

Padding the Clock

By DarkeyeV2

The air in the storage room felt cool, smelling of copy paper and the faint chemical sweetness of a cheap air freshener. I pressed my back against a tall metal shelf, letting my weight lean fully into him while my head rested against his chest. My work blouse was completely untucked. The pencil skirt I wore remained bunched high on my thighs, and the sound of my own shaky breathing echoed loudly in the quiet space.

After a long moment, I stirred and pulled back just enough to look up at him. My face felt flushed, my lipstick was definitely smudged, and my glasses sat slightly askew before I pushed them back up my nose.

"Okay then," I said, my voice heavy with fatigue but shedding the husky whisper from a few minutes prior. I fumbled with my skirt, tugging it down over my hips with a soft grunt. It was a bit of a struggle since the tailored garment seemed to fight against the recent softness settling around my midsection. "I believe I have held up my end of the bargain."

I took another step back to create some space between us. Without breaking eye contact, my fingers found the clasp on my skirt and unhooked it with a soft click. The zipper slid down, allowing the tight fabric to relax. The soft, gentle curve of my lower belly pressed forward, forming a pale white swell against the dark waistband of my panties. I was not large by any means yet, just losing my definition and gaining a comfortable layer of padding.

"No, we are not going for a second round," I warned him, seeing his eyes drop to my waistline. "Keep yourself in check. I just needed to breathe again."

I looked up at my feeder, my cheeks still warm and my eyes wide behind my lenses. Coincidentally, he was now a higher up at the company I worked on - I was a lucky girl.

"So, about that work from home transfer for me. You said you would talk to HR and pull some strings now that you got your big promotion. Are you getting cold feet?"

He blinked, leaning back against another metal shelf and running a hand through his hair. He let out a sharp exhale.

"Are you for real?" he asked, his voice still a little rough. "Babe, let me breathe first. I literally *just* came. My brain needs a second to reboot." He adjusted his tie, the mask slipping back into place. "I just... I can't believe you are actually serious about this. Like, determined. Look, I'll try, okay? But we don't even have that many fully remote employees. What am I supposed to tell them? I'm higher up the ladder now, sure, but I barely have the keys to my new office. I don't know if I have the capital to burn on a transfer request this early."

A small pout huffed past my lips, sending a stray strand of chestnut hair flying away from my face. I folded my arms across my chest, which only served to push the soft flesh of my cleavage up further against the constraints of my bra.

"Oh come on now, you just stood there and looked pretty while I did all the hard work," I teased, letting my arms drop to rest my hands on my hips. My thumbs hooked into the elastic of my panties, accentuating the new rounded curve of my belly. "And yes, I am very serious. Do you think I have been stuffing myself every night for fun? Well, obviously I have, but like..."

I stepped closer, closing the distance he had just created, and lowered my voice to a low whisper.

"Think. Think about what happens when I get to stay home all day," I purred, letting one hand rest on his chest to trace idle patterns over his shirt. "I need the flexibility to build that freelance graphic design consultancy we talked about. But while I am doing that, we get to have this all day, every day. No more desk lunches. Just me waiting for you with a full fridge and an empty stomach."

He smirked, his eyes narrowing with a mix of lust and skepticism. "Bullshit," he scoffed. "You wouldn't wait for me. You sure as hell wouldn't endure an empty stomach if I left you alone in that apartment with a full pantry at your disposal." There he was - the man I was falling in love with. He placed his hands on my hips, his thumbs digging in slightly. "You'd grow so fucking fat, you know that? You'd be grazing all day."

His words ignited me all over again, sending a visible shiver through me despite the stuffy warmth of the supply closet. I did not pull away. I leaned into the touch, pressing my soft middle against him with a slow, lazy smile.

"Holy fuck, yes," I murmured. "I would not waste a single second. I would wake you up with the smell of pancakes and syrup. I would meet you at the door with my mouth full and a box of pizza in my hand. I will put this belly to the test."

He smiled, looking down at me with that familiar heat, but then his brow furrowed. "It's hot, Chloe, I'll give you that. But are you sure we can actually pull this off? Having you, well... essentially jobless? The economy isn't exactly thriving right now. If HR catches wind that you're getting paid to sit on the couch and expand, that's fraud. What if they audit your output? Mm?"

The mention of logistics was *such* a turn-off.

