

A HEARTBREAKING TALE OF LOVE
AND THE STRENGTH TO MAKE DIFFICULT CHOICES

'Bye Jack

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A short story by **Justine Castellon**



1

Today is my first day as a copywriter at the city's top ad agency. As I stepped off the elevator onto the 16th floor, my pulse pounding a rhythm of anticipation in my ears. The air was thick with the intoxicating scent of fresh paint and ambition.

I looked around. The office was a symphony of clattering keyboards, ringing phones, and hushed whispers. The walls were painted in the colors of creativity, vibrant shades that danced under the soft glow of the overhead lights. One wall was painted orange, while the other side was apple green separating white beams. Each division hung printed samples of the agency's works on canvas. I felt a surge of excitement mixed with a dash of fear. This was it—my new beginning.

I navigated my way through the maze of cubicles, clutching my brand-new iPad like a lifeline. As I rounded a corner, I collided with a solid wall of warmth. I looked up into a pair of intense blue eyes. They belonged to a man cradling two steaming cups of coffee.

"Watch out!" he cried too late, his voice a velvety baritone that sent shivers down my spine. The world slowed as hot liquid splashed over our hands, our shirts, and my brand-new navy blue skirt.

"Oh no, I'm so sorry!" I stammered, mortified. His eyes twinkled with amusement.

"It's alright," he said, shaking off his surprise. He helped steady me and flashed me a disarming smile, the corners of his eyes crinkling. "I

guess we both needed a wake-up call.” Though slightly burnt from our coffee catastrophe, his hands were firm and warm, just like his smile.

“Now, we are really color-coordinated,” I laughed. We both wore cream long-sleeved tops now decorated with coffee stains. We laughed it off, our clothes stained but spirits undeterred. I hope so. “Again, I’m sorry. I have to go; it was my first day today,” I said. Before he could speak, I rushed out of the scene, away from all embarrassment. I looked back and saw him as he walked away. I couldn’t help but watch him, a strange feeling stirring inside me.



Later that day, I discovered his name was Jack, the lead photographer for the agency. Amidst the chaos of my first day, it became abundantly clear that bumping into Jack was more than a simple, clumsy encounter. It was a twist of fate, a vibrant splash of color on the canvas of my new life. Little did I realize then how significantly he would transform my world, one photograph at a time.

So, armed with a coffee-stained blouse and skirt and a heart brimming with hope, I plunged headfirst into my new adventure on my first day at work. My phone buzzed; the caller ID displayed ‘Dad.’

“I’m doing well, Dad. This isn’t like my first day of grade school,” I reassured him as soon as I answered the call.

“All I want is to know how my daughter is faring in the jungle she’s chosen,” he replied, his voice filled with nothing but love and void of any disappointment. I was well aware he would have preferred me to accept a job within his sphere of influence, a place where he could ensure my safety. But I yearned to carve my own path. I am the only child of a bank president who oversees one of the largest retail banks in New York City. After my mother succumbed to cancer when I was merely three years old, my father single-handedly raised me, never remarrying and instead devoting his life to me and a succession of nannies over the years. In this office, no one had a clue about my background, and I never volunteered that information. I wanted to be treated like everyone else, without any special privileges.

'Bye, Jack

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"Dad, I am not the same 6-year-old Mandy anymore. I am determined to make it on my own, as we've discussed countless times," I responded, rolling my eyes.

"I understand... I am learning to let go. But, I will check on you now and then," he promised. Suddenly, he remembered something, "I've asked Lino to pick you up. I've reserved a table for us at The Marks."

I remembered the dinner. "There's no need for your chauffeur to pick me up. I don't enjoy making a spectacle. I'll take the train," I retorted.

"Sweetheart, if you're uncomfortable with Lino, take an Uber instead."

"Okayyy!" I replied, drawing out the word for emphasis. "I have to go, Dad. I love you!"

"I love you too," he said, and the line went dead.

The rest of the morning was a blur. I sometimes saw Jack casually leaning against the hallway with a coffee in hand; his rogue allure, on full display, was etched in my mind. How his jeans hugged his legs and hips, paired with that coffee-stained cream long-sleeved shirt that clung to him like a second skin, was a sight that was hard to forget. His stubble, three days old and begging for a razor, somehow added to his charm. The memory of his scent still lingered in my mind — the odd blend of cigarette smoke intertwined with cologne. Typically, such a combination would repel me, yet on that day, it held an inexplicable allure.

