

Rose woke up as she did every day. Alone. She preferred it this way. For now, anyway. She had spent a lifetime waking up next to the wrong person. When she finally broke free; she placed a mirror on each side of her bed. This was so now regardless of which direction she slept, she'd rise to see her own face and know that she was with the right person. She could only count on herself. She would always remain true to that one person who looked back at her from the other side of the reflective surface. That person encouraged her, tested her, pushed her to be better than the person who she was the day before. Constructive criticism was something she practiced daily. She was her own worst critic and that was okay because she knew that it was coming from a place of care.

So again, she rises to herself and no one else. Not to say that she didn't have people she could call on to fill her needs. She was a beautifully desirable and sexy woman. She wasn't quite thirty yet, she still had a few years. She was physically fit. She was kind, funny and charismatic. The type of person whose presence could captivate a room. She was the best version of herself that she had ever been and still she had nobody with whom she could consistently spend her time. This wasn't for lack of want, but for fear that the other person would only see her as an object and not the delicate fireball that she was.

She finally sat up and swung her feet off her bed. Getting up, she stretches for a few moments before sauntering over to her bathroom on her tippy toes. She didn't live with anyone but was cautious about the noise level for her neighbor's sake. A sweet elderly lady whom she checked in on daily. She'd bring her goodies from the bakery or a plate of some "yummy ethnic food" as Susan called it. Anything that wasn't meat and veggies was foreign to Susan. This included Asian food, Spanish food and even certain Italian dishes. She'd get all giddy whenever Rose stopped by as she herself never had children and being in her eighties, most of her friends had gone away. Admittedly, this was Rose's favorite part of her day as well.

Rose arrives in the bathroom and begins her morning routine. Brushing her teeth, washing her face, applying a touch of makeup, deodorant and perfume. She ties her hair up and now she's ready to get dressed. She had already laid out her workout clothes for today, black shorts, black sports bra, blue tank top. As she slides on socks and ties up the laces of her running shoes, she can't help but think how these morning runs would be if she had someone with her. She had a few friends she could call to workout with her, but the few female friends didn't like working out with her anymore.

She was far too competitive and didn't understand the etiquette behind slowing down. She had three guy friends she could call to run with her, but two of them had girlfriends and she did not want to cause any problems. The other she had fooled around with after their last run and she was worried it would become a pattern or even worse an expectation. Being alone made more sense. She needed to have her time to get centered.

Grabbing her keys, she places them in the inside pocket of her shorts and zippers it shut. She places her phone in its pouch, which she straps to her arm, puts her earbuds in and is off. Taking the stairs, provides her with the stretch she needs. Five flights and she's finally outside. With a deep full breath, she hits play and begins to jog down the block. She takes 68th Street down to Central Park West. She wanted to go past Strawberry Fields today. Running on a trail thru the park she smiles as she begins to move faster, smoother. She's a graceful gazelle. Jumping imaginary hurdles. Her lean figure moving faster and faster. The sun begins to rise, and Rose stops for a moment to watch the sparkling on the Reservoir. It's nearly seven and she needed to get another hour and a half in before she could stop and grab some coffee. She craved it, but she had grown accustomed to making her body work for that caffeine.

She begins to think of all the things that she needs to get done today. It's Thursday morning. Her first meeting wasn't until noon and she had so much to do before then. She continues to allow her mind to follow her thru her day. Run, have breakfast, stop to get a treat for Susan, shower, lunch meeting, afternoon work from home, change for dinner with the girls and then drinks with the guys. There was going to be no time for writing today. She found it more prudent to keep her body conditioned than to continue to write a story she didn't believe in. She really hoped her editor had commissioned her to do something more realistic. She couldn't bare another love story. Her life was a loveless story and daydreaming about these beautiful possibilities drained her in a way she couldn't explain. Even now thinking about it, she realized her pace slowed. This wasn't good. Maybe think about other things.

