

A Clean Mindset

"Hey shit-for-brains, you missed a spot."

Arrik frowned at me, a momentarily annoyed expression crossing his face. He wanted to snap at me, I could see it in his eyes. Instead, he looked over to where I was pointing. At a tiny, near invisible smudge on the glass side-table.

His frown deepened.

He'd been cleaning all morning. Picking up shit from the floor, dusting, rubbing all the furniture clean. The side-table I was pointing at had already been cleaned, cleaned perfectly. The smudge hadn't been there before and shouldn't be there now. There was only one explanation for it.

I could see the thoughts painted clearly on Arrik's face. He knew. Knew I'd left that little smudge there intentionally. Just to fuck with him.

He didn't call me out on it.

He couldn't.

Instead, he walked over to the glass side-table and scrubbed away the smudge. Not a word uttered.

Arrik was quiet like that. A good trait for a roommate right there. Another good trait was his ability to clean. Seriously, he scoured the mess and dirt from this place more thoroughly than a professional cleaner would have, and for none of the cost.

Inner-city rent is high. Astronomically so. And most people see that as a horrible thing, unfair and unjust. I, however, saw the potential in it.

Step one; rent a place - easy when you're raking in as much as I am. Step two; invite someone to share the place with you, splitting the rent so that you're paying most of it. Step three; have them agree to do the housework in exchange for you taking care of most of the rent. Step four; profit.

Effectively, I had a live-in man-maid. And rather than having to pay him, *he* was paying *me*.

He cleaned, cooked, went shopping, basically did anything I wanted him to. An indentured servant in everything but name.

In simple terms, he was my bitch.

Sure, he could leave any time he wanted. Pack his bags and look for somewhere else to live. But where? No-where nearby, that was for sure. Not with the pittance that he made. And he knew I didn't need his help to pay the rent. He *could* leave, sure. But, at the same time, he couldn't. Not realistically. He would do anything, everything, that I wanted. No matter what.

It was a perfect little setup.

I turned the volume on the TV up, drowning out the sound of Arrik's cleaning. This was the life. And people told me that city life his hard and fast, that I'd have to adjust to lots of changes. Hah! Shows what they know. Life couldn't be easier.

Unum

They teach you a lot of pointless shit in law school. Just like every form of education I've ever gotten - and I've gotten the best. They teach you a lot, expect you to remember everything, fail to teach you the most important things, and half of the things they *do* teach you end up being totally useless.

I could give you the history of agricultural zoning laws dating back four-hundred years, including all relevant legal cases and their resulting rulings in that time-frame. Totally irrelevant for me, a criminal lawyer, yet that was the kind of crap I was taught. Meanwhile, things that I did need to know - like legal negotiations and, oh, I don't know, the actual god-damned laws of my local area - were left untaught.

School never changes. Whether it's kindergarten or college. I always ended up being taught by a person that I'm already far more intelligent than.

Bullshit I was never taught was the reason I had to sit here, at this desk, with pile upon pile of legal documentation in front of me. Searching for a loophole, some long-forgotten law, anything at all that could help keep my obviously guilty client from a jail cell.

For sitting at a desk for the last few hours, my feet hurt a lot. Damned heels. The pencil skirts I could live with, the fake glasses that made me look professional, the business attire. They were all necessary and acceptable sacrifices for my career. But the heels were a nightmare.

My feet would be sore tonight, I could feel it.

A part of me considered having Arrik massage them. A tempting idea. But no. As useful as my live-in servant might be, he had his limits. I could make him do a great many things, but I didn't want to push him too far. Good cleaners were hard to find.

Duo

"You forgot the salt, dumbass," I snapped.

As far as cooks went, Arrik wasn't half bad. He wasn't the best, not by a long shot. But he was good enough. Just. It wasn't like him to be so sloppy, forgetting to set the salt shaker on our small dining table. That wouldn't do at all.

Maybe something's wrong with him, some small part of me thought. A soft voice, barely audible.

There's something wrong with him, all right. It's called being stupid, and there's no cure.

A mix of emotions battled inside of me.

For the briefest instant, I wanted to apologise. To tell Arrik that I was sorry for being an asshole to him.

The moment passed.