"Mandy, he's way off your league," I scolded myself. I tried, unsuccessfully, to shake off thoughts of him as I made my way to the cafeteria at lunchtime. Our agency had its own cafeteria, free for everyone, and it was always brimming with life. It was a cool place, with its modern decor, vibrant colors, and large windows that let in abundant natural light. But during lunch hour, it transformed into a chaotic mix of chatter, clanging utensils, and the aroma of food — quite like a high school cafeteria.

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Preferring solitude over the bustling crowd, I took my lunch to a quiet nook in the corner. The crowd's murmur was a soothing hum in the background as I began to eat. Then, the popular crowd walked in, and with them, Jack. He was surrounded by a bevy of colleagues, mostly women, all drawn to him like moths to a flame.

Suddenly, he looked in my direction, his eyes locking onto mine. A slow, knowing wink followed, setting my heart racing. I knew he would walk into my table. A wave of emotions washed over me — surprise, excitement, nervousness, and a hint of fear. My cheeks felt warm, my palms sweaty. I quickly looked down at my food, trying to hide the smile that threatened to spread across my face. Then, I put my unfinished food on the tray, stood over the counter, and hurriedly left. Despite the turmoil inside me, one thing was clear — Jack affected me, one I couldn't ignore.

On my first day, I was thrown into the deep end, tasked with crafting a slogan for vegan crackers. There were no introductions, no training — just an expectation to perform. I sat before my sleek desktop, the cursor blinking mockingly on an empty Word document. Minutes trickled by, yet no inspiration struck. University life at Cornell, cushioned by my father's education fund and devoid of any student loans, seemed like a distant, carefree dream compared to the stark reality of this job.

My cubicle was small but functional, a yellow and blue partition separating me from the rest of the office. I had a few personal items scattered around — a small potted plant that added a touch of green and a mug with the Cornell logo, a bittersweet reminder of my alma mater.

Lost in my thoughts, I nearly jumped when I saw Jack's face peering over my cubicle wall. He looked amused, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

"Hey, we weren't formally introduced after that coffee fiasco. I'm Jack," he said, his voice low and casual as he extended his hand.

'Bye, Jack

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I took it briefly and said, "Call me Mandy."

"Why've you been avoiding me? Not that I'm stalking you or anything."

I blinked, taken aback. "I... I haven't been avoiding you, Jack. Just trying to come up with a slogan for these crackers."

He chuckled, leaning against my cubicle partition. "Well, good news for you. You'll be off the dreadful, boring task from now on. You're going to be working with me on a new advertising campaign for wines."

My heart fluttered at this revelation. "Really?" I asked, trying to keep my excitement in check.

"Yeah, really. So, be ready. We start tomorrow. We'll go to The Met to check the spots for shoots," he said with a confident smirk before walking away, leaving me with a whirl of emotions.

Excitement bubbled within me. Working with Jack, the very person who distracted me all morning seemed like a narrative straight out of a romantic novel. But this was real, and I couldn't wait to see what tomorrow would bring.

2

The days turned into nights and the nights into days as Jack and I immersed ourselves in the new campaign. The studio was our home, and Jack was my constant companion with his endless energy. Jack was indeed an artist. He wasn't just a photographer; he was a storyteller who used his camera as a tool to weave narratives that were as complex as they were compelling. His images weren't just aesthetically pleasing. They were emotionally engaging, telling stories that went beyond the surface.

"Mandy," Jack's voice sliced through my reverie. I glanced over to see him squatting. His camera bathed in the warm glow of our studio lights. He was focused on capturing the wine bottle and glass meticulously arranged on the floor.

"Which bag, Jack?" I asked, my gaze scanning the three bags sprawled across the low table.

"The medium one, the brown one. There's a lens inside," he responded without breaking his focus.

Carefully, I extracted the lens and moved to kneel beside him. His cologne wafted into my senses. As he turned towards me, he deftly unclasped the lens from his camera, handing it over as he took the one I held.

"Thanks, Mands!" He winked at me, his usual playful manner shining through. I cherished the way he called me 'Mands'. It was unique to

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him, and I found myself liking it more each time.

“Anytime, partner,” I replied, my smile matching his.

I watched as he worked, his eyes always behind the lens, searching for the perfect angle, the perfect light. He had a knack for making the ordinary extraordinary, turning everyday scenes into beautiful works of art. His mind was a whirlwind of creativity, his eyes sparkled with passion, and his laughter was infectious. He was unlike any man I’d ever met — a gentleman, yet with a rogue charm that was impossible to resist.

