

Grace

My name is Grace Porter, and I am the personal assistant to Gabriel Ferrara, CEO of Ferrara Media in New York. And it's the perfect job, great pay, beautiful office, everything I ever dreamed of, if not for one small detail. I am utterly and hopelessly in love with my boss.

Every day it starts the same, at precisely 8:20 a.m. I make my way into his office. By this time, he's already run on his treadmill, had an infrared sauna and showered. We run through his day while he dresses.

Watching Gabriel put on his suit each morning is the highlight of my day—who am I kidding, it's the highlight of my fucking life. I pick up my notes and knock softly.

"Come in," his strong voice calls.

I tentatively open the door to see him standing at his coffee machine, white towel around his waist. Tanned muscles, broad back and dominance for miles, the lethal trifecta.

"Morning, Gracie."

"Good morning, Gabriel," I reply, my eyes drink him in while he has his back to me.

I know most PAs make their boss's coffee, but each morning he likes to make mine, and besides, it's the only time I can stare uninterrupted.

He turns and passes me my cup and saucer. "Your coffee, madam."

"Thank you." I take a sip, warm and delicious, even his coffee is smooth.

He goes back to making his coffee while I take a seat at his desk. I open his computer and log into his diary.

My eyes flick over the screen to his sculptured back. Damn it. Why is he so delicious? How could any female work in these conditions and not be completely besotted with him?

And then he opens his mouth...and I remember why.

"Did you sleep at all last night? You look like shit."

"Thanks," I mutter as I refocus on his day.

"I didn't sleep much either, actually, can you remind me later to send flowers." I bite the side of my cheek. Fucker.

Not only do I have to watch him date every beautiful woman in the world, I send them fucking flowers too.

"Of course," I reply as I act unaffected.

I'm positive that I could win an Academy Award for the acting of casual that I do.

"What have we got today?" he asks as he disappears into his large closet.

From my peripheral vision, I see the white towel drop as he puts his briefs on. Focus.

I exhale as the screen jumbles, he's busy. Even reading his schedule is exhausting.

"Board meeting at nine."

"Let's run through that agenda." He walks out of the closet in black briefs, his suit and shirt on hangers.

"You are talking about the flow-on effect from the defamation case against Noble Industries," I reply.

"Yes, that's right. Did we get that information?"

"Bryce has sent it to your email, and it's saved in your Noble Industries file."

"Thank you." He pulls on his white shirt and slowly does up the buttons.

"And do I have the graph?"

"Uh-huh." I bite my bottom lip as I try to focus on the screen.

Something about him standing there in his briefs doing up a white shirt...it scrambles my brain.

Every.

Single.

Morning.

"Okay, so what then?" he asks.

"You have a meeting with Roger at ten fifteen." My eyes flick up to him.

"Why do you have a meeting with Roger?"

"I'm letting him go." He pulls up his navy suit pants and zips up.

"What?"

He shrugs. "He's not performing."

"You can't fire Roger; he's going through a lot right now. His wife left him."

"Probably wasn't performing in bed either," he mutters dryly as he puts his gold cuff links on.

"Wouldn't surprise me."

"Now is not the time, can you just give him a warning, please?"

"It's amusing that you think you have a say in this matter." He pulls his suit coat on.

"Next appointment?"

"You have a phone conference with Holly, you are closing on the land for the shopping mall at one p.m. today and she needs to run through a few details."

"Uh-huh."

"At eleven you have a walk through the finance department to see the new refurbishment of their office."

He screws up his face in disgust. "Why?"

"Because you do," I snap in frustration. "You paid for it, the least you can do is be excited."

"You're getting a bit lippy this morning, Grace," he mutters dryly.

"Don't piss me off before nine."

He walks back into his wardrobe and the scent of his aftershave wafts through the office.

Fuck it...why does he spray that when I'm in his office?

It's morally wrong.

I keep reading through his calendar. "You have lunch at twelve thirty with..." I frown and my eyes rise to meet his, "...Veronica."

"Uh-huh," he says casually. "Drink your coffee so I can collect your cup."

I sip my coffee as I plot his death.

Is it Veronica Rothchild?

It's a new name. I don't know a Veronica other than Veronica Rothchild the supermodel, and I know that they met two weeks ago at a charity event.

I'm happy with his regular women because I know that he sees them just as that...regulars.

But every time he meets someone new, I panic a little, knowing this could be the woman he finally falls in love with.

As well as acting, another job I excel at is as undercover detective. I know who he is sleeping with before he does.

"Well, you don't have long for lunch, you have to be back at the office at one thirty for a very important meeting." I focus on the screen.

"Cancel it."

"Impossible." I keep typing and try to change the subject. "Who am I sending flowers to today?"