What the hell did I have to be sorry about? I was letting him stay here with barely any rent to pay. The very least he could do was the damn job we agreed on. We made a deal, and Arrik was going to fulfil his end of it or he could look for somewhere else to live.

"Ah, right," Arrik said, looking intently at me. There was an odd tone to his voice. "Sorry Kamille, one second."

Watching as he walked the few steps it took to get to get the salt shaker from its cabinet, I felt another unfamiliar emotion stirring inside me.

Was that *guilt*? The fuck did I have to feel guilty about?

I allowed him to live here specifically for this. To do the things that I couldn't be bothered with. He'd *agreed* to it.

I had *nothing* to feel guilty about.

What was wrong with me today?

Tris

Sunday. Also known as my only day off a week. Fucking finally. I can only take so much defending crooks and criminals. I don't give a shit what they did, but the ones who pretend like they're innocent when they're obviously not, who treat me like *I'm* the idiot, piss me off.

Annoying. So annoying in fact, that it made me consider only taking up cases in which the person I'm defending is actually innocent.

But there was nothing to be gained from that. The money was shit and it was impossible to make a name for yourself. By taking on the obviously guilty and getting them reduced sentences or, in some cases, off the hook entirely, I'd start making the real money. And, eventually, access to the higher-profile cases - where the big payouts were.

That had been the goal ever since I was a teenager.

Only, something felt different now. Off. As if some part of me was repulsed by the idea of defending the dregs of humanity.

I tapped my forehead, scolding myself for being so stupid.

Someone was going to do it. Someone was going to make all that cash. Might as well be me.

What I was telling myself made sense. It was smart. Pragmatic.

And yet, I couldn't shake off the newfound unease.

I rose to my feet, stretched. Best thing to clear my head right now was a shower. So that's what I did. Waking from my little bedroom, through the apartment's main area, and into the bathroom. My eyes wandering and taking in all the mess on the way.

Arrik, the lazy prick, hadn't cleaned the place up. Not last night after I'd gone to bed, or this morning before I'd woken up.

There were discarded snack wrappers everywhere. Crumbs and spots of dirt. It was disgusting. What the fuck, Arrik? Did the moron want me to kick his ass out?

He wasn't here, either. He worked Sundays.

This was totally unacceptable.

I took my shower quickly, unable to fully relax. That bastard had ruined my morning with his laziness. God-dammit.

Annoyed. I was annoyed. And I was hungry.

And that shithead wasn't here for me to shout at, or to make breakfast for me. Which meant I was either going to have to eat snacks, or I'd be forced to order some food. A pizza, maybe.

In the end, I did both. Taking some of Arrik's frozen chocolate treats - it was only fair, what with the bastard slacking off like he had - and ordering a large pepperoni pizza.

Which, in the end, I barely ate a quarter of before tossing what was left onto the floor. A little punishment and payback for my dumb-fuck roommate.

Only...

Only it was uncomfortable.

Being surrounded by all this mess. All this shit on the floor. It was gross. And shit-for-brains wouldn't be back for hours.

I could go out, but...

It wouldn't be right.

Who gives a shit?

I couldn't take my eyes off the floor. The pizza box that lay there haphazardly, the slices of pizza on the ground, all the empty packets that were scattered about - including the chocolate treats packaging that I'd tossed there minutes before.

The place was a mess.

It was gross and disgusting and ugly, unhygienic and downright uncomfortable to look at. And...

And...

I couldn't bear it.

"Fuck it," I cursed angrily, getting to my feet. This was all Arrik's fault, he should be the one to clean it.

Even as the thought sounded in my head, I leaned over to pick up the discarded pizza box.

I wouldn't clean up everything! Just the pizza. And the chocolate packet. Just those. Everything else was Arrik's job. I was just going to clean my mess up. Just mine!

Quatter

It was evening. Arrik, earlier in the day upon arriving home, had acted surprised by how

much of the place I'd cleaned. There was still plenty left to do, dusting and scrubbing. Mostly, I'd just picked up and binned all the trash.

He'd smile happily at me, then had disappeared into his small bedroom for an hour.

While he was in there, I fumed and raged - reminded of the fact that he'd left the place an utter mess. I wanted to burst into his room, shout at him, threaten to kick him out. I would have, usually. Only today I didn't. It was... rude.

