

Everyday Printing was all about love sometimes. Wedding invitations, bar mitzvah invitations--we even printed the occasional Will and Testament, which often had a lot more to do with people loving money than each other.

As a graphic designer, I made love look good. Except when love was designed for me.

Working on rearranging yet another invitation for a June wedding, I held onto my temper with greased fingers. The *appearance* of love was my business. I didn't have to be successful in love to keep my job. I just had to keep from telling a certain brassy matron of honor that she needed to butt out before her friend the bride *and* the 'invitation lady', as she called me, both gave her an orange spray-tan and made it look like an accident.

"Yes, Sherry, we can add a third panel of pictures to the invitation," I agreed patiently.
"I--No, I can't hold--Sherry--"

I bit back a growl as the line went mute. We had already revised these invitations twelve times and they still weren't printed. The unlucky couple would *never* get married at this rate.

My boss, Alex, his dark hair bouncing like paper curls, whistled jauntily through his teeth as he passed my cubicle by the poster machine. Seeing my expression, he pantomimed strangling a cardboard roll, eyes bulging dramatically.

I smiled, silently shook my computer as if it were the apocalypse, and tried not to think about just how good racketballer Alex looked in his teal button-up shirt and dark slacks. Alex was best at talking anyone into loving anything, which is how just after college graduation he bought a tiny, failing print business and turned it into a successful hub of ink with only four employees.

He hadn't had to talk me into loving him. Unfortunately, that meant he hadn't tried.

"Hon? You still there?"

Watching Alex's retreating back, I felt a funny lurch in my heart and knew I was smiling a bit bitterly. "Yes, Sherry. I'm still here."

"Yeah, well, the third panel on side B--"

Smothering a sigh, I picked up my phone as it dinged with an arriving text message. It was from not-so-helpful best friend Heather who I had told about my boss-crush in a moment of cursed weakness.

Trish, you're leaving the print office in a week. It's now or never with your boss. Kiss that adorable paper-pusher senseless before I do it myself.

On my work line, Sherry sighed, bringing me back to her harping. "Can you send me the new invitation? Today?"

Distracted, I looked up at the invitation I had been mindlessly editing and answered, "Yes. I can. Headed straight to you."

"Good, because--"

I tuned the meddling matron out as I heard another ding on my phone and opened the message with fire in my heart. Without bothering to read Heather's argument, I texted her back fiercely as I could.

Don't want to hear it, Heather. I tried to tell Alex how I felt at the Christmas party after too much eggnog. He laughed and thought I was joking. I'm not trying again. The man's insurance pays for my abandonment counseling sessions! Besides, it's tacky to kiss your boss senseless. Tacky but tempting. So shut up.

I sent the text and sighed, running my finger through my tangled curls. After a few minutes more placating Sherry, Alex sauntered out of his office again, leaning against the poster printing machine with a patient smile on his heart-shaped face.

His *fine* face, his *kind* face. Good grief.

I spoke a little faster into the phone. "Well, shoot me an email if *Miranda* wants anything else changed, Sherry. Ba-bye."

I hastily hung up, shoving the work phone into my desk drawer as if it were a cobra that could bite me. Leaning back against my chair, I looked to Alex, trying not to let my warm thoughts splash into my eyes.

Alex assumed an expression of comical guilt. "Two years you've been working here and I've been underpaying you to deal with that?"

“You pay me.”

“Not enough for a sterling UCLA grad. But thanks for staying this long.”

Alex came up behind me to peer at the invitation still on the screen. I tried and failed not to be completely aware of his presence at my back, even though it was warm and comforting as sunshine. He smelled like cloudy dryer sheets and something spicy and manly. I fought not to sniff at the elbow he had rested against my chair back.

“I’m thinking we use our ink to tattoo difficult clients in their sleep,” I said.

“Tacky. But tempting.”

I laughed, feeling a shift of unease in my stomach. Where had I heard that before?

“Heaven help me,” I whispered in abject humiliation, realization of my mistake hitting me like a sledgehammer. I fought the urge to grab my cell phone and verify the accidental horror I’d committed.

Alex only shifted closer, sending chills down my right side. “Multi-tasking wrecks efficiency, you know. Texting on the job? Tsk, tsk.”

Good gracious, no. Bumblebees of anguish buzzed and stung my stomach. I gripped the sides of my chair. “Alex, I was just--”

“Going to dinner with me,” he said evenly. “Right?”

“Huh?”

“After I fire you.”

“Fire me?” I rose half out my chair.

“I’m not your boss anymore,” he said, with a touch of relief and nervousness totally foreign to him. “You’re not the only one who was avoiding *tackiness*.”

I stared up at him, openly gawking.

He smiled a bit wider, showing his one dimple, a bit of nerves in the smile. “I thought you were teasing me at Christmas. Sorry.”

Dinner was shrimp and steak. Second dinner was chicken masala and a tacky, senseless kiss on the doorstep. A year later, I was back working for Alex, wearing his ring and designing my own wedding invitation. Only now, I don't multi-task. It isn't worth the risk.

Even if the risk sometimes pays really, really well.