"Hmm." He purses his lips as he thinks. "Melissa."

"The card should read?" I act uninterested.

"You were incredible last night."

I clench my teeth so hard I nearly break my jaw. "Is that it?"

"Umm." He walks over to the window and looks down over New York. "Come away with me this weekend."

My eyes linger on his back as sadness sets in.

I can't do this anymore.

Every time I send one of his girls flowers or gifts, I die a little inside.

I'm twenty-nine years old, and for seven years I have hung on Gabriel Ferrara's every word, waiting for him to notice me. Waiting for even just a shred of his attention, for him to admit his undying love and sweep me off my feet. But it's never going to happen, is it?

He doesn't see me like that, he is never going to see me like that. I run through the rest of his day on autopilot, my mind off in another place, and I know that while he is away with Melissa this weekend, I will be at home, wishing the time away until Monday so that I can see him again. So that I can be a personal assistant to his full and exciting life.

Pathetic.

"What are you waiting for?" he snaps.

I glance up. Huh? Was he talking?

"I beg your pardon?" I ask.

He gestures toward his door. "Leave, I have work to do."

"Oh...right." I stand, embarrassed. I walk toward the door.

"Gracie," he calls and I turn back to him.

"Yes."

"Don't wear that perfume again."

I frown in confusion.

"I don't like it."

I bite my lip to hold my tongue and make my way out of his office. I take a seat at my desk, deflated. He doesn't like my perfume. Well, fuck him!

I do, asshole, and I'm going to slather it all over myself tomorrow until he throws up.

I might even spray it in his eyes for added effect.

One by one, the office fills up, and then, like clockwork, right on nine, his office door opens, and he marches out like the king of the people.

Gabriel Ferrara in all his bossy glory.

"Gretel," he barks.

"Yes, sir," she stammers.

"Why isn't the advertising report in my email?"

"I...I..."

"You what?"

"I haven't finished it yet, I thought you didn't need it until tomorrow."

"You thought wrong." He strides through the office and stops in front of Allen's desk and his eyes roam over it. "Why does your desk look like a fucking dumpster fire, Allen?"

"Ahhh." Allen begins to nervously collect the coffee cups and stacked papers.

"Sorry, Mr. Ferrara. I'll clean it now."

Gabriel glances up and his eyes meet mine. He strides back to my desk. "Miss Porter." He calls me Miss Porter in front of everyone, I'm only ever Gracie in private.

"Cancel my one thirty appointment," he demands.

He wants to extend his lunch date with fucking Veronica.

"Impossible, Mr. Ferrara, I told you that already. Please listen," I fire back.

You have one hour with her, motherfucker.

That's it.

"Then you can go in my place, because I won't be at the meeting." He marches back into his office and slams the door.

The staff all let out a collective sigh of release that the tyrant is gone. I tap my pen on the desk while my blood boils.

Asshole.

The sun shines down on me as I sit in the park. My lunch break is the best part of my day. I love the fresh air, watching the dogs play off leash and the birds fly around. I never realized how much I loved nature until I hardly saw any. As beautiful as New York is, it's the city of concrete. When I moved here seven years ago, I was going to work for twelve months, get some experience with a big firm and then move back to the suburbs somewhere.

Being infatuated with my jerk of a boss was never in the plan.

A dog runs up to me and I bend and pat him, he's big and brown.

"Hey there, cutie." I smile as I pat him.

His owner walks up. He has a beard and longish hair with a big warm smile, he has a real chilled-out hippie vibe about him.

"He likes you."

"I like him." I smile.

"Do you have a dog?" the guy asks.

"No, I wish." I keep ruffling up the dog's ears. "What's his name?"

"Dusty."

I giggle. "Hello, Dusty."

"You should get a dog," the guy tells me.

"I will one day, when I buy a house in the suburbs." I smile.

"One day?" He frowns.

"When I get my act together." Code for when I get over him.

"You should do it now," the guy says.

I shrug.

"What are you waiting for, life is now. Decide what you want and take it."

I smile sadly. "I wish."

"Don't wish for it. Do it. If you want a house in the suburbs, save and buy one. You never regret the things that you do, only the things that you didn't."

He throws the ball and Dusty takes off after it.

"Catch you later."

"Bye." I frown after him as he runs off.

You never regret the things that you do, only the things that you didn't.

Hmm...

8:20 a.m., and I inhale deeply to calm the beast within.

I'm furious.

Like a cornered animal waiting to strike.

Mr. Ferrara didn't come back from lunch yesterday. He messaged me to say he was taking the rest of the day off and to cancel all appointments.

Must have been some lunch date, he's never done that before.

This is it, she's the one. It's finally happening, and I have no one to blame but myself.