What the hell was wrong with me?

Since when did I care about being *rude*?

A long time ago, my father had shown me how the real world worked. If you wanted to make it anywhere in life, you had to be willing to walk over people. There were two types of people, the fishes swimming aimlessly, and the sharks. Be a shark, he taught me, rise to the top. Pride, greed, arrogance, these things weren't vices - they were medals to be earned and worn.

And yet I was scared of being rude?

I had every right to be as rude as I wanted! I paid for this place. I let that idiot stay here for barely any rent. When he fucked me over, it was my *job* to call him out on it.

I walked over to his bedroom door, paused, turned around and walked away.

Dammit.

What was going on?

"You okay, Kamille?" Arrik asked, peering at me over the dining table. A veil of steam rising from our supper meal half-masked him from sight. From what I could see of him, he looked happy.

I wanted to snap at him. To hurl an insult at him. Call him a useless good-for-nothing. I wanted to slap that smile right off his stupid face. Instead, I answered him quietly.

"Yeah," I murmured. "I just feel... weird."

He looked at me for a long moment, said nothing, went back to eating.

Most of our conversations went like this, short and uninteresting. Only most of the time, there was more cussing from my end.

I felt the need to speak up, to talk. To take away the uncomfortable silence. I wanted to be open with Arrik. With anyone really. I wanted to tell someone how I felt. My stomach churned with all these emotions bottled up inside me, making me feel like I was going to throw up.

Looking at Arrik, I wanted to say something. I wanted to tell him I was-

No!

I had nothing to be sorry about!

Before I could say something stupid, I pushed away from the table and my half-eaten meal. I glared at Arrik, as if all this was his fault.

He looked shocked - wide eyed like a deer in the headlights.

I rose, walked away. No more of this gooey emotional crap. It was stupid and annoying and I was *done* with it.

Quinque

One week. One whole flipping week of this nonsense. Is this what *normal* people felt like all the time? Conflicted, apologetic, empathetic? It was hell. Literally hell. How could I legally defend a criminal when I felt so bad for their victims? How could I properly scold Arrik for... for... what?

Argh. This was agony.

Sunday. At least it was Sunday again. I didn't have to worry about any of my work stuff for today. I could rest, relax. Maybe do some housework to clear my head.

Housework?

That was Arrik's job!

But Arrik wasn't here. And the place was messy. It had to be cleaned. It *needed* to be.

In the main room, on the dining table, I found a bundled package with a note on top. A note from Arrik.

'I'm doing this to help you. You might not see it right now, but one day you'll thank me. This is for your own good. What's in the package is an apology from you to me.'

What?

I opened it, was stunned by what I saw.

A French Maid costume. Black and white. Lace, frilly skirt, a pair of knee-high boots made from jet-black leather. It looked sexy and revealing and expensive. This was no Halloween costume shop outfit. Fine, silk white and satin black, with the weight and design quality of a high-end product.

Did Arrik want me to wear this?

Outrage flared inside me. Anger and... guilt.

He must have spent a small fortune on this thing. And his note said he was trying to help me. I'd been so mean to him for so long. And it wasn't like wearing it was such a big deal...

It couldn't hurt, could it?

I let out a resigned sigh. I owed it to Arrik, after everything I'd put him through. It was just one silly costume.

So I put it on.

Skirt first, easy to slip on as it was, then the top. Lacing it up was difficult - it felt a size too small. Tight and compacting, pushing my breasts up and outwards. Difficult, but I managed it. I took a moment to breathe. Then on came the soft, fingerless gloves, black with white frills at the wrist. Then the white bonnet with its big, black ribbon. And last, the boots.

They were unlike anything I'd tried on before. I'd worn boots and I'd worn plenty of heeled shoes. But these were different. They were tight, difficult to walk in. Tall. They travelled so high up my legs that only a tiny strip of skin was visible between the boots and my very short skirt.

Walking in them was not easy.

Cleaning in them was even less so.

But I managed.

When I set my mind to something, it gets done.

