One

Assistant Needed!

International Men Magazine.

Mon-Fri 9-7. Some overtime required. No experience required. On the job training available after hiring. Negotiable pay. Excellent benefits! Background check will be performed. Professional wear. Call to set up interview 212-555-8128.

I called the moment I saw the ad in the newspaper, while sitting in the park eating a hotdog from a sketchy street side cart. I had been looking for a job for a month now and the reality of being homeless was creeping up on with faster than I expected.

I've only been living in New York for 6 months and was working as a nanny until the wife accused me of flirting with her husband. She fired me right on the spot without even hearing me out. I was more than prepared to blurt out that her husband was actually sleeping with the house keeper that showed up at 10am on the dot, just in time for him to come home for some mid-morning delight. Spanish s*x screams and loud grunting would spill down from the master bedroom as I buckled baby Emily in her stroller to go to the park. Hell, if I'd known I'd get fired without a chance, I would have surely had my fill of the man. But honestly, I would never do such a thing. However, it doesn't mean I haven't thought about it.

After booking my interview, I hurried home to my rundown apartment that had been broken into twice. Nothing was ever stolen and that was only because the burglar most likely realized that I have nothing of value. A full size bed doubled as a couch and dining table in the middle of the living room. My clothes, still in suit cases, because I'm too afraid to put them in the closet where there's a dangerous amount of mold. When I moved into the s**t hole, I purchased 3 cans of bug spray to fumigate the place, which probably put me in danger of some sort of chemically induced cancer when I'm 40. I'd like to think I got this place for a steal, but that would be a lie. The old pervert landlord took one look at my breasts and cut the price down by $300 when it reality, this place wasn't worth a dime.

Living like a character from Rent, I never planned on falling into this situated. Coming from Mobile, Alabama, I thought moving here would open up doors to a better life. New York was supposed to be my ticket to being a writer, but efforts fell through when responsibilities came first. It didn't really matter though. When I arrived in the big city, writer's block came with me.

Sitting on the floor, I rummage through my clothes, searching for whatever exhibited a sense of professionalism. I mean how professional do I have to be to make copies and make coffee for business men who would never learn my name? I've seen International Men Magazine on a cart and I must say, every other page is plastered with a sexy guy in a suit whose jaw line was chiseled by Jesus himself. If I can look at models all day then working there will be a piece of cake.

After I pair an old black skirt and a wrinkled white button down that was going to remain wrinkled from my lack of an iron, I lay them out on the back of the one chair I have sitting in the corner of the room. I don't have any dress shoes so flats will have to do. Ready for my interview, I make my way to the kitchen and grab a pack of crackers and jar of peanut butter before flopping down on my bed couch table.

Butter knife in hand, I spread peanut butter on the cracker and enjoy my dinner while listening to music on my phone. I haven't updated my music in 5 months because soon after getting here, my laptop died a painful death. And by painful I mean the charger had a shortage and my laptop caught on fire. I panicked and threw it out the window. With the amount of bug spray fumes lingering in this place, I was not about to risk an apartment fire.

After taming my hunger for the night, I chug some water to fill the rest of the empty space. Being broke also means skipping out on buying groceries. Cereal in Alabama is affordable. The price of cereal in New York is insulting. So I stocked up on cheap peanut butter and crackers to last me a few days. I really hope I get this job.

I wake up around 7am to the sound of someone cursing from down below in the streets. I would have been able to sleep longer if I had closed the window, but the air doesn't work and I get hot when I sleep. Rolling out of my bed couch table, I shuffle to the bathroom and take a quick shower.

I only allow myself to wash my hair twice a week to preserve shampoo and conditioner. If I run out then I'll be forced to use dish detergent which will have my already messy horribly dyed red hair even worse. As for the rest of my body, I will spend my last penny on soap and lotion. People can call me poor, but they will never call me dirty.

When I get dressed, I leave my hair down to air dry, hoping my wavy strands don't frizz up. I didn't completely feel comfortable with the way I look, but I don't have a choice. The struggle is all too real. I just hope whoever I'm interviewing with looks past my pathetic state to give me a chance. If I don't get this job then I either hitch hike my broke ass back to Alabama or find some church steps to sleep on. And if all else fails, I'll sleep with the grit landlord and ignore his pot belly and beer breath. On second thought, those church steps don't seem all too bad.

Locking up my apartment, though it doesn't do a darn thing to stop burglars, I make my way to the bus stop. My interview isn't till 9:30 and it is only 7:45, but I need the extra time to make the walk to catch the bus. As people pass me, I feel invisible. Everyone is talking on phones or to other people as I make my way between them like a small ghost in this large world.

As much as I want to be noticed, I don't want to be noticed like this. People look down on folks like me. They would say that I'm am my own downfall and that I put myself in this situation. They're right. I blame myself every day for my living situation so that I can beat everyone else to the punch.

After 20 minutes of standing next to an old guy who keeps taking peeks at my ass, the bus comes. I make my way to the back and flop down, putting earbuds in my ear to drown out the chitter chatter.

I get to the building at 9:05 and as I'm walking in, it becomes apparently obvious that I don't belong here. The sound of heels clacking against the floor fills my head as women walk by in tight dresses and expensive shoes while my 5 year old flats squeak as that rubber sole catches the floor. Self-conscious, I reach up and flatten my hair a bit, knowing it's probably a mess. Taking a deep breath, I go to the elevator just as its opening. A group of people rush out, bumping into me as they go their separate ways. Stepping onto the medal box, I hit the 17th floor button that the woman on the phone told me to report to. As I ride up, my palms begin to sweat with anticipation. My tummy rolls and a nervous chill runs through me.

In front of me, a tall old guy turns his head to look at me. His eyes roam over me as if I'm not supposed to be here. I stare at him frowning "Can I help you with something?"

"Not at all." He mumbles turning back around, but in the reflection of the doors, I see him looking at me. It would be so simple to just give him the finger, but the elevator doors open as soon as the thought crosses my mind. Stepping out, I walk through a set of class door and up to a large desk. I look around and everyone looks clean cut and orderly. Everyone is perfectly dressed with perfectly tamed hair. No coffee stains or missing buttons on shirts. It's like everyone was groomed just for this job.

"Can I help you, ma'am?" I turn to the voice behind the desk. "Huh?"

The woman smiles a bit more, revealing her perfectly aligned teeth "I said can I help you with something?"

"Oh, I'm here for a job interview"

"Name?" She asks as she starts typing in her computer.

"Thea Washington"

"Ah yes, here you are." She nods, picking up her phone "Mr. Sawyer, Thea Washington is here for an interview. Should I send her in?" She nods a few times and mumbles a few words before hanging up.

"You can have a seat right over there and Mr. Sawyer will be right with you"

I nod and pace over to the set of chairs sitting in a circle. Taking a seat, I sigh and fiddle with my fingers as I try to get my mind together to answer questions. Reaching in my bag, I pull out a folder with my resume in it.

I look it over as people walk past me, hopefully not staring. In the middle of reading over the paper, a deep rumble erupts in my stomach. The desperate plea from my tummy to eat something. Groaning, I press my hand against my stomach, feeling it growl. I usually never eat breakfast so that I can save money for lunch and dinner. Breakfast isn't all that important to me anyways. I try to wake up around noon so that I won't even have to think about it.

"Miss Washington?" I look up and see a woman standing there looking around. I stay silent for a moment waiting for her to notice me and when she doesn't, I stand "Right here"

"Oh, I didn't see you sitting there" Obviously. A high pitch laugh escapes the woman as she waits for me to walk to her.

She leads me down a long hall with blown up pictures of the magazine covers hanging on the walls. I take a second to eye each one of them, each sexy guy posing on the front in designer threads and smoldering model looks. God, where are these models and where can I get one?

The woman stops at the last door and opens it, letting me in. I slip past her and walk into the office. Looking around, I am taken back by how neat everything is. There isn't a single thing out of place. Not a spot of dust or a loose paper on the desk. Everything was stacked and place neatly.

"Have a seat, Miss Washington" A voice sounds from somewhere I can't see. I sit down in the chair in front of a desk and wait. I take the time to scan over the office a few more times, trying to see any imperfection, but there are none.

As I'm about to reach for the underside of the desk to check for dust, a man appears from a room. A body of 6'1 strides towards the desk with light brown hair, perfectly slicked and combed into place. The suit is so tailored that only he would ever be able to wear it and if he gained so much as 10 pounds it would no longer be useful. His skin is clear and clean, lips perfectly shaped. This man deserved to be on the cover of the very magazines sold here. The man is a God. As he sits down, I get a quick glimpse of his crotch, letting my own perverted thoughts do as they please.

When he finally looks up to speak, he pauses and looks at me. "Miss. Washington?"

"Yes" I nod, feeling a ripple of nerves wave over my stomach. His eyes scan over me for a moment, taking it my thrown together look that I'm beginning to feel ashamed of. His stare is judgmental and critical.

"Before we start, I need you to put your hair up please"

"Excuse me?" I frown as he opens his desk. Mr. Sawyer, as the receptionist called him, hands me a jumbo rubber band.

"Your hair, please. Put it in a neat pony tail. It’s quite unruly."

I gaze at the elastic in his fingers before reaching out for it.

"Um, Okay." I mumble as it gather my hair into my hand, finger combing it to ensure neatness.

He watches me intently, expression neutral yet critical. My fingers freeze in my hair for a moment and I almost stop breathing. Obeying his order, I pull my hair up into a neat pony tail. I eye him for approval and he nods, authority oozing from the treads of his expensive suit.

This man is intense without even trying. I wrap the band around my hair until it's almost too tight. I smooth down any loose stands and he nods again.

"Better. Okay let's get started. I didn't require an application because I'd rather ask the questions myself and get a feel of your personality. Do you mind?"

I shake my head and he raises and eyebrow "Oh, no, I don't mind" You can get a feel of me any time.

"Age? Date of birth? Resume?" He asks.

"I'm 23. January 19th." I reach into my folder and pass him my resume. Scanning over it, he frowns and unfrowns a bit "You live across the city?"

"Yes"

"Hmm. Not the best of neighborhoods. How do you get to work?"

"Bus."

Mr. Sawyer peaks up from the paper and eyes me for a moment, clearly making a mental note of something. It makes me wish I could read minds, but I'm sure he is probably thinking what I already know.

"Okay, well your resume is okay. I didn't require an experience, but I'll keep it in my files for contact purposes. Considering you were a nanny, I don't have to question your work ethic, but I want to stress that this job requires a lot. You'll need to be on call whenever you're needed. 9-6 is just office hours. You may be needed for event and meetings after hours or on weekends. As far as your transportation, will you be able to handle the load?"

Biting my lip, I take a deep breath "I don't know, but I will do what I have to in order to be where I need to be. If I have to get here or there an hour or two early then so be it. I really need this job." At the worst moment possible, the rumble in my stomach sounds and I gasp in embarrassment.

"Oh God, I'm so sorry" I say as I rub my stomach, trying to sooth the hunger pains. Mr. Sawyer stares at me, raising an eyebrow.

"Skip breakfast?"

"Something like that" I force a smile, though his face stays firm.

"Well, this interview was just a face to face. I'll have you visit the HR floor to fill out your information for your background check and drug screening. They'll need your banking information for check deposits and you'll need an I.D badge to access the cafeteria and high security floors."

I nod at everything he says, realizing that he is basically saying that I got the job, but his express makes me think that he feels differently. He keeps eyeing me like I have dirt on my face or something. I want to ask him what his problem his, but I don't want to seem rude.

"Do you have any questions?" He asks

"Um, the person I'm working under, what are they like if you don't mind me asking?"

"Ethan, is a piece of work. He likes everything to be perfect. He doesn't stand for mistakes. He can be a bit anal about assignments and deadlines."

Before I can even bite my tongue, I blurt out my first thought "He sounds like an ass"

Mr. Sawyer's eyes widen and he smirks the slightest. "Well, that's one way of describing me."

Fire ignites under my skin and I stop breathing. I just insulted my own boss. Hired and fired in less than 30 minutes. Great f*****g job, Thea. Go pack your crap and head over to the Catholic Church. Their steps looks comfy enough to sleep on.

"I'm so sorry. It just came out. It will never happen again"

Mr. Sawyer stares at me and parts his lips "Can I ask you something, Thea?"

I nod. "Okay"

"Don't get offended, because I'm only asking for business purposes. Do you own proper professional wear? We have a strict dress policy here and pride ourselves on it"

Words don't form for a moment as I hesitate revealing how poor I am.

"No, this is all I have that comes close. I'm sorry. Hopefully with my first pay I can get some things after I pay my rent and stuff" In all actuality, I don't even know how much this job pays. How much can a simple assistant get paid?

"Don't apologize." He says as he picks up the phone "Anna, get in here please"

Seconds later, a natural red head with legs for days, appears in the door way.

"Yes sir"

"Come in and close the door. This is important" Anna comes in and stands next to his desk. She immediately whips out her phone and looks at him. "I'm ready"

Ready for what?

"Okay, this is Thea, she will start working here in two days. In those days, I need you to take her to a salon, take two inches off her hair and correct it, please." He almost cringes at the sight of my horribly dyed hair.

Is it that obvious that dying my hair red from a box that only cost $2 was a huge mistake? And cutting my hair?! Is that really necessary? I look over at Anna and she is typing away in her phone, not the least bit affected by the level on control this man has fuming off of him.

"Take her shopping. Skirts, dress pants, dresses, jackets. Make sure they fit well. She needs proper shoes. Flats and heels. Get her blouses and button downs." As he talks, his eyes scan over me, making note of everything wrong with my appearance.

"Take care of undergarments too. She'll need some jewelry, staple pieces. Get whatever personal grooming items, brushes, hair utensils, rubber bands" His eyes flicker to mine at the mention of the bands.

I sit there and listen to him basically tell Anna to change my whole look. I want to argue against it or tell him off for knit picking every part of me, but I can't blame him. I'm a mess and wouldn't want someone dressed like me to work here either. I just sit there and take it.

"And I'll be making a home visit"

Oh hell nope. "What?! No!" I sit up.

Mr. Sawyer's eyebrow twitches "Excuse me?"

"I'm not comfortable will you visiting where I live. All of this is a bit personal" Anna and Mr. Sawyer stare at me for a moment before Anna, but in.

"You shouldn't take it to heart. He has helped almost every employee that works for him. I hope you don't think all of us just walked in on the first day looking like this. Of course he has never bought us a whole wardrobe with company money" Mumbling the last part, Anna shoots Mr. Sawyer a questioning look, but he doesn't notice because he is watching me.

"I just..." I start, but Mr. Sawyer raises his hand, stopping me.

"Anna I'm done. You can head out. I need to talk to Thea alone" Anna nods and exits, leaving me here with Mr. Control.

God, what boss dictates and mandates a wardrobe. If he doesn't like your shirt, he sends you out to buy another? Control freak much? This man clearly has some underlying issues.

When Anna is gone, He stands up and paces around "I apologize for the snide remark Anna made. She oversteps her boundaries from time to time because she has been here longer than most. I'm not doing this to be rude or mean, Thea. I take my employees very serious. The wellbeing of each person working here is my responsibility and I take the job to heart. I'm not doing this to embarrass you or make you feel less. If anything, I'm trying to build you up. Do you understand?"

He asks as he paces around behind me. Suddenly, his hands land on my shoulders and I freeze. "s****l harassment is against the law, you know?" Though I don't completely mind.

Mr. Sawyer snorts "Don't flatter yourself. Your horrible posture has been bothering me this whole time"

He squeezes my shoulders and pulls them back. Sliding his hand down the middle of my back, he pushes forward, forcing me to undo the small hunch I was sporting. "This feels weird now, but in due time it'll be a habit. Now you're neck"

"What about my neck?" I go to turn my head to look at him, but his hands are already around the back of my neck. He wraps his fingers gently around my throat before sliding his hands up into my lower jaw, making me lift my head and straighten my neck.

"Perfect" He whispers as he corrects my posture.

The sensation of his fingertips on my throat is like cold water to the anger I was feeling moments ago. Does he do this with every woman in here? If so then someone needs to lawyer up. This man is one bad posture away from a lawsuit. When his warm hands leave my skin, I breathe a sigh of relief that I didn't know I was holding in my lungs.

"Better?" He asks and I frown "Uncomfortable."

"Because you're used to sitting all hunched over. This magazine is based on poise and stature. We require the same for employees" Mr. Sawyer takes his seat again.

"Yeah, I've noticed the guys in the magazine. But I have a quick question that hasn't been brought up this whole time"

"Okay, go ahead" He sits back and grips his chin, waiting for me to ask. His brown eyes burn into mine and I nearly shift in my seat, left over feelings from his posture lesson.

"What is your job title?"

"You don't know?" He sits up as I shake my head "No"

"Well, let me introduce myself properly" He stands up and comes around the desk yet again. Holding out his hand, he smirk

"I'm Ethan Sawyer, owner of International Men Magazine"

Gawking at him like a fool, I reach up and shake his hand. Parting my lips, I run my tongue over my bottom and he catches it. His large hand grips my small hand, squeezing firmly, waiting for me to actually speak instead of sitting here like a mute.

"Uh, Hi. I'm going to be your assistant?"

He nods "Yes, and call me Ethan, please. We're going to get really close and I want you to be comfortable. No one else calls me Ethan so think of it as a privilege. Now, let's go down to get lunch."

Hand still in his, he pulls me up to my feet. When I stand, our bodies are a lot closer and his height towers over me. Ethan looks down at me and presses his lips together.

"You will eat proper meals from now on. I will give you a temporary money card to buy yourself dinner and after my home check, tomorrow morning, we'll figure out groceries."

"But, I don't..." God, how does he know?

This man doesn't know me, yet from one stomach growl, he can see my whole financial situation written on my forehead. I guess the panic I feel is sketched into my expression, because Ethan presses his hands down on my shoulders.

"Calm down, Thea. Everything is going to be fine."

"I don't want you taking pity on me. I just really need this job to get on my feet. I don't want any handouts or special treatments, Mr. Sawy....I mean Ethan."

"Thea, don't over think it. The better situation you are in, the better able you are to handle the crap load I'm going to throw at you in two days. I need you well fed and rested. Now I will admit, I don't usually do all of this as far as the new wardrobe and home problems, because most of my staff live comfortably. I usually make suggestions and it's up to the employees to handle it themselves, but it's clear you need a little extra attention and I'm willing to give it. I won't have my assistant going home hungry and without. Understand?"

I nod "Yes"

"Good, now let's go get something to eat, new assistant." If he keeps being this bossy and analytical, I don't know how long I'm going to be his assistant.