Stupid fucking fuckface.

I hate him, I hate everything about him.

I collect my diary and pen and knock on his door.

"Come in," his deep voice purrs.

I open the door and with one look at him, I melt into a puddle of patheticness. He's just gotten out of the shower; the towel is around his waist. Water is beading all over his skin, and his black hair is hanging in curls.

"Good morning, my Gracie." He smiles.

My eyes drop to his big red lips, and I want to stab my eyes out with my pencil. Anything to stop me seeing this perfection.

"Good morning, Gabriel," I reply.

"Last time I looked, I was not your Gracie."

He lets out a deep chuckle. "You will always be my Gracie."

He walks to the coffee machine and begins making us coffee.

"What's on the agenda today, boss?" He smiles.

I stare at him as a clusterfuck of emotion runs through me. Did you fuck her? Of course you did. I slump into my chair at his desk. I open his computer and see him bend and pick something up from the floor.

"What's this?" he asks.

"What?"

He opens a booklet. "It's a pamphlet on Sardinia."

"Oh, it must have fallen out of my diary."

His eyes rise to meet mine. "Why do you have this?"

"Because I never want to go there, what do you think?" I roll my eyes as I click through to his diary.

"You want to go to Italy?" he asks, as if surprised.

"Of course I want to go to Italy," I scoff.

"Everyone wants to go to Italy."

He sits down on the corner of his desk. "I'll take you one day."

I twist my lips, annoyed. I hate you...remember?

Get with the program.

"What, you don't believe me?" he asks.

I exhale heavily. "Will you just get dressed."

He holds his hands out as if surrendering. "You don't like me in a towel?"

"No. I don't, actually," I lie.

I love you in a towel.

"It's off-putting having to watch you get dressed every day, and frankly, very annoying. I don't make you watch me get dressed."

"Ahh..." He laughs. "Wouldn't that be something, Gracie Porter getting dressed in my office?"

I glare at him as I point to the coffee machine. "Make my coffee, Gabriel. You have a very busy day, seeing as you didn't come back from lunch yesterday." I widen my eyes to try to stop myself from throwing a tantrum on the floor.

He smiles, amused, and begins to make our coffee.

Calm, calm...keep fucking calm.

"At nine thirty you have a teleconference with London." I begin to read through his day. From my peripheral vision I see his towel drop in his wardrobe, I glance up to see his bare bottom and I die a little inside.

I really can't do this anymore.

I love him, completely and utterly love him, and I'm just...I don't count to him at all.

The calendar on the screen blurs as my eyes fill with tears.

Focus.

I continue to read out his day as he dresses in his power suit and puts his aftershave on...and shock of the century, I didn't wear the perfume he hates.

"And that's your day." I smile as I close my diary. I stand and make my way to the door.

"Gracie," he calls.

"Yes." I turn back.

"Can you book me a hotel for the weekend, somewhere hot and heavy."

I stare at him, my heart breaking in my chest.

Ouch...

"Of course, sir," I reply through the lump in my throat.

He gives me a sexy wink. "What would I ever do without you?"

Fall in love.

I fake a smile and walk out to my desk and slump in my chair.

That's it.

This is the sign.

I've got to get out of here.

As much as I love Gabriel Ferrara, I can't do this to myself anymore. I'm getting older, my biological clock is ticking, and I won't even date anyone because I'm so blinded by my fatal attraction to my boss. Nobody stands a chance while I work with him.

I need to start thinking with my head and do what I know is right for me.

Make a future without him.

My heart constricts at the thought of not seeing him every day.

How could I bear it?

But then, it could be worse. Staying here, watching him fall in love and marry, start a family with someone else is a torture I cannot deal with.

It's time to rip off the Band-Aid, I need a fresh start.

I open Google and type into the search bar.

Properties for sale in Greenville, Maine

I went to Greenville for my cousin Debbie's wedding a few years ago and I just fell in love with it, and for some reason, it's always been in the back of my mind that one day I'm going to move there.

Maybe one day is now.

I scroll through the pages, wow, it's cheap, you can buy a three-bedroom home on a quarter of an acre for a fraction of the price of New York.

I scroll through the towns and options with my mind going into overdrive.

I could get a dog of my own.

I smile, and for the first time in a long time, hope blooms in my chest.

I'm going to do it.

Gabriel's office door opens, and we all jump to attention. I quickly close my real estate screen. He marches through the office.

“Geoffrey,” he snaps. “This isn’t a fucking marathon. Hurry up.”

“Yes, Mr. Ferrara,” Geoffrey stammers.

Without another word, Gabriel walks to the elevator and gets in, I stare at the doors as they close.

You’re right, Gabriel, it isn’t a fucking marathon.

I’m going for a sprint.