Working alongside Jack was an exhilarating experience, a journey that led me to discover aspects of life I’d previously overlooked or dismissed. Despite living in the Upper East Side, nestled in one of those plush apartments on 5th Avenue with Central Park practically serving as my backyard, I realized I’d taken so much for granted. As a child, I would watch ducks glide across the ponds, and I continued to frequent the park for my daily runs. Yet, I had never savored a hot dog bun from a street cart nor sipped on the humble dollar coffee that accompanied it. Jack introduced me to these simple pleasures, and to my surprise, I found myself enjoying them immensely. I wondered how I had missed out on these experiences for so long.

Jack was not just intelligent but also incredibly engaging. I’ve always been drawn to men who can hold their own in a conversation, and Jack was a master at it. Our shared love for movies often provided fodder for our discussions. However, our definition of ‘classic’ films diverged quite amusingly. For Jack, classics were from the 80s, movies like *Fight Club* and *The Breakfast Club*. On the other hand, I adored the timeless charm of the 50s, films such as *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* or *Singing In The Rain*. Jack would roll his eyes at my choices, but our playful debates about films and TV series only added to our friendship.

As the days turned into weeks, our relationship evolved. We became comfortable in each other’s presence, and our interactions became more intimate. Casual gestures like him draping his arm around me

during walks or holding my hand started to become frequent. Our closeness was something I found myself not just accepting but also craving.

However, with time, I learned another side of Jack – his unpredictable mood swings. One moment, he'd be the charming man I was growing fond of, and the next, he'd be irritable for reasons unbeknownst to me. Initially, I struggled to navigate these sudden shifts in his demeanor, but eventually, I learned to accept them as part of who he was. Whenever he seemed to retreat into a darker mood, I learned to give him space, stepping back until he was ready to re-emerge.

After hours of intense work and collaboration, Jack broke our comfortable silence one evening. "Mands," he started, his voice uncharacteristically soft, "There's something I need to tell you. I... I have a girlfriend. We're living together."

My heart stuttered in my chest, a wave of disappointment washing over me. I had found myself inexplicably drawn to Jack despite him being unlike any man I'd been interested in. His roguish charm had trapped me, but now, that illusion seemed to shatter.

"I see," I murmured, forcing a smile to mask the unexpected sting of his words. "But, hey, we're just co-workers, and I'm not in love with you or anything," I added, punctuating my sentence with a light laugh to diffuse the tension.

"I know, Mands. I didn't mean to imply... I just thought you should be aware," he responded, his tone sincere.

"Seriously, Jack! We're fine. It's not like we're head over heels for each other. We barely even know each other outside of work," I pointed out.

That was the stark truth. Despite seeing Jack at work every day, he remained an enigma to me. I knew nothing about his personal life. Similarly, he wasn't privy to my details. He didn't think I was the sole heir to a prominent New York banker, nor was he aware of the penthouse I resided in on the Upper East Side. He had no idea that I chose to walk every day from my apartment to our office in Manhattan and our regular shoot location at The Met.

'Bye, Jack

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"So, we're good?" Jack asked, seeking reassurance.

"Absolutely!" I affirmed, hoping to put an end to the awkward conversation.

Despite the revelation about his girlfriend, Jack's behavior towards me didn't change. He was comfortable around me, touching my arm casually during conversations or helping me adjust my scarf during the chilly New York winter. Each touch sent a jolt of electricity through me, stirring emotions I struggled to keep in check.

Our dialogues were refreshingly candid, effortlessly meandering into personal territories like relationships and intimacy. One evening, as I was tidying up my desk in anticipation of a long weekend, Jack materialized beside me — a knack he seemed to have for appearing out of the blue.

"So, what's on your agenda, Mands?" he inquired, his tone casual.

"Nothing particularly thrilling," I admitted. "I hope to catch up on some much-needed sleep over the next three days. We've been pulling twelve to fourteen-hour shifts," I remarked, realizing it sounded like a complaint. Hastily, I added, "Not that I'm complaining, of course."

"Well, I plan to spend the entire weekend immersed in mind-blowing... sex," he replied with a mischievous grin. "Or perhaps I'll just get high and enjoy some fun in bed with my girlfriend," he added casually.

I couldn't help but laugh at his audacity. "Really? Wow!"

"Don't tell me you've never tried that?" He winked suggestively. "Getting high, then having great sex... it's quite the experience," he said, accompanying his words with an exaggerated hand gesture for emphasis.

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“Um, no!” I retorