

Temporary Insanity

Bisbee's bottom itched hot with carpet burns, and her shoulder was scratched pink, courtesy of the keyboard tray. She was happily rife with bruises and bites and, in fact, dressed more conservatively now than before the misadventures began, lest she spike the curiosity of Human Resources. But her flushed cheeks and steam-curled hair, golden-red like the copper town for which she was named, were hard to hide.

Things started innocently enough. They were just two misplaced journalists who the unfortunate job market had driven corporate. After too many days of compartmentalized copywriting, Bisbee wrote a fabulous, and not repeatable, filthy joke on Babbitt's proofing sheet. This led to a flurry of dirty little post-it notes. Sexy suggestions of things only English majors would do to each other, with footnotes on how positions may vary according to AP or Chicago style.

Soon those long grey days were broken by stolen moments before and after, and a few times during, office hours. Bisbee lived for the pressure of the water cooler against the small of her back, the white tap releasing a stream down her thigh. The acrid taste of company coffee on his mouth. The department-morale meetings during which she slipped off her shoe under the conference table, trying to keep poker-faced as her bare toes worked up his chair.

It wasn't just last night under her desk—or the elevator, bathroom stall, or electrical room. She knew Babbitt had true affection. He brought a mirror to entertain her lonely Beta fish, Blue. Among salacious text messages, there were sweet ones like *you're the bee's knees*. And, he took a light hand editing her, writing *please* and *sorry* in the margins.

The best was yet to come. The two were booked for a copy editing conference in Vegas. Bisbee dreamed of the desert and its neon signs bright with electric sex. She craved

nights that went long past five, free cocktails to lower her few last inhibitions, and finally getting to use a bed.

Tuesday, over Vietnamese takeout, Babbitt confided, “I called the hotel and made arrangements for adjoining rooms...”

Bisbee was so excited, she stabbed him with a plastic fork. The tines broke against his khaki-clad muscled thigh, but she still kissed the spot in apology later.

Though Bisbee generally kept a blank and unsentimental workspace, the navy envelope containing her plane ticket was T-pinned lovingly right above the fishbowl. It was a company function, after all, and Bisbee was a valued employee. Her manager even hired a temp to cover the workload during her absence.

Bisbee had two days to train the temp. From day one, they were enemies. Her name was Iskra or Ilonka or something else foreign. Bisbee refused to learn it, really because the temp was younger, prettier, and skinnier. Every seat swiveled when the temp walked past. She received several invitations to Friday’s potluck, cajoled that she didn’t even have to bring anything.

The temp leaned forward to ask something, and her skirt hitched up showing a slice of black garter. It reminded Bisbee of the stockings she purchased specially for the hotel, and it made her green that she wasn’t the type to wear them every day. Bisbee took in the temp’s cat-shaped eyes, full bottom lip, breasts high and tight under a v-neck. She blew off the request to borrow her style guide. “And don’t feed my fish while I’m gone,” Bisbee warned.

The next day, she resolved friendliness. It was Bisbee and Babbitt who were going to Vegas after all, and envy was so unbecoming. She came in at 7:46, hoping to rendezvous between the reams of white and canary yellow. She was pleased to see steaming coffee on Babbitt’s desk.

Bisbee tried the door to the copy room, but it wouldn't budge. She could hear the whine of the archaic printer warming up. Several thumps followed. She knocked.

"Babbitt?" she whispered. "Hey, Babbitt-Rabbit, are you in there?" The door was still locked.

Returning to her cubicle, Bisbee shifted from confusion to panic. A fresh cup of coffee sat on the temp's desk, too.

Bisbee did the only thing she knew to do in times of crisis. She cleaned. She pulled the guts out of the latest edition of Webster's, and put it and every other living bit of paper in the confidential shredding bin. She tossed her mug and fern. She carried Blue over to the coffee island and turned on the tap. The hapless Beta slid into the drain, and Bisbee pulsed the disposal. She was wiping down her desk when the temp resurfaced. The girl adjusted her skirt and smiled.

"Hey, what happened to your fish?"

"He died." Bisbee betrayed no emotion. They both looked at the empty spot where the little bowl once sat.

"Hey, where's my ticket?" Bisbee spat at the temp. "It was right here!"

"What ticket?"

"Oh come on," shouted Bisbee. "You been here 24 hours and you've christened the copy machine and taken my trip to Vegas!"

Bisbee reached over the divider and pulled the girl's shiny black hair—hard.

The temp shrieked. Babbitt ran down the aisle. “What the hell...?”

“My ticket,” she repeated.

“Oh for God’s sake,” said Babbitt, “I have it right here. I was just checking seat assignments to see if we were together.” He regarded the empty cubicle and shook his head. “We are.”

Bisbee regarded Babbitt. He had left his pen uncapped and red stain bloomed on his pocket. He looked like any and every other guy in the office in a blue oxford and khakis. She surveyed the grey-blue maze of cubicles, took the navy envelope, tore off the top ticket, and left.

There are better boxes to be had. An airplane seat, a lavatory, a hotel room, each square self-contained. There is a place for every tiny coffeepot and cup, a precision and beauty to the arrangement of single-serving soap. And there are banks of slot machines, endless glistening rows making up bright new cubicle farms.