I rolled my eyes and pulled back, planting my hands on my hips again with a fond exasperation.

"Honestly, use that big brain of yours for something other than thinking about my ass," I scolded gently. "I have already handled it. It is amazing how much work a secretary like me can delegate when people assume you are just sweet and overwhelmed. Mika is surprisingly eager to help organize vendor invoices, and the marketing team absolutely chomped at the bit to take over the weekly report collation. For months I have been slowly giving my tasks away, playing the damsel in distress."

I took a step closer, lowering my voice again. "Listen. Fine. That's not a long-term plan. I get that. I do. But that's exactly why for the last two weeks, I have been employing an AI. I have been feeding it everything that is left of my job. So I will clock in from home, the AI will do the filing, and I will focus on my consultancy."

He stared at me for a moment, mouth slightly open, before letting out a short, impressed laugh. "You... got ChatGPT to do it?" He shook his head, looking at me with a new kind of appreciation. "Alright. Fine. It's not like those working in that department can tell the difference in quality. I'll pull the strings, babe. I'll talk to HR." He leaned in, kissing me hard on the mouth before pulling back, his hands lingering on my waist. "Let's get you out of those tight clothes. Let's get you well-fed from the comfort of our couch. I'm fine with either."

"Now that is what I wanted to hear," I breathed against his lips. "You will not regret it."

I gave his chest a final pat before turning away to head back to my desk. My movements were a little less graceful than usual as I bent forward slightly to reach the doorknob. The dark gray fabric of my pencil skirt pulled taut across the generous swell of my rear, and my soft belly pressed gently against the waistband.

It was just a small swell for now, but I was well on my way to taking care of that.

1 YEAR LATER

I remembered the elevator chiming with a bright, cheerful ding at 9:58 AM - it vibrated right through the headache I had been nursing since I woke up. I stepped out onto the plush gray carpet of the fourth floor, clutching the strap of my oversized tote bag like I was bracing for a physical collision. I had to pause right there in the lobby to catch my breath, pretending to check my phone because the walk from the parking garage had already winded me.

That parking garage used to be such an easy hike for me. I used to park on the fourth level near the skybridge just to get my steps in. Today I circled the ground floor for ten minutes until a spot opened up near the elevator, cursing out a Prius that stole the very first one I saw. I felt irritable and sweaty, a heavy heat building between my thighs while damp frizz clung to my messy bun. This office used to have reliable air conditioning, and supposedly it still did. Looking at the receptionist wearing a thick cardigan gave me the sinking suspicion that the problem was not the thermostat.

I ignored that thought because I simply did not need any more stress on my shoulders.

My first attempt at returning to the building on Friday had been a complete disaster. Management had abruptly canceled all remote contracts and mandated a full return to in-person work.

Our plan had been simple enough on paper.

My feeder and I agreed I would just show up, pad the clock, and do the bare minimum to keep my salary flowing into our joint account. Putting that into practice was proving to be challenging.

I had tried to squeeze into a pair of high-waisted charcoal slacks from Zara, the ones I used to call my power pants back when I cared about things like silhouettes and capsule wardrobes. I hadn't worn them since my smart-working era began. The zipper on those pants had simply given up the ghost in the parking lot, popping with a sound like a gunshot and forcing me to call a distraught Uber back home before I had even swiped my badge.

So I tried to go about it smarter today. I wore a jersey-knit wrap dress I ordered over the weekend with rush shipping, heavily advertised as flowy and forgiving. I had genuinely believed it would hide the worst of the damage. On my new 245-pound frame, forgiving turned out to be false advertising. It felt like shrink wrap. The fabric pulled incredibly tight across my middle, sliding across the deep indentation of my belly button and hugging the sheer bulk of my lower gut. The crossover point at my waist gaped open entirely, leaving the stretched, shiny fabric of my control-top panties exposed for anyone who looked closely enough.

My face flushed hot as a stinging thought occurred to me. Had I genuinely believed I could still pass for normal? A year ago, I didn't have a gut that entered a room three seconds before I did. A year ago, I was worried about whether my blazer matched my shoes, completely unconcerned about whether my ass was going to eat my chair. I could have worn my cardigan to try and cover the gaping fabric at my waist, but putting my arms through the sleeves sounded like an awful lot of work. Letting the dress stretch to its absolute breaking point had been much easier.