There wasn't a lot of trash this time, but there were plenty of dirty spots, dusty areas, stains. I got to work scrubbing and dusting and washing. At first it was awkward and uncomfortable. A labour of discontent. But, as I worked, cleaned the messes that Arrik and I - mostly I - had made, I felt a burden lifting. A weightless clarity.

As tiring as it was, cleaning the apartment felt good. Almost therapeutic.

It was as if I were washing away all the bad. The stress, the anger, the negativity. Everything that had become a daily part of my life, disappearing under soap and sponge.

When I finally finished, I actually *wanted* to clean more. An energy compelled me to. Only there was nothing left to clean.

Nothing except Arrik's room.

What better way of thanking him than by cleaning his room while he was out working? He'd cleaned my room for me for me countless times. It was only fair I do the same.

I strode over to his bedroom door, now totally used to these new boots. Walking in them had gone from being uncomfortable and awkward, to elegant and easy. I could feel the way the raised heels, angled my legs, arced my back - pushing my bottom out,

emphasising my figure. My outfit, revealing as it was, felt comfortable and free.

I opened the door to Arrik's bedroom and entered.

It was much smaller than mine. Enough space for a bed. And nothing else, really. The bed was already done, sheets and blanket neat and clean. There was no dust or dirt that I could see. Not much to clean.

Where did he keep his clothes?

I checked under the bed and found a wide box - filled to the brim with shirts and trousers and socks and underwear. Besides that box was another, this one containing paper and documents and other boring, important things. Finally, a third box.

This one opened up to reveal something bizarre.

Seven candles, five burned out and used, two untouched. All in a circle around a seven-pointed star. A heptagram with two lines missing.

It was odd. Spooky.

I pushed the box back under the bed, feeling a shiver run down my spine. I left the room, looked for something else to clean. A distraction from the weirdness of my discovery.

Sex

Things were going so well recently. Me and Arrik had found our rhythm. He would cook, take care of the shopping. I would clean and take care of the bills. It was nice. Easy. To the point that I looked forward to getting out of work each day, just so I could don my home clothes - that little maid outfit - and get to cleaning and brushing up the place.

I'd only gotten the outfit a few days ago, and yet it seemed like a second skin to me now.

'One day you'll thank me. This is for your own good.'

When I'd read that, I'd been upset. But now, having worn the clothes so much, I was surprised to find his words were true. I was thankful to Arrik. Grateful.

I hadn't said so, some remnant of stubbornness holding me back. But I was.

Why was I so silly? Why couldn't I just tell him 'thank you' and get it off my chest? I felt like two different people. The bottled up old me, who was driven by greed and self-interest, who didn't care about anything or anyone. And the new me, who was more open and carefree. It felt like a weight had been lifted, a weight that I hadn't even known I'd been holding.

I looked at Arrik - sitting down watching TV as I cleaned - and felt a wave of gratitude.

He was looking out for me. He'd bought this maid outfit just for me, to help me discover this new side of myself. It had cost him a lot of money, and he'd still done it. Even after I'd been so mean to him for so long. He still wanted to help me. He'd said as much in the note he'd left me.

I wanted to thank him, to say how grateful I was. How much I appreciated his support.

But the words wouldn't come.

I couldn't tell him how thankful I was.

But I can show him.

The thought was followed by a desire I'd never felt before. A longing. A hunger that demanded feeding.

Before I could give myself enough time to change my mind, I sauntered over to where Arrik sat, stood in front of him. He looked up at me, eyebrow raised. And, wordlessly, I lowered myself to the floor, kneeling before him. Started unbuckling his jeans.

Septem

"Thank you," the old woman sobbed. "Thank you."

Most of my co-workers wouldn't have accepted the case - had been offered it and downright refused. The woman was poor, didn't have the money to pay for legal advice. There was no financial gain to helping her, and a significant loss when accounting for the time the case would take. A significant loss in potential income.

But I didn't mind.

Money was unimportant in the grand scheme of things. This old woman needed help, needed support. And I wasn't about to turn her away over some arbitrary numbers on a piece of paper.

I shook her hand, smiled at her.

As she left my office, I leaned back in my chair, letting my mind wander. Only two more hours until I could call it a day. Two more hours until I could get back home and put on my home clothes, get cleaning.

I smiled at the thought.

Who knew cleaning could feel so nice?