

The Fall

It was a Friday just like any other. Get up, walk to the subway station, get on the A-train heading south, avoid touching the sticky handholds. Try not to fall into any fellow passengers. Apologize deeply for the inevitable failure. Walk to the coffee shop, wait in line. That's where Gina was now. Waiting at the back of the same long line-up as every other morning.

Everyone stared ahead like cows in line for the milking machine. She wanted to hate being a member of that line, but even the thought of going without her daily espresso fix made her eye twitch.

The door opened as she was putting in her earbuds, planning to listen to one more chapter of her latest audio book. Her eyes flicked to see the newcomer, and found herself staring at the very definition of tall, dark, and handsome.

She held her breath and focused on the doorway, long enough that no one would ever suspect she was gawking at the man walking through it. After putting on what she hoped was a convincingly casual expression, she turned her gaze toward the front of the line. As he settled in behind her, Gina found the story that had been so captivating on the train wasn't enough to distract her. After another minute, she gave up and flicked to her high-energy playlist, the one she used when she couldn't convince her ass to get out of the door for a run.

The music filled her ears and wound itself around her core. Before she knew it, her hips were twitching on their own accord, settling into the rhythm and putting her mind at ease. She quickly peeked behind her and saw that he was staring at her ass. His eyes met hers, and a hint of a half smile touched his lips.

This time her about-face wasn't quite so casual.

He could take his pick from any woman in the entire city of New York. Why was he looking at *her*? She was the kind of girl who blended into any crowd without effort, let alone in the streets of New York.

The thrill of it made her stomach flutter. Not wanting to spoil the moment, she restrained herself. Resisted the urge to dance more suggestively. Leave 'em wanting more. *Who said that?* Didn't matter, Gina was going to do her damndest to follow the advice. To leave him wondering what else her body could do. Make his mind drift to her as he went about his boring day at the cubicle farm.

The line moved ahead and curved slightly. It afforded her the ability to check him out more surreptitiously. He stood a full head taller than her, though if she put on her heels they'd be at almost perfect kissing height. And he had lips she longed to kiss. Full, and the color of caramel. His dark eyes roamed the room, but returned regularly to watch her hips have their way with the beat of her music.

His shoulders flared broad and filled out his suit jacket perfectly. The fine cloth and expert tailoring made her amend the 'cubicle farm' part of her assumption. This was a man with an office. Maybe even a corner office.

Most interesting was his nose. It sat crooked and flattened ever-so-slightly. Probably he'd broken it several years ago. Odd that a man with a suit so stunning wouldn't have it fixed, but somehow, the flaw made him more attractive.

Not that it took much. He'd look gorgeous in a cheap rental suit. He had the right frame for it, and judging by his bold little smirk, he had the confidence to pull it off too. Just what she liked.

She sighed with pleasure. There hadn't been new fantasy material in her day-to-day life for far too long. She could already feel the balminess of arousal spreading through her body.

Today was turning out to be a good day.

All too quickly she came to the front of the line. She pulled out her earbuds and made her order. Americano, large. One flavor shot, barista's choice. No room for milk. Same thing every morning. She pulled out her wallet to pay, only to have a dark hand cover hers. Her eyes followed the line of the

attached arm up to the shoulder, and over to the handsome face of her new crush. He had on a full smile with very white teeth. "My treat."

Heat rose in her cheeks and her tongue wouldn't work. "Thank you," she finally managed to stammer.

He ordered his drink, paid, and they stepped to a new line to wait for their drinks. Gina cleared her throat. "So what did I do to earn myself a free coffee this morning?"

He flashed another smile. "A man can't do something nice at random?"

She lifted an eyebrow. "I suppose he could. But he could also have ulterior motives."

He stepped closer, forcing her to lift her chin to hold eye contact. "What kind of ulterior motive would prompt a man to buy a beautiful stranger coffee?"

Gina's heart pounded and her insides felt wobbly. The spicy scent of his cologne filled the air surrounding her, cranking the dial on her arousal to ten. "Well, he might be a salesperson looking to fill a quota."

A soft laugh rumbled out of his chest. "Nope. Nothing to sell."

"Hm. Religious wing nut?"

"The last time I went to church it was Christmas Eve, and I was there under threat of death from my mother."

They were now standing toe to toe, nearly touching. Gina licked her lips, and his eyes moved to watch the gesture. "He might be a spy looking to steal Top Secret information."

He did an exaggerated shoulder check to both sides and whispered, "The code word is lullaby."

A giggle escaped her. "Alas, that word means nothing to me."

His shoulders sagged. "Damn. Well, it was nice meeting you anyway."

He winked and turned to walk away, but Gina caught his arm. "Wait!" He turned back. She shrugged. "I might have other useful information."

His eyes narrowed. "Hm. I suppose it can't hurt. Let's start with something easy. What's your name?"

She smiled. "Gina Winters. What's your name?"

He frowned and wagged a finger. "Uh uh, this is *my* interrogation. I'll be the one asking questions."

Gina laughed. "Is that right? Well, get on with it."

"What song were you listening to?"

A tingle worked its way down her spine. "Which song?"

He brushed a stray lock of hair away from her face. "The one that made you dance."

She swallowed hard. *Good Lord he was sexy.* "I forget." It wasn't a lie. She could barely remember her own name as she took in his smooth cocoa colored skin and chiseled jawline coated with just the right amount of stubble.

"That's too bad," his eyes scanned her slowly from head to toe, lingering at her hips, "I wouldn't mind watching you dance to it again. And again. And again."

For the second time in three minutes he had her at a loss for words. Unfortunately, the barista announced that their order was ready before she could think of a reply. He turned, grabbed his coffee, lifted it in farewell, and walked out the shop.