The thought that maybe this was all for the best anyways did come to mind, then.

I kept my head down and avoided eye contact as I waddled toward my cubicle. I passed the bathrooms and the breakroom, the scent of industrial cleaner warring with the phantom smell of stale donuts. I finally reached my new desk and grimaced a second time at the sight of it. It looked exactly the same as the one I had left, featuring the same beige laminate and the same sage-green fabric walls. It had been bought in bulk, completely devoid of personality. I had worked in one of these for about three years, feeling my soul calcify before I manufactured my grand escape to the living room couch.

I dropped my tote bag onto the floor, wincing at the heavy, metallic clunk of glass soda bottles clinking together, poorly muffled by the scarf I threw on top of them to look professional. With a long, shuddering sigh, I lowered myself into the office chair.

The cheap plastic frame dug into the soft flesh of my hips, and the gas cylinder hit its bottom range with a final, insulting thud. It reminded me that this place was not built for work and not comfort. Sure, the chair was ergonomic, but it was just not the kind of comfort I had gotten used to. The thought alone was exhausting.

A low, wet rumble echoed from my midsection, prompting me to press a hand against the solid mass of my belly to quieten it. The pressure shifted the contents around, doing little to silence the deep, gurgling complaint. I could feel my stomach spilling over my waistband and settling heavily into my lap. A wave of heat washed over me.

My gaze drifted to the tote bag on the floor. Inside, nestled beside my laptop charger and a pack of cherry lip gloss, were two full-sugar glass bottles of Dr. Pepper and a Tupperware container holding the leftover half of a meat lover's pizza from the night before. Cold pizza for breakfast was perfectly acceptable in my book. Right now, the idea of chewing felt like entirely too much effort. I wanted liquid calories. I wanted sugar.

But I couldn't do it yet. Could I? It was barely ten o'clock, and people were trickling in, their low murmurs and clicking keyboards starting to fill the open-plan office.

My screen flashed with an automated reminder containing a cold corporate directive regarding Brenda in Accounting and a redundancy protocol. I stared at the dense paragraphs of corporate jargon, finding the words blurring together into an incomprehensible soup. A year ago, a task like that would have sent a jolt of anxiety through me. I liked Brenda. She brought in peppermint bark every Christmas and had pictures of her rescue greyhounds on her desk. I would have agonized over it, felt a pang of sympathy, and carefully processed the paperwork.

Now I could not even muster the brainpower to parse what the email was asking me to do. I convinced myself that letting the system break down was a calculated move on my part. I decided that letting HR notice my negligence was a brilliant strategy. It was going to work out in my favour.

And it did.

Looking back though, I was likely just feeling too sluggish to move my mouse. Sure, the AI could've done it for me, but I had to go about prompting it right, to make sure it was understanding this task, maybe even search for examples, then turn on another agent to do it, then set another agent to overlook that one...

My stomach gave another low gurgle, presenting a much more pressing concern. I minimized the window. Brenda's paperwork would sit there and rot, and it was going to be my fault. I was too busy holding in a fart and thinking about how stuffed I had gotten myself over the weekend, not once leaving the bed except to pee.

The login prompt stared back at me, mocking me with its blinking cursor. What was I even supposed to work on? It had been a full year since I had needed to do anything but ask an AI to do work for me while I laid back and ordered takeout.

My fingers fumbled with the clasp of my bra under the thick jersey knit. I used to buy these cute, lacy little things from Victoria's Secret. Now I was wrestling with a beige suspension bridge I bought off a targeted Instagram ad for plus-size fashion. I dug my thumb under the band, trying to wrench it down from where it was digging a painful red line into my ribcage, right below the burgeoning swell of my bust. I got it settled into a slightly less agonizing position, let out a shaky breath, and rested my hands on my lap.

I straightened up as best I could, my spine protesting the movement. I glanced around the office from my relatively private corner, paranoia prickling at my neck, but no one was looking. Everyone was engrossed in their own Tuesday morning misery. The fear remained sharp and thrilling anyway. The fear of a seam popping. The fear of someone seeing the true extent of what I had done to myself. I cannot deny that part of me reveled in this. A part of me wanted them to see just how much I had let myself go. I should have been ashamed of myself, but the damp warmth in my panties told a different story. I wanted to be caught being this massive.

The squeak of approaching sneakers on the linoleum tile made me flinch, yanking my hands away from my stomach as if I had been burned. I quickly slapped them onto the keyboard, typing a gibberish string of letters. A shadow fell over my desk, smelling of clean laundry detergent and expensive coffee.

"Hey! Um... Chloe, was it? Welcome back."

I recognized the voice before I even looked up. Mark from marketing. I remembered him from the Christmas party two years ago when I was wearing a red sequin dress in a size six. He was one of those guys who was handsome in a bland, corporate way, equipped with perfect teeth and a jawline that could cut glass. He was not my type.

I plastered a tight smile on my face and tilted my head up, feeling the soft roll of my double chin fold against my neck. My glasses slid down my nose, slick with sweat.

"Mark. Hi," I managed, my voice sounding a little thin. I cleared my throat. "Thanks."

He leaned his hip against the partition of my cubicle, holding a steaming paper cup emblazoned with the logo of some artisanal coffee shop I couldn't afford. His eyes scanned my face, then dropped just for a fraction of a second to the expanse of my chest where the dress was pulling taut.

I felt my face heat up. He probably thought I was some unprofessional slob. I watched him walk back to his desk, pausing to water the sad-looking fern on his filing cabinet. I didn't

think guys like Mark even noticed plants. It was surprisingly sweet. A pang of second-hand shame for how I was judging him pricked at me. Then my stomach rumbled again, loud and impatient, and the thought of the plant, Mark, and everything else that wasn't edible just dissolved.

I could not blame him for staring. I now had a proper rack on me, boasting a very proud jump from a low C to a DD. Today had also been when I first noticed a slight back pain as the front of me had just exploded forward in so little time.

I felt it vividly as I decided to pay a visit to the breakroom after an hour of doing absolutely nothing at my desk.

It was a mostly instinctual reaction. Like a cow heading to its trough.

I hauled my body upright, a quiet grunt escaping my lips in the relative lull of the workspace. For a moment, I just stood there, swaying slightly as I adjusted to the sensation of being on my two feet again. The full, heavy reality of my gut settled downward, a dense, pendulous weight pulling me forward. I instinctively arched my back to counterbalance the load, which only served to make my stomach protrude even more.

The walk to the breakroom felt longer than it ever had before. Each step sent a jiggling through my midsection, a subtle, fleshy ripple that I was acutely aware of. I pushed through the swinging door and was immediately hit by the smell of burnt coffee and the sweet, cloying scent of vanilla syrup.

The stale aroma of burnt coffee grounds filled the small room, a scent I once found comforting but now registered as simply bitter and acrid. It reminded me of early mornings and empty stomachs, a combination I hadn't experienced in over a year. I used to be a coffee snob. I bought single-origin beans from Ethiopia that tasted like blueberries and dirt, telling people I drank it black because I liked the profile. What an insufferable little thing I was.

I neared the industrial coffeemaker either way because a carton of my usual creamer was sitting right there. Chugging down coffee creamer was not the healthiest thing in the world, but I reckoned my body had gotten used to being treated like trash by that point. My fear of losing weight had been a little irrational lately, making me act entirely on autopilot.

I wasn't thinking things through, nor was I making sure I was alone in the room.

I had just cracked open the cardboard flap on the large carton of liquid creamer, the sweet, milky-vanilla scent rising to greet me like an old friend, when the other person in the room spoke. I flinched, nearly dropping the carton. My head snapped up, my eyes widening behind my glasses.

"Oh my god, Chloe? Is that you?"

It was Jessica. She was perched on one of the uncomfortable-looking stackable chairs near the window, cradling a mug of her own fancy latte. She was one of those women who looked like she had stepped out of a yoga pants ad, all lean limbs and a neat, blonde ponytail. We had been friendly enough, though I wouldn't have called her a friend. She had always been overly chipper, and a year away from the office hadn't changed that. Jessica probably ran marathons on weekends. I was much more at ease watching television marathons from the comfort of my apartment.

My mouth opened, but no words came out. I was caught red-handed. I was holding a gallon jug of pure, liquid sugar, my gut straining heavily against my outfit like I was smuggling a medicine ball. My face bloomed with color, a deep, blotchy crimson that I knew was creeping down my neck.

