

19. paint the city grey

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I was not angry anymore. It had been days. I read that contract about a thousand times just to make sure I didn't miss anything else and printed a couple dozen of copies to burn for fun. The urges to shove the burning fire of crumbled paper down his throat was barely even there. I was fine.

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The sound of my phone buzzing for the hundredth times echoed through the room. I didn't need to glance at it to see who was texting me. I shut the thing o and aggressively throw it inside my desk drawer, slamming it shut.

My o ice sat on the top floor of my two stories tall clothing store. The small window overlooked the crowd of customers waiting outside the door to be opened. A grim line frowned upon my lips as I squinted my eyes, trying to stitch a new piece onto the slim waist of my mannequin. I hadn't been here for weeks since the unfortunate event that occurred in my other business. This place was my sanctuary and completely mine. There was no board directors to disturb my life here and I actually liked my employees and vice versa.

We were running out of clothes to sell because whatever I was caught wearing beside my stupid fake boyfriend was sold out in a span of minutes. Even my shirts that he started wearing were gone.

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The information had severely pleased me when Barbara gave me the sale chart but I wasn't going to kiss our scheme and that bastard thank you anytime soon. Not a er that stunt of his.

"Ma'am." Hank's voice broke the spell of the eerily cold silence inside my o ice.

I looped my needle through the fabric one more time before turning to look at my favorite doorman. The balding old man filled the small frame of my door. A huge bouquet of red roses barely cradled in his arms as he struggled to hold it upright.

My mood soured. I did not come here for him to disrupt my peace.

I glared at the beautiful flowers and turned my attention back to my task. I was stabbing at the needle now and Hank swallowed loudly. I didn't even need to look up. I was certain his whole face had turned white with horror by now like it always did every time he delivered those obnoxious flowers for the past days.

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"You can leave it in the trash can beside the door." I said absentmindedly. "Thank you, Hank." I added with a small hum.

"There's a note." He informed.

I sighed. There was always a fucking note. We had this same conversation every damn day. "Read it to me. You know the drill."

Hank picked up the note and cleared his throat nervously. "Before you throw my flowers away. There's that tiny good for nothing Chanel clutch you want inside."

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"Insulting my Holy Grail will only piss me the fuck o even more." I muttered to myself.

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"Will you stop being mad at me? Please. We can't even hate fuck for fuck's sake. If you ignore me one more day, I swear to fuck I'm going to lose my shit."

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I cursed the crude prick. I didn't know who was more insane. Him for writing stupid shit in these notes. Or me for still traumatizing my loyal employee by making him read them.

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"Ps. Move in day today. I fucking miss your pretty evil glare. Be mad when I'm with you. Never run o . This suck. Sincerely, your handsome boyfriend." Hank finished the note with a visible wince and somewhat amused smile.

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He placed the bouquet on the shelves by the door and slowly backed away. I let the door shut closed and his footsteps to fade away before I put the needle down and went to pick the flowers up like I always did. Fresh roses fanned the air on my face. I hugged it in my arms and twirled it around to peak inside to see if there were sharp thorns.

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"Maybe I can chuck this in his stupid face." I grumbled at the roses, plucking out the note.

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I glared at his neat scrawls and read the words again, letting the anger shimmered inside my blood. He didn't even apologize. Never did. I bet he was proud of himself too.

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He had no idea he was another knife. I could feel him pricking through my skin and slowly tearing apart my flesh and bone. A painful blade and instead of instinctively wanting to pull it o I wondered if this knife was worth spilling my blood for.

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Something was seriously wrong with me. He was messing with my head. I hated that.

My fingers latched tightly on the handle of my umbrella in a deadly grip an hour later. I pretended it was Elliot's throat and squeezed harder, ignoring the horror looks on my doorman's face as he watched my knuckles whitened. He had no idea how much that bastard pissed me o and he wasn't even here for fuck's sake. I hiked my purse higher on my shoulder and prepared to walk the upcoming storm down the street.

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The crowd had settled down and went inside eagerly to shop. It did something to my chest but I didn't let the feeling linger as I strode past the flashing cameras and curious paparazzi.

Dark clouds hovered above my head, painting the whole city grey. Petrichor filled my nostril the further I walked on the wet ground as if the earth itself surfaced from beneath and rose into air. Little drops of rain started drizzling down the corner of my umbrella and the wind picked up dramatically. I glared up the sky and hated how it reminded me of his fucking eyes.

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"He is following me around everywhere too now. Fucking great." I groaned and hugged the roses tighter to my chest.

I refused to think about him and cursed at the weather and my bad decisions instead. I really should have driven my car. But, all these decision making errors seemed to follow me like a mocking shadow these fucking days.

Since when did I start making rush decisions. I was so stupid, it's sickening.

"I blame him for messing with my life." I muttered to myself. "That deceiving bastard. Fool the world with him my fucking ass." I said, mimicking his deep tone because I had actually gone mad.

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"He unapologetically played me into sharing my house with him." I was going to strangle him for it.

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"I'm going to murder him and sacrifice his stupid blood to a fucking cult so his soul can burn in hell."