Her brain finally caught up to her body and lurched her into action. Gina snatched her coffee from the counter and hustled out the door.

It was too late. He was nowhere to be seen in either direction. What was this guy, a ninja? Disappointment surged through her body. Why hadn't she asked for his name again? Or at least given him her number?

Maybe today wasn't such a good day.

Saul sucked wind as he stood in the large lobby across the street from the coffee shop. Traffic had been in his favor for once, and let him pull off the disappearing act without a hitch.

He spun in time to see her rush out of the door, just as he anticipated. Her head swivelled both ways, her curls bouncing against her cheeks from the speed of it. He could see her entire body deflate at the realization that he was gone. After another long moment, she finally walked down the block and out of his sight.

Saul took a sip of his coffee and let himself savor the satisfaction of their brief encounter. It brightened his morning, and potentially hooked in a new playmate. Not bad for the price of a coffee.

The memory of her suspicious expression brought a smile to his face. There wasn't anything ulterior about his gift. Gina Winters was hot as hell, and he wanted more of her.

But not yet.

He waited a bit longer to ensure she didn't double back, then resumed his morning commute. As he made his way through the crowd of commuters, thoughts of the bewitching brunette's sultry moves in the coffee shop filled his mind. He certainly hadn't gone out looking for a new conquest when he left the hotel that morning, but after catching her checking him out when she thought he didn't notice, there hadn't been a chance he was going to let her slip through his grasp.

This was the part he liked best. At least, that's what he told himself. Saul hadn't had much luck in the romance department, thanks mostly to being married to his job. Women didn't tolerate his scheduling challenges, and never stuck around long. There were a few that tried over the years, but after they all ended in tears and disaster, he'd sworn off of monogamy. It wasn't worth the pain.

As he waited for the lights to change, his thoughts drifted to Samantha. His Sam. Or least she *was* his Sam. The memory of her fiery red hair with temper to match was finally enough to make him smile instead of think frantically about anything else. Only took fifteen years. Not bad.

She was his first love. First year in college. Even then he'd been a workaholic. Not entirely by choice. His sports scholarship was the only reason he had the chance at a higher education. A full ride, no less. Not a chance he was going to waste it. So he studied and practiced and studied some more. It was no real surprise when she drifted away, their love long burned away to nothingness.

Jesus, melodramatic much?

He shook his head and took a swig of his latte as he started across the street. Cabs flashed past his peripheral vision, yellow and gaudy, cluttering the street. Soon there wouldn't be any cars, just a massive crowd of people on their way to work. Just like him.

Memories tugged at him again. Not Sam this time. No, now it was the exotic Prada. Not her real name. But she was tall, dark, and ethereal, and people tended to let her have her way. Including Saul, until he lost out on a chance to be in the NFL and she fled to greener pastures, blaming his neurotic class schedule. He didn't really blame her.

He did, however, resent the very public breakup.

Then there was Charity. She'd gotten bored of him in three short months, but stuck around another six to make sure he felt like a dick for it. By the time he cut her loose, there was little more than resentment between them.

Saul rounded a corner and his eyes locked on the still very new World Trade Centre. A thing of beauty, if ever there was. And it was smack-dab in the centre of his office view. His skin prickled with excitement. Day Three.

Yet, even as the tower holding his new corporate home came into sight, the past poked him again.

Amber.

Her memory didn't make him smile. Not yet. Five years had gone by, and their last conversation still slapped him around the face.

'You love your job more than you ever loved me!'

Saul had to stop and take a deep breath. That line had been the last straw. Amber was right. He wanted her, but that wasn't enough. It would never be enough for women the caliber of Amber, Charity, Prada, and Sam.

So now he was what some would consider a man-whore. Saul hated the label, but what else would you call it? One-night stands worked for him. A night of fun that both parties could look back on with satisfaction. No promises he couldn't keep. No risk of trampling all over some other poor woman's heart. Just two people getting it on, and getting off.

Saul shook the past off and walked the last block to his new office. The monstrous tower emblazoned with WTF Financial came into sight. Otherwise nondescript in a city full of such towers, the founding partners gladly admitted that a lot of their clients chose to them thanks to their ridiculous name. It was the high-touch manner in which they treated those clients that made them stick around.

WTF was the biggest step up in his career, thus far. Financial Operations Manager. It played perfectly to his sales and finance experience, and offered nothing but upward mobility. And if it didn't, there were literally hundreds of firms on the same block he could approach. Hell, they'd approach him if he did his job right.

And he *would* do his job right.

Saul checked in with security and waited for the elevator to the 21st floor. As he did, a fresh memory played through his mind. One that brought a smile to his face. Those hips, and that ass, moving just the right way. It sent his reptile brain straight to the gutter. She would fuck like a maniac. He could tell. He could always tell.

He'd taken a big gamble in letting Gina go without getting her number, but that was part of his game. Maybe he'd kick himself in the future if that shop didn't turn out to be one of her regular haunts, but Saul hadn't gotten that impression. Gina wore practical runners with her sexy little pencil skirt, and carried a bag big enough to hold a change of shoes. This woman was a real New Yorker, one who didn't bother wasting her feet on the morning walk to work. She worked somewhere nearby, and she'd be there on Monday.

So would he.

His skin tingled at the thought of seeing her again. Would she be irritated? Make him work a little harder to get her number? Or would she throw it his way, begging him to call sooner than later? Saul couldn't decide which he wanted more.

The hunt was more than just finding a new woman to entice, to seduce. He liked guessing at their reactions, and learning their quirks. Finding what they liked, what turned them on. The more they surprised him, the more he enjoyed it.

Gina was particularly intriguing. No other woman ever questioned his motives, in jest or not. Nor could he remember another woman getting a genuine laugh out of him so quickly. She was a clever one.

He was going to relish reeling her in.