"Cravings, huh? You poor thing!" Jessica's face broke into a wide grin. She set her mug down with a delicate clink and leaned forward, lowering her voice as if sharing a delicious secret. Her eyes, bright and genuinely curious, flickered down to my stomach and then back up to my mortified face.

"Wow," she breathed. "Okay, wow. I mean, I heard a rumor you were back, but nobody said... well. Congratulations!"

I froze, my knuckles turning white around the plastic handle of the creamer jug. My brain stuttered as it tried to process her words. She thought I was pregnant. My confusion must have been plain on my face, because she just giggled, a light, airy sound that grated on my nerves.

"Don't play coy!" she insisted, waving a dismissive hand. "When are you due? You're absolutely glowing! And that's a beautiful dress, very flattering for the... you know." She gestured vaguely at my midsection, her expression full of sisterly approval, before actually going in and rubbing the top of it, ending the movement with a light pat.

For a second, I panicked. Tell her the truth? Tell her I was just incredibly, undeniably fat?

Then a wicked thrill shot through me. I didn't want to hide it. I wanted to make a spectacle of myself. If I was going to test the boundaries of this company, I might as well start spreading ridiculous lies about my condition.

"Ah, um... aww...? Thank you, Jessica," I cooed, a syrupy-sweetness coating my voice that I didn't recognize. "Yeah. Yeah! It's a whole journey, let me tell you. A real rollercoaster." I watched her eyes sparkle with genuine delight for me.

I brought the carton of creamer up to my lips again, tilting my head back. I took a long, deliberate swallow, not even bothering to pretend I wasn't enjoying it. The sickly-sweet, viscous liquid coated my tongue and slid down my throat, thick and cool. I lowered the carton with a soft, satisfied sigh, wiping a stray droplet of white from the corner of my mouth with my thumb. I made sure she saw it.

"Ugh, I needed that. You won't believe the kind of cravings this little guy gets in me. But it's just a few weeks left now," I announced, my voice sounding tired from the heaviness in my gut, full of false cheerfulness. "We're in the home stretch. The doctor says I'm measuring very, um... very large for my timeline, but everyone's different, right?"

Her pat on my stomach lingered in my mind. Part of me was enjoying this a little too much. She was validating the size I had worked so hard for, even if she had the context completely wrong.

"And... um... yeah, and it's been so active, too." My stomach gurgled a little. "Oh! Hear that?" I looked straight into her eyes. "He just kicked."

"Here," I said softly, taking a hesitant step closer. My hips brushed against the edge of the table, and I steadied myself with one hand on its surface. "Do you... do you wanna feel? He just did it again. I swear, it's like he's practicing soccer in there. Go on, don't be shy."

I held my breath, my heart hammering against my ribs.

"Really? Oh my gosh, yes!" she whispered, her voice trembling with excitement.

She shifted on the hard plastic chair, leaning in close. Her hand, slender and cool with a silver ring on her index finger, hovered over my belly for a second before making contact. I tensed as her palm pressed flat against my outfit, right over the deepest, fullest part of my stomach. Her touch was gentle and questioning, and I could feel the warmth of her skin through the fabric. Going along with it felt incredibly good. Maybe my feeder did have a point when he occasionally called me breedable.

No kicks for her, unfortunately. Just the churning of sugar and fat.

The thought of it being believable made me dizzy.

By noon, I had migrated back to my desk, though migrated felt too active a word for the slow, heavy waddle I had adopted. My lunch break had been extremely productive. I had ordered from that Italian place three blocks over, the one with the alfredo sauce that could double as spackle.

I remembered going there on a date with my boyfriend back when we first started seeing each other. I had ordered a Caesar salad with dressing on the side and pretended to be full halfway through. I had picked at the croutons and talked about my yoga practice. He had been so polite, so good at feigning being impressed by my great discipline. Luckily, that charade didn't last long. Today I ordered a large fettuccine alfredo with extra chicken, two breadstick baskets, and a slice of tiramisu that I inhaled before even touching the pasta. I wondered if the delivery guy recognized me, or if he just saw another faceless office drone eating her feelings.

My Tupperware sat empty on my desk beside a grease-stained paper bag. I leaned back, my arms hanging limp at my sides. A sleepy food coma crept through my limbs, turning my blood to syrup. My stomach was visibly distended now, completely obliterating any remaining drape my dress had left. Every bite had been a struggle, forcing me to scoot my chair back inch by inch to accommodate the expansion against the desk.