Rose starts to think of the things she was planning to do tomorrow and over the weekend. Tomorrow she had a long conference she needed to attend. This one was going to be a little different as it was being held at The Museum of Natural History. Then off to her sister and brother in laws house out on the island for the weekend. It was her nephew's first birthday Sunday and she promised to come out and help cater the event. She had planned out the entire event, had the prep time nailed down to a

science for Saturday and had the entire cooking schedule down for Sunday. Everything with Rose was precise, timed and scheduled. There was no room for surprises. Never again would she allow her guard to drop.

She turns the corner around the zoo and sees a man who looks just like her ex and stops completely in her tracks. She gets instantly dizzy and it takes a moment for her eyes to readjust. Blinking several times, her eyes finally see clearly, and she realizes the man in front of her is a complete stranger. Overwhelmed, she drops her hands to her knees, dips her head down and begins to hyperventilate. It's a few minutes before she regains her composure. She's still trembling some and scared she'll get hurt if she continues to run in this state, she opts to hail a cab to the coffee shop. The ride is quick. Not having finished her run, she has some extra time on her hands. She orders a coffee and croissant at the counter and sits at a high-top table overlooking the park. Sipping her coffee slowly, she doesn't take her phone out to check emails or social media. This was her time to relax, strategize, meditate and listen to music. She changes the playlist, as she doesn't need hype music any longer. The mellow folk music playing in her ears is beautiful, and sad. She quietly sways to the music and she finishes her breakfast. It's nearly eight thirty, so she decides to head to Columbus and 69th. Magnolia's would be opening soon, and she could pick up a couple banana puddings. That would make for a great Thursday treat.

When Rose arrives to the building, she presses the fourth-floor button in the elevator. She would take her pudding over to Susan before even showering. There was no doubt her smiling face would help change Rose's mood. She taps lightly on the door and the sweetest white-haired little lady is beaming as she opens the door. "Dear sweet Rose, what is bothering you honey? I can tell something is wrong. Come, sit down. Let's have a visit." she says as she pulls her into her apartment before Rose can even open her mouth. They sit at the small dinner table in the corner of the apartment. There's a cool breeze coming in thru the window and instantly Rose becomes both more relaxed and self-conscious. Did she smell? Tipping her head downward, while Susan is getting her a glass of water, Rose smells herself, just to be sure. Susan returns, chuckling and says, "Oh dear. You don't smell. You never smell. The worst I can say is that you smell like outside and outside smells lovely on your skin." Rose settles down a little as she sips the water.

"Now, are you going to tell me what has you so shook this morning? You know I always see through that fake smile of yours." Susan says, taking hold of Rose's hand.

Taking another sip of water, Rose begins; “On my run this morning. I was focused. I was going through my ‘to-do’ list for the day and then I thought I saw him. It wasn’t him; I knew it couldn’t be him, but it still gave me pause. Now I’m trying to get my day back on track, but my mind keeps drifting back to that night to all those nights.” Hearing this, Susan stands and takes Rose into her arms and kisses the top of her head. “Oh honey.” Susan begins, “Please know that you are safe now. You’ll never be back in that place again. You’re stronger than that circumstance. I can see why you’re upset; do you need something to settle your nerves?” Rose chuckles and is now completely okay, this eighty-year-old lady offering her drugs was always the highlight of her week, “No thank you Susan. I have a long day ahead of me. I don’t need to spend any amount of time high this morning. But seriously, thank you for listening to me and for the water. Water always taste best when you give it to me after a run.” With a final hug, Rose takes the stairs back up to her apartment,

Rose unlocks the door and immediately begins to strip down. She loved being in her apartment. It was hers and hers alone. She could leave her wet workout clothes on the floor and not worry about anyone saying anything. She could freely walk thru her apartment, naked without a care in the world. She connects her phone to her speaker and selects a mellow playlist to listen to while showering. Nothing too hype today, she needed to get thru this lunch and dinner before she could get to her relaxation time afterwards, drinks with the guys. She turns the nob for the water and moves the handle to make the water far too hot. She needed to wash the remembrance of today’s run off her skin. She steps in and stands under the waterfall showerhead allowing herself to be completely submerged by the steaming hot water. She bows her head and takes one-two-three deep breaths. Finally, she is starting to feel the tension release from her shoulders. She washes her hair, cleans for face, rinses her hair, applies conditioner. As she washes her entire body, she shutters a bit as she goes over the deep scar on the right side of her torso. She finishes, rinses the conditioner off her hair and steps out of the shower. She towel dries her body and wraps her hair up in the towel.

