

*I'm not sitting on one of those filthy seats.*

Joanna held her clothesbasket in front of her and frowned over at the worn and faded faux pink brocade. "Is that dried blood," she muttered, taking a step back.

*I hate this.*

Hated she'd lost her apartment. Hated her new home was a one-room hotel with a barely working air conditioner. Hated she had to go two blocks to wash her clothes.

She sat her basket down and loaded her few items—underwear, blouse, uniform—into the washer—shoving the dark blue dress in a little harder than necessary.

She also hated the only job she could find was waiting tables.

She added detergent and fabric softener to the load before inserting quarters in the slot and hitting the start button. The room was stifling, but leaving wasn't an option. She glanced once more at the stained and torn seats before walking over and leaning up against the bank of windows facing the street.

She closed her eyes at the world on the other side of the filmy window. It wasn't a nice view—not like the one she'd had from her fifth floor apartment. On days like this—sunny Saturdays with just a slight breeze—she would've started her wash and left without a thought.

Downtown would be bustling. Joanna could see herself with other 20-somethings enjoying their day off. She'd end her day of shopping at Starbucks—a venti, triple, nonfat, two-Pump, no-whip, mocha latte in her hand. She licked her lips at the memory of the foamy goodness she hadn't tasted in months.

Tears pricked the backs of her lids. This was her new normal—working a menial job and drinking plain coffee. But it was her own fault. She should've been more cautious—smart.

She shouldn't have trusted Mark.

She'd worked for Dorsett Accounting since graduating college and had been a damn fine accountant—so fine, in fact, she'd found some discrepancies on one of Mark's personal client's records. Sure he'd be pleased, she'd handed her findings over with a self-satisfied smile. He'd peered up at her with those sexy brown eyes of his and assured her he'd take care of the *error*. He'd never told her taking care of it would include blaming the misplacing of tens of thousands of dollars on her and firing her.

Well, at least she wasn't in jail.

She'd gone through her meager savings within the first three months without much thought. One of the many accounting firms in town would hire her.

But, of course, they hadn't. Mark had made sure of that.

So, here she was—eleven months later—standing in some rundown laundry with her bare arm stuck to something on the window.

The timer went off on the washer, rousing her from her spot. She checked her watch before putting everything in the dryer and starting it up. She had two hours before her shift started.

*Note to self. Never sleep with the boss.*