I hiccupped, a small sound that made my whole torso jerk.

The hiccup jostled something loose. Before I could even attempt to stifle it, a deep, rumbling belch rolled up from my distended gut and out of my mouth. It was loud, far too loud for an office. My eyes flew open wide, my hand flying to my mouth in a performative gesture of shock that fooled no one, least of all myself.

"Oh my god," I whispered behind my palm, my cheeks flaming. Even as the heat of embarrassment flooded my face, I could feel that familiar tug low in my belly. I squeezed my thighs together under the desk. I wasn't trying to hide it anymore. I wanted them to hear me acting like a pig.

I glanced around, pretending to be paranoid. A few heads had lifted from nearby cubicles. I caught the back of someone's head turning away quickly. They had absolutely heard me. The acoustics in this place were terrible.

My stomach gurgled again, processing the heavy load of cream and carbs I had dumped into it. I could feel the weight of the meal sitting in my gut like a stone, a warm, heavy

presence that made me want to slump further into my chair and never move again. My eyelids drooped.

"Mmph... 'scuse me."

I let my head loll back against the chair, my eyes half-closed. The heavy, sluggish fullness was comforting, but the context was entirely wrong. At home, this would be the part where I would sprawl across my bed, my belly spilling out freely while he rubbed slow circles into it. I would let out burp after burp without a second thought, groaning and demanding more food between them like the greedy thing I had become. I would have my hand down my panties within minutes, unable to resist the way my taut, swollen gut made me feel.

Here, I had to sit up. I had to keep my legs closed. I had to pretend I wasn't fighting the urge to slip my own hand beneath the desk and press hard against my strained clothing just to feel how stretched I had made myself.

A small, frustrated whimper escaped my throat.

The quiet ache in my stomach started around two o'clock.

The alfredo remained a heavy, leaden ball in my gut that left absolutely no room for actual hunger, yet my mouth still desperately craved the sharp crackle of a chip bag. The satisfying snap of a chocolate bar. The, the... ah, well. Anything would've sufficed then.

I was getting incredibly bored.

The first trip to the vending machine was a negotiation. I told myself I just needed a little sugar to get through the afternoon. A bag of M&Ms and a packet of cheese crackers later, I waddled back to my desk, telling myself that was it.

By the third trip, an hour later, there was no negotiation. There was only a dull, magnetic pull that drew me from my chair. I found myself standing in front of the glowing panel and feeding crumpled dollar bills into the slot with trembling fingers. I selected a Snickers bar, a small bag of Doritos, and a plastic bottle of orange soda to wash it all down. I did not even remember the heavy, chafing waddle to get there. My finger hovered over the keypad, picking item after item, even though I was already feeling pretty bloated. I guess the thought of not being completely, overwhelmingly full was somehow more tiring than the thought of eating more.

It was infuriating, for I used to be much better at pretending. A year of unstructured access to a fully stocked pantry had rewired me, and nothing made it so obvious as walking down the hall, fishing for change, then actually bending over to retrieve a Snickers bar from the bottom slot.

A simple enough task, right?

I had to plant my feet wide just to accommodate my stomach. As I dipped down, the thin jersey dress hitched recklessly high up my heavy thighs - I could feel the fabric pulling painfully tight across the massive, soft spread of my ass, stretching so much I half expected the center seam to give way right there in the breakroom. My strained panties had to have been on display to the entire room, and while the thought was making me flush, I hated it. Hated having to hoist my heavy backside upright and actually work for my gluttony instead of just having food handed to me on the couch.

By three o'clock, I had lost count of how many times I had made the journey and suffered through the most exercise I had had the whole month. Each time, I told myself it would be the last. Each time, within forty minutes, the urge would creep back.

My trash drawer was filling up with wrappers and empty chip bags. I kept pushing them deeper, burying the evidence beneath old sticky notes and a dead pen. I felt like a raccoon hoarding garbage, but I couldn't stop.

By four-thirty, the evidence had become impossible to hide. My trash drawer wouldn't even close properly, and I remember the corner of a chip bag poking out defiantly. I could feel the uncomfortable pressure against the desk's edge every time I shifted.