Rose looks in the mirror and at the moment is happy it’s foggy from the steam of her shower. With her body completely exposed, she walks thru her apartment to her bedroom, to pick out an outfit for lunch. She grabs black skinny leg dress pants, heels, pale pink blouse, pink bra and black blazer. She didn’t want to be too provocative. She could wear something revealing later, but right now she just needed to be as professional as possible. She lays it all out on her bed. She begins to towel dry

her hair before returning to the bathroom to blow dry her hair. By the time she returns to the bathroom, the mirror has defogged. She takes a deep hard look at her naked body and gets uncomfortable again. She returns to her bedroom and puts on her bra; she even grabs a pair of matching underwear from her drawer.

In the bathroom, with her body partially covered up, she looks at her body a little less uncomfortably. Starting at the top, her long wet auburn hair, big dark brown eyes, full lips. Her shoulders are broad, and she wishes she had firmer arms. Small breasts, small waist she worked really hard to keep. That scar, she hated that scar, she hated how she got it. It had been a year, but she still gets nauseous thinking about the night she got it. Her thighs, slender but still more than enough to wrap around the right body. Her calves were her second favorite part of her body. They were firm, muscular, plump where they need to be, everything she wanted her entire body to be. She turns around slowly looking for a moment at her ass. There it was her favorite body part. The one thing that she always liked about herself even when every other part of her was questionable, she could always count on 'dat ass!' She clips up her hair and begins blow drying it in sections. It's nearly 10:30, she had to leave in an hour and she still had some prep work to do.

When Rose finishes drying her hair, she grabs her laptop and walks over to her breakfast bar to begin reviewing her presentation. She loved what she was proposing but was frustrated that she was doing so over lunch. She much prefers to take these meetings from a conference room. She struggled to be taken seriously in her field. She was an actuary and didn't work for one company in particular. She made more money as a consultant. She liked making her own hours, being able to come and go as she pleased, workout whenever she wanted. She promised herself she'd never be tied down or kept in a box again. Most of her clients were referred to her by word of mouth. She was truly good at what she did, but in a male dominated industry she was an anomaly and needed to be careful to draw the line when around these multi-millionaire business owners. That's why she much preferred to meet in the office setting, but this was the only time Mr. Johnston's assistant said he had available.

It's past eleven and Rose rushes to get dressed, apply makeup, slide her laptop into her purse and head out of her apartment. She waves down a cab, she was going downtown and was not about to jump on the train and have to deal with that heat and smell right now. She was still nauseous from this morning's almost encounter. "Tribeca, Greenwich and Hubert. Thank you." she tells the cab driver as she settles

into the back seat and finally takes her phone back out to check her messages. She hadn't allowed herself to check her social media all morning. Eighty-five notifications. This was about norm for her level of activity from the last few days. Actuary wasn't her only profession and she had so many interests that she ran in several circles. She knew this was going to be one of those high activity weeks as she had events every day. She tries her best to answer the messages from her girlfriends first. There aren't that many, so it was simple enough. Where to start when it comes to her guy friends? There were the friends, the exes, the "not just" friends. She wasn't in the mood to entertain everyone. She was too busy. All of these guys would have to wait, she thinks to herself as the cab stops at the restaurant.

"Rose Pembroke, I believe the reservation is under Mr. Jared Johnston." she tells the hostess. With a rather large smile, the hostess guides her to a private room in the back of the restaurant. This didn't make Rose happy. She was in no place mentally to have to deal with some older guy trying to wine and dine her especially not over lunch. She looks around the room and there's only one table in this rather large, sparse room. Before she can even take her seat, the waiter is pouring her a glass of water and asking for her drink order, to which she informs him she's fine with just water. A young guy enters the room. He's well-dressed but a touch more casual than she had anticipated. He's in jeans, a dress shirt, blazer and sneakers. He removes his sunglasses and she can tell by his expression that he hadn't looked her up before this meeting.