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A string of disgraceful words that would send my dead mother rolling in her rotten grave spewed out of my mouth like a fucking unstoppable train wreck. I cursed Elliot Salvatore and everything that went wrong. I didn't even bother acknowledging the happy family walking on the pavement a few feet from me. Although I felt the pervert father staring at the silver of cleavage peaking from the deep neckline of my blazer dress while his wife sent me dirty looks for cursing in the presence of her daughter. She probably thought I looked ridiculous holding this huge roses in the rain too. Fucking awesome. New flash, I didn't give a shit about the creepy looking infant who looked more like a haunted doll. It was a public space. I could do whatever I wanted.

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For all I knew, I was basically impacting wisdom with new vocabularies and all that. The world was dark and ugly, it was within the baby rights to learn about it sooner rather than later.

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The storm picked up then and those cold fat drops of rain poured down aggressively, bouncing on the edge of my umbrella and sprinkling onto my face. I walked faster then, leaving the family and wailing child behind. My heels stomped on puddle of water and if I believed in crying and tears, I would be weeping right about now. I didn't have time to mourn the possibility of damaging my footwear when lightning strike and almost cracked open the sky.

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At least it sounded almost as furious as me.

"You look like a wet dog." My best friend, Riley Preston, said as a way of greeting when I arrived at our breakfast spot five minutes later.

Her eyes dropped to the roses in my arm. I raised a hand and gritted my teeth. "Don't ask."

I dropped my umbrella beside the restaurant door and strode to our usual table. The place was interestingly emptier than normal. I realized only a mad person would risk the raging storm outside for a hot buttery croissant and co ee. Speaking of which, I slammed my ass down the chair in front of her and pointed an accusing finger at her dry and fresh as a daisy self.

"You." I sneered, pulling out an empty chair to put the bouquet. "You look entirely too happy. Stop it. How are you not wet. Did you come from a secret tunnel I don't know about?" I narrowed my eyes.

Riley leaned back into her chair and crossed her arms over her chest, watching me as I smoothed my thankfully dry clothes or someone would've su er my undeserving wrath and bad mood. I ignored her amused gaze and adjusted the black bow on my ponytail, running my fingers through my slightly damp hair.

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"And, you don't look happy enough for a courted lady. Is your new rich boyfriend not satisfying your needs?" She asked, grabbing the menu from the table even though we both had remembered the whole thing and ordered the same food every time.

Rich was an understated adjective to describe his assets and whatever amount of money he was making. Elliot would be so o ended if he had been here. The looks on his face could have been the highlight of my day.

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It took a minute for me reflected on my subconscious thought and my eyes almost bugged right out of my face. I did not just wish he was anywhere near me.

"He's pissing me o ." I growled to no one but myself. I was o icially out of it. I felt like banging my head against the stupid table.

My glare snapped on her nervous face then. Riley even looked like she knew what was coming. "You're fired, Preston. I need a better lawyer."

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She casually shrugged her shoulders. "I thought you would move in together eventually. You know make it even more real"

"Why would I want to live with a boy? Specifically Elliot Salvatore." I scowled.

"Because who else will do the dishes and polish your floor, Rory." She replied like a true manipulative evil lawyer.

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I grumbled a few more curses as a waitress walked over to take our order. She looked at me for awhile before doing her job. She had looked giddy enough at the sight of me that I assumed she knew me from the tabloid so I gave her a half smile back. Riley watched the interaction with little patience. We ordered our food thank to my passive aggressive force and we waited for it to arrive in silence. It lasted a whole five minutes before my friend broke character and grace.

"So, what's he like?" She asked in a serious tone, leaning over the table.

I cocked my eyebrow and pretended to think. "Who?"

She glared at me but had shut up and let the waitress placed our food on the table before she went at it again. "Elliot Salvatore. Your boyfriend."

"Fake boyfriend." I corrected, taking a bite out of my croissant. It was all I wanted. "He's way too cocky for someone with that ugly face."

Riley smirked as she munched on her crispy bacon. She swallowed it before pinching her fork at me. "You like him."

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Why did people keep saying that. I sco ed at the ridiculousness of it all. When Hell fucking froze over. "He likes himself enough for the two of us."

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"You met his whole family. It was all over tabloid." She hummed. "And, you smiled. You totally like him."

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No, I did not. Even if I did, it was fake. For the people we needed to fool. Although there was also a high chance that I might be smiling because I thought of a fun creative way to murder the idiot.

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"You also kissed him. I saw the picture."

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My body straightened and I almost dropped the pastry at the mention of that moment of weakness on my part. I had kissed him and believed that his mouth was sin in heaven. It had been the only thing that held me together a er a million shards of glass shattered right before my eyes.

I cleared my throat curtly a er a moment and brushed the thought away. "I need better friend. Stop slamming my terrible life decisions in my face."

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"I'm assuming Anastasia Salvatore and the Queen of England will do?" She narrowed her eyes on me. "When will you introduce me?"

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My answer was cut o by the sound of chair scraping the floor. We turned our head to the side. Riley furrowed her eyebrows while I glared at the intruder.

"Is this seat taken?" Kayden Jacobs from where he worked at asked with a grin. He tipped his chin down and acknowledged me. "Miss Carmen."

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