The little typing I had been doing had also slowed to a crawl. The AI agent I had set up to handle most of my actual work had sent me three notifications about completed tasks, but I hadn't even bothered to check them. The tasks were done, and I was intentionally letting the final steps languish. I got the sense the AI was getting frustrated by my lack of initiative on the clock. But that had been the whole point of today.

I kept finding myself snoozing off, my brain foggy with sugar and carbs, shutting down for the day.

My chin dipped toward my chest, my glasses sliding down my nose. I jerked awake with a small snort, my hand flying to my mouth. My belly sloshed heavily beneath my palm, the contents of the day's grazing shifting. The motion sent another wave of drowsiness through me, warm and insistent.

And the office had grown quieter, too. I had lost track of the time by that point, but people were trickling out, their end-of-day rituals marking the slow exodus. I could hear the

distant sound of elevators chiming, of chairs being pushed back, of conversations fading into the hallway.

I told myself I should leave. I told myself I should gather my things and make the commute home, where I could properly collapse.

I simply did not. My body felt leaden, anchored to the chair by the sheer weight in my gut. My eyelids drooped again, heavier this time. The fluorescent lights buzzed overhead, a dull drone that blended with the soft gurgles of my stomach. I let my head fall back, my mouth falling open slightly. Just a few minutes, I told myself.

Just a small rest to digest the vending machine.

The next thing I knew, a warm hand was on my shoulder, gently shaking me.

"Chloe? Hey, sleepyhead."

I startled awake with a gasp, my whole body jerking in the chair. The sudden movement sent my belly jiggling, and I let out an undignified squeak as I tried to sit up straighter. My glasses had slipped completely off my face and were dangling from one ear. I blinked rapidly, disoriented, the fuzzy shape before me slowly sharpening into my feeder's familiar features.

He was crouched beside my desk, his face close to mine, an amused smile playing at his lips. He was wearing his tailored charcoal suit, looking every inch the responsible corporate manager who usually resided safely up on the eighth floor. His eyes flickered down to my exposed stomach and then back up to my flushed face. The shame melted instantly into relief. He was here, and he would fix it.

"Long day, dear?" he asked softly, his thumb brushing a stray hair from my cheek.

Before I could answer, another deep, rumbling belch tasting strongly of artificial chocolate and orange soda worked its way up my throat. I didn't even bother covering my mouth this time. I just moaned, a pathetic, drawn-out sound, and slumped sideways against his jacket. I could feel his face reddening. Were there still people in the office? A couple of minutes later, and I would have confirmed my suspicions on the matter.

"This is all your fault," I mumbled into his lapel.

I tried to push myself up, but my arms felt like noodles. My stomach was a dead weight pinning me to the chair. He chuckled, a low, soothing sound that only made me more irritated. He put his hands on my arms, helping me sit upright properly.

"My fault?" he murmured, his voice full of fond amusement. "How is it my fault I get a very concerned text from Martin in logistics asking if I needed to update my insurance to a family plan?" He grinned. "God, I just had to come down here and see the damage for myself."

"Hey, it was your decision to let me come back here," I whined, my voice cracking with exhaustion and frustration as I completely ignored his teasing. "I am not built for this anymore. Look at me."

I gestured vaguely at my own body, a grand, dramatic sweep of my hand that ended with me weakly patting the taut bulge straining against my dress. "I have been here for eight hours and I have already gained... what? Five pounds?" I continued, squinting at him through sleep-induced tears. "I can feel it."

He laughed a real laugh this time and started trying to maneuver me out of the chair.

"Your making me look like a bad guy! I thought it had been our decision, not mine. Come on, you big drama queen. Let's get you home."

"Nooo," I moaned, but I let him pull me to my feet. My knees buckled for a second as my full weight settled, and I stumbled against him, my forehead thumping lightly against his chest. "I popped a button on my cardigan yesterday. Did I tell you that? Right in the middle of a Zoom call. Do you know how hard it is to hold a sweater closed with just your elbow?"

He just nodded, wrapping a steady arm around my waist.

He practically carried me out of the office, my arm draped over his shoulders as my feet shuffled along the carpet. The few remaining employees we passed gave us strange looks, but I was too exhausted and overstuffed to register their judgment. All I could focus on was the blissful promise of my car's passenger seat and my bed.