Extending his hand toward her, he motions to shake her hand; but opts to raise her hand to his lips and places a light kiss upon it. Seeing Rose's expression, he explains, "I'm sorry, I'm a little less than proper. I'm taken aback. Not only by your age, but your beauty. Your reputation proceeds you and I was expecting someone more advanced in years." Rose immediately calms, knowing that landing this contract would mean upwards of a couple hundred thousand dollars for three months' worth of work. This could bankroll her entire next year if she wants to do nothing but travel. "It's quite alright. I usually prefer to present my preliminary findings in a meeting room, where I can project my presentation on the wall." she realizes as her words come out that she's still standing and probably coming off as aggressive. As she turns to take her seat, he is faster than she and is already there, holding her chair out for her. Without even noticing she smiles at him and he smiles back at her. She notices the dimples on

the sides of his mouth and thinks to herself, 'You need to control yourself. He's a potential client.'

The waiter returns to take their drink orders and bring out appetizers. Even though she had already said she was fine with water, since he ordered an Irish Car Bomb she opted to get an Old Fashioned. She notices again that the corner of his lip is turned up. She begins to bite on the corner of her lower lip but knowing nothing good could come of her giving in to her appetite, she immediately stops herself, places her laptop in between them on the table and begins her spiel. The entire time she's talking about cost reduction and consolidating departments across his three brands; he's engaged. He asks well informed questions. After about ten questions in, she stops him and asks why it is that he wants to bring in a consultant for this brand reconstruction if he already knows what he needs to do. He waits a moment, formulating his words carefully before responding with, "I am well versed in all these business matters but it's the human side of things with which I suffer. You've been able to breakdown the logical and monetary side of things. However, word has gotten around as to how you have been able to not just simplify but help grow brands by looking at the people side of things. Helping displaced employees find alternate jobs, and different roles within organizations to shift people around, making the brands stronger and more efficient. That's the aspect with which I struggle."

Rose nods, allows herself to smile at him, which in turn lights up his entire face and finishes up her presentation. She gets through her entire PowerPoint while they sip their drinks and eat appetizers. There appears to have been a long endless stream of plates that were brought out to the table. She counts seven plates. Looking at her watch she realizes their hour luncheon actually took two hours. She apologizes for taking up so much of his time. Knowing that every time this week when she ran thru this, she had only taken forty-five minutes. She wasn't counting on his being so engaged and asking so many questions. He sits back for just a moment before saying, "It's quite alright. I texted my assistant to reschedule my meetings for a couple of hours, to allow time for us to take a deep dive into our conversation. But, it's probably prudent that I head back to my office. Do you have time later on tonight to possibly go over some follow up questions I'll have?" She almost wishes she didn't have plans later, but she had already rescheduled dinner with the girls three times and she couldn't bail on the guys, they were her weekly reprieve. "I have a couple of other

obligations tonight, but I am free tomorrow night after an engagement at the Museum of Natural History.”

“Popular woman. A couple of obligations tonight. You’re already juggling a bit and you can’t allow for one more ball to be thrown at you.” he says, his smile getting both bigger and more suspicious. His word selection has her wishing she wore panties to this meeting. She was beginning to have a stirring and would definitely be in need of a release tonight. “I can handle any ball I take in my hand. But the true power comes in the recognition that some balls are just toys and other require a different level of care and attention. You wouldn’t play with a dirty golf ball, you wet them and was them off real good. You wouldn’t want to palm a slightly deflated basketball; you pump it until it’s reached the peak level of firmness. There is a time to allow your attention to scatter and then there is a time like this, that requires an elevated level of regard. So, tomorrow then? He smiles, shifts slightly as though she has stirred something inside him, agrees and insists she ride down to his office a few blocks away and then he’d have his driver take her to wherever she needed to go. Rose agrees and as he holds open the door to his black Audi for her, she gets a good look at his face. His light blue eyes, his dark brown hair, the tiny scar on the bottom of his left cheek. She’s definitely going to need to watch herself around him. She was such a sucker for blue eyes.

Their ride together isn’t very long. Ten minutes of non-work-related conversation. He didn’t know it, but this was her way of doing research. By getting to know him a little better, she’d be able to figure out where to focus her main efforts into reorganizing his companies. As they arrive at his office, she puts her hand out to shake his, she’s half expecting him to kiss her wrist again. This time he leans over, gives her a 10-second hug, about 8-seconds longer than she’d allow for a friend to embrace her and then lightly kisses her on the cheek. Rose’s cheeks instantly turn, well, rosy. They bid each other farewell and she provides the driver with her address so she can head back to her apartment. Rose sits there replaying the meeting in her mind. Trying her best not to just think about how captivating his eyes are. Before they even get a quarter of a mile away, she gets a calendar invite from his assistant for tomorrow night 6pm to 11pm. That can’t be right. Five hours! She opens up the full invite to see that he’s picking her up at her apartment and there are specifics about her “suggested attire.” She’s a little creeped out as to how he knows where she lives but tries hard not to dwell on that for too long.

They arrive at her apartment and the driver asks her to wait before exiting the vehicle. He gets out and opens her door for her and says, "A woman never opens her own door. Also, Mr. Johnston had the restaurant pack up the leftovers for you. Give me a moment while I grab the bags." He reaches into the trunk to retrieve three bags with to-go containers. Well, Susan was going to feast for the next couple of days. Rose thanks the driver and heads up the elevator to the fourth floor. Knocking on Susan's door, she finally takes a deep breath. Susan looks well rested; she must have taken her midday nap. She's ecstatic to see the bags of appetizers, she wasn't sure what she would be making for dinner tonight.

They sit on the couch while Rose tells Susan about her meeting. Sparing no details, Rose went on and on. Susan loved hearing about these meetings. Of course, in true Susan fashion she asked if this gentleman that Rose had met with had a social media presence. It was so adorable to hear her talk this way. Rose pulls up a picture of Jared, Susan's jaw drops, and she says, "Now I see why you were so excited to meet with this man. He's quite the tall glass of water. You might want to take care of yourself before seeing him, you know it's been a few weeks since you've had any male companions over. You don't want to just pounce all over him." If anyone else had said this Rose would've been annoyed, but Susan was like that crazy Aunt with whom you share all your secrets. Rose sometimes forgot that Susan lives directly beneath her and has a front row seat to all the audio of Rose's exploits. On more than one occasion Susan had greeted Rose with, "So I hear you had a good time last night." when she came to check on her the day after. Not realizing she had been with Susan for a couple of hours, just chatting, she excuses herself for the evening. With a kiss on the cheek and a quick hug, Rose runs upstairs to get ready for her dinner out with the girls.

Rose clips up her hair and takes a quick shower. Her leg was still sticky from her earlier secretions. She gets out the shower, towel dries her body and walks into her bedroom naked. She needed an outfit that would work for both dinner with the girls and drinks with the guys. Her female friends were not the prissy type. They'd all likely be in jeans and t-shirts. This made her uncomfortable, she owned maybe three t-shirts and they had seen her in all of them more times than she could count. Her guy friends were all businessmen. They would likely be in suits, which she could totally work with, but not when she had other obligations first. Finally, she decides she doesn't even care, she was going to wear whatever she wanted. She grabs her white suit and a bra. No blouse, just the slacks, the blazer and silver open toe heels. Good

thing her toenail and fingernail polish always matched. She'd barely have enough time to curl her hair before getting to the restaurant, she couldn't deal with painting nails.

Rose does her hair in tight curls, knowing the humidity will do its job and drop them by the time she meets up with the guys tonight. As much as she enjoyed dinner with the girls, it was the drinks with the guys that she looked forward to every week. She applies her makeup, puts on far too much jewelry, throws on an accent scarf, grabs her clutch and is off. She arrives downstairs and sees she has forty minutes to get all the way back downtown. Instead of hailing a cab, she waits in her lobby and schedules a car to come get her. In the city, this is cheaper than hailing a cab and so much cleaner. The car arrives in ten minutes and thank goodness it's a female driver who doesn't appear to speak much English. Rose needed a quiet ride. She opens her phone to get to all of her notifications and sees that even after everything she took care of this morning, the number is now up to 105. "Oh, this is exhausting!" she thinks as she begins to read thru the messages, making sure there aren't any from the girls or the guys about tonight. Clearing the notifications, she only has about 30 actual messages and this appears much more manageable. She takes care of all of them before arriving at the restaurant. She really did love people, but sometimes these messages were a bit much.

It was Jenny's turn to pick the restaurant. Which meant, Mexican food. Jenny only ever wanted to eat Mexican food. Somehow, she thought it was healthier, because she'd eat corn and not flour tacos, forgetting the fact that she ate like a pound of cheese with her meal. Rose looks around and sees that the entire gang is already there. Here she was, proud she was five minutes early and they all looked like they had been cozy for quite a bit. She walks over and gives each lady a hug and kiss. Jenny is already downing the chips and queso, while Crystal and Harriet were nursing their margaritas. They've already ordered Rose a mojito. Regardless of how many times she tells them she prefers hard liquor; they still get her these umbrella drinks.

Dinner with the ladies lasts for hours. Rose has a steak salad while the girls enjoy their tacos, enchiladas and life away from their children and husbands. Yes, Rose was the only one of them still unattached. This is the way she preferred to live her life. At least for the time being. Her ex left so many scars on her emotionally and physically, that the idea of being in a serious relationship made her cringe. Rose listens to story after story about potty training issues, endless mounts of laundry and scheduled date nights. Finally, at about a quarter to eight Rose excuses herself to head

out to her drinks with the guys. Leaving two hundred-dollar bills on the table to cover much more than her share of the bill, Rose kisses all the girls and is off again. This time she scheduled her car to take her down by the seaport. This would only be about a fifteen-minute walk, but in these heels on cobblestone, she wasn't going to risk it.

Rose appears fashionably late and all the guys are waiting outside the bar for her. It's amazing how she got all of these guys from different industries together. All had been guys she had been on one date with and thought, "Nope, you'd make for a better friend than mate." She had only slept with one of them, Sam, and that was just by happenstance. Now he was her preferred "friend" when she needed a release. He came with no attachments, didn't fawn over her, wasn't seeing anyone else and treated her body right. When the troupe sees her, they immediately start hooting and howling. This was almost sort of a routine with them. She would never admit it, but most days she needed that attention. She spins in a circle and they wrap their arms around her, giving her a monstrous group hug. Sam of course, manages to slide his hand down the front of her blazer while John cups her ass. Sam, she has no issues with as she was kind of hoping he was in that mood tonight, but John is another story. With a slight turn, she knees John between his legs lightly and they all release her from their embrace. Rose winks at John letting him know, that she knew it was his hand, and her kneeling him was intentional. He in turn nods at Rose, knowing he had crossed the line.

They get carded and go straight to their regular table. They had been coming out every Thursday for six months and this was by far their favorite spot. It was well lit enough that they could see each other, the music was good and the people that frequented this place were working professionals, providing a decent dating pool for all of them (when they were single and looking). Chris orders a couple of rounds of shots and they go around the table talking about the week's events. Rose listens to all the stories, chiming in here and there, laughing, throwing her head back giggling, flipping her hair (which she was amazed was still bouncy). Then after the fourth round of shots, Brenden asks about Rose's lunch meeting. She looks around the table, knowing she had strategically not told any of them about her meeting. Instantly it hits her, Brenden must have been the one who recommended her to Jeff. The guys are taken aback by her meeting with the notorious Mr. Johnston.