We stepped into the empty elevator, the doors sliding shut with a soft whoosh that sealed us in our own little world. As soon as the car began its descent, he shifted, turning to face me fully. His arm slid down my back, his hand flattening against the underside of my huge, heavy belly. His fingers spread wide to cover as much ground as they could, lifting just slightly to take the weight off my screaming lower back.

I sighed, melting against him, my head falling onto his shoulder.

"You know," he murmured, his voice a low rumble against my ear. His thumb stroked slow, firm circles into the sensitive skin above my navel. "He was genuinely worried. The guy who sent the text, I mean. Can you blame him, though? Seeing you all flustered because you had to be... normal again is quite the sight. Watching you stuffed into clothes that barely fit while your belly swells with cheap snacks. Makes me wonder how you're going to survive back in the office."

I leaned in, and we shared a kiss.

"Admit it," I whispered against his lips. "You had your fun watching me squirm."

"Oh, I'm having fun alright," he replied, his eyes dropping to my midsection again with that familiar, hungry look. "But you really are a mess. We are going to have to get you back on a real schedule tomorrow so you can at least pretend to function."

I shook my head slowly, rubbing my cheek against his lapel. I knew what I was about to do was going to send his meticulous, spreadsheet-loving brain into a tailspin.

"I am not going back on a schedule," I confessed, my voice barely above a whisper. "I am not doing any of it. I sobered up the second I walked into the lobby this morning. Come on. Don't look at me like that, you know what I'm talking about. I am completely broken for the corporate world. And you know what? I made sure everyone out there got to know it today."

I felt his hand stall on my stomach. He pulled back just enough to look at my face. The playful teasing vanished, replaced by what I knew to be a sudden, sharp realization. He was the guy who tracked our household budget down to the cent... but he was also the man who had reviewed my fake freelance business plan and approved the transition because it made financial sense at the time. He must have known it had been utter bullshit from the second he laid his eyes on it. He was too smart not to.

"...no. What?" he said slowly, his voice dropping an octave. "You tanked this on purpose? Chloe, you can't just... Chloe. Sure, we share an apartment, we can pay for that with my salary, but like... don't you want to have savings? Or something like that? We talked about this. You were supposed to just put your head down and collect the checks until we figured something else out. You told me you could do it. You promised?"

His frustration was genuine. Was there some panic there, too? I could see the cold feet setting in over the terrifying prospect of becoming the sole provider for a girl whose grocery bill was rapidly outpacing our car payments. He expected me to just pad the clock and keep up the facade. It was the reaction a normal boyfriend would have upon discovering his partner was actively sabotaging their dual-income safety net so she could lay around in her underwear eating cold pizza.

We'd been through this before. I knew how to handle his rational side.

I pressed my heavy, ruined body closer to him. I let my stomach gurgle softly beneath his palm, deliberately pushing my expansive waistline against his tailored slacks. I looked up at him through my messy bangs, completely surrendering to the sloppy, demanding creature I had become.

"A hundred more pounds," I blurted out softly. "I want to gain a hundred more. I want to be so big that next time I have to come into this stupid office, I won't even fit in the elevator. I will get stuck in the doorway and they will have to call the fire department to grease me out. But we both know there won't be a next time beyond this week, don't we?"

I watched his eyes track a fresh grease stain near the neckline of my dress before dropping to the strained fabric clinging to my heavy thighs. The conflict in his expression lasted for three glorious seconds before the tension completely drained out of his posture. His whole facade melted away as his fingers dug possessively into my soft flesh.

"You played me," he murmured, a slow smile spreading across his face. "You had no intention of coming back here. And here I thought I had gotten you to see reason. For once in your life."

"Are you mad?" I whispered.

He paused for a moment, allowing himself a wide grin. "Oh, I'm livid. But now I am thinking about our grocery bill," he replied, leaning in to kiss my forehead. "And about exactly how wide we are going to have to make the doorways in the house to accommodate my new full-time pet."

The elevator dinged, the bright sound announcing our arrival on the ground floor. The doors slid open, revealing the empty lobby.

"You want to rot all day on the couch?" He tightened his grip on me, his arm a firm band around my waist as he guided me out. "Fine. Okay."

My steps were still clumsy and slow, but I did not argue. I just leaned my full weight against him, letting him bear the burden of my day. The shame of the office was already fading, replaced by the eager, greedy anticipation of returning to my real life where I didn't have to pretend anymore.

"Let's see where that gets you."

As if I ever really tried that day.