Brenden of course, asks if she thought he was attractive, because that's all that matters. They knew she was a sucker for sexy eyes a killer smile. More than those

attributes, an accomplished man. There wasn't a greater turn on for her than someone who was self-motivated. She could see Sam was getting upset. Why was he getting annoyed? This wasn't allowed. This wasn't part of their arrangement. Well...they had never officially spoken thru what their arrangement entailed, it was just understood. No awkward conversations, no catching feelings, no jealousy. When Sam had been seeing a girl a few months back, she backed off, she didn't give him any "come hither" glances or anything. Just then Sam asks Rose to dance, all the other guys vie for her hand on the dance floor (which isn't really a dance floor, just a slight clearing between tables). Rose obliges Sam and joins him. Sam whispers in her ear, "How long until we get out of here and head over to your place?" He was never this forward and wasn't he upset? Maybe not. He usually allowed Rose to set the pace. Just the thought of him being this forthcoming about what he wanted was making her warm in places she did not need to get warm while wearing all white. She smirks at him, thinks about it, and finally replies, "Two more drinks."

Their dancing gets interrupted by Brenden, who slides in between them taking Sam's place. Sam is gracious and bows out, returning back to the table. While dancing, Brenden asks Rose, "You didn't wear this outfit to your meeting this afternoon, did you?" "No! Are you crazy?" Rose says, whacking him on his chest playfully. "I mean if you did then you probably would've got the gig on the spot. You know he's single, right?" Brenden starts and Rose gives him a mean look causing him to clarify, "Please don't think that I'm throwing you at each other, but he's everything you've ever wanted and deserved in a man and more. He has motivation for days. He is insanely successful. He's polite and I've seen him with women, very attentive. Let's be honest, he could easily make one of those Top Five lists for hottest eligible men in the city. And you have to know you're quite the catch. You are self-made, driven, your body is banging and you're a better cook than almost every other chef in the city. And you're you know, easy on the eyes." To that Rose really hits him on the arm and says, "Well thank you. Right now, I'm just trying to get the job and do the work he needs so he can recommend me to his circle of professional contacts. I'm not worrying about anything beyond that. Seriously, though, thank you for the introduction. I was curious as to where he got my name." Just then, the song changes and Chris and John push Brenden out of the way and sandwich Rose with their ridiculous dancing. She spins in a circle, embracing the insanity of their movements. This was why she looked forward to their Thursday nights. She loved this carefree behavior. This was what she needed.

The song finishes and they all return to the table and have a couple more drinks. Rose announces that she has just consumed her last drink and needs to get home to rest up for a conference she has the next day. Sam offers to share a cab with her uptown, to which none of the other guys bat an eye. They barely wait a minute before the car arrives. Sam opens the door and Rose slides inside. Sam sits next to her; closes the door and they are off. Sam casually places his hand on her thigh and squeezes lightly. Rose doesn't think too much of it, she was wearing pants, he couldn't get to anything while she is dressed this way. They arrive quickly, Sam gets out and holds his hand out to help Rose from the car. He was a gentleman. That's probably how all of this extracurricular stuff started. He was sweet, a good kisser, the sex was satisfying but there wasn't that spark. She really wished there had been a spark with Sam. He checked off almost all of her boxes. He was financially stable, motivated, healthy, physically fit, came from a good family and attractive enough. But she didn't melt when they kissed and they only had sex, albeit good sex, but they never made love.

Rose opens her apartment door and offers Sam a drink to which he responds, "Yes, I've been thirsty all week." and walks over to kiss her. Standing there for a moment, this kissing was sweet. His lips were soft and welcoming but again no sparks. She gets angry that she's so distracted and pulls away slowly excusing herself to the bathroom. She closes the door behind herself and just looks in the mirror. Beautiful, curls almost completely dead, not a single bit of dirt on her white suit (thank goodness). She tries to smile, but it's forced. She knows this encounter won't fulfill her the way it normally does. It was too late to back down. She wasn't going to be rude or mean to Sam. He didn't do anything wrong. He just wasn't Mr. Right and he knew that. She had told him months ago, that these hookups would be only that hookups.

Rose opens the lingerie drawer in her bathroom. Yes, she had a drawer with clothes for occasions such as this in her bathroom. She pulls out a white gown, keeping with the theme of the evening and begins undressing. She leaves her suit folded neatly on the counter and slides the gown down her slender body. When she exits the bathroom, she finds Sam standing there in only his boxer briefs. This makes her relax a bit, which finally allows her to smile. Sam smiles back at her and says, "That's much better. You had me worried for a moment that you were upset or preoccupied." Taking a long deep breath, Rose needed to get this encounter going to shake these feelings she was having.

Rose walks over to Sam, who's licking his lips and biting down. He's cute like that. She goes straight for his neck. Placing firm kisses all along his jawline, neck, shoulders, working her way down his chest. Encircling his navel, she uses her teeth to remove his underwear. They drop and he playfully kicks them over to the other side of the room. He's already hard. She enjoyed this about Sam. She didn't have to work to make him excited. She wondered if he was always ready to go. She kisses his inner thighs and he places his hand on the top of her head. Grabbing hold of both his butt cheeks she takes him into her mouth. He always tasted so clean and was well groomed. He's enjoying how her mouth is working over him, and grabs hold of her hair. But not to push himself deeper into her, but to remove her mouth from his body completely.

Sam helps Rose to her feet, walks her into the bedroom and lies her on the bed. He runs his tongue on the inside of her thigh before allowing it to graze over her vagina lightly. Rose flinches. "That felt really good," she thinks to herself. It's like that one action has finally brought her back to the fact that they were together. All she was able to think about up until this point is how she couldn't do this the rest of her life. She wanted, needed, deserved more. This was easy. This was available. But she couldn't live the rest of her life in a relationship of convenience. Sam was nice and he deserved someone who loved him also. But as for tonight, right now, this felt good.

His tongue enters inside her and again her mind goes blank and she's just in the moment. He knows what he's doing and she's clenching the bedsheets with both hands. He slides his hands underneath her and cups her cheeks, massaging them. Rose was happy to just be selfish for the moment and enjoy what he was doing to her body. He works her for a long time and she's finally relaxed. He stands, slides her nightgown off her body and mounts her. Rose looks up at him, but for the first time, she just can't look into his eyes. She pulls him close to her, deeper inside her, but most importantly he won't notice that she's not looking at him. She's kissing on his neck and he's distracted with her breasts that he's sucking on. Half enjoying herself and half wanting this to be over, Rose knows exactly how to move to get Sam off quickly. Within minutes, they've both climaxed and are lying on their backs next to each other on the bed.

Sam reaches over and pulls the comforter over Rose's body. He knows she always wraps herself in a blanket when they're lying naked. Sam gives Rose a sweet, big bear hug over the blanket before leaving the room to go clean off. When he leaves,

Rose grabs a couple of wipes from the drawer in her nightstand and cleans herself off. She returns to under the comforter before Sam returns. He has his boxer briefs back on and is carrying a glass of water, which he hands to Rose to sip on. Kissing her on her forehead he says, "Somehow I feel like this isn't one of those wrap my arms around you until we fall asleep kind of nights. Am I right?" Sam could always read her pulse. "I'm sorry. I really am. This was nice. This was great. Really it was. But you're correct. I think I should probably sleep alone tonight." Rose says, covering her face with her blanket. Sam digs her out, looks her in her big brown eyes and says, "You don't need to apologize for anything. I'm here for whatever you need. If I've taken care of all of your needs, then I'm okay with leaving. If you change your mind, you know where to find me. I'm only a five-minute ride back over. Honestly, this is more than fine. Breakfast in the morning after your run?" Rose liked that she could be so honest with him. She agrees to breakfast in the morning. Sam gets dressed and with another kiss on Rose's forehead, he leaves.

Rose sits in the silence. Just the way she liked it. No noise. No chaos. She gets up and heads to the bathroom. For the first time she feels the need to shower after sex. Normally, she likes to keep the feeling and smell on her skin, but she needed this feeling off her skin as soon as possible. She ties her hair up in a bun and walks into the shower. Washing off all the makeup, the booze, the sex, the outdoors, all of it. Rose finishes off and looks at herself in the mirror for just a moment before heading back to her bedroom. Looking at her bed, she can't even lay down yet. She strips off the bedsheets and swaps them for clean sheets. Even the pillowcases need to go. Now with the clean sheets, she can finally rest. She lies down, closes her eyes and replays the days events in her mind before drifting off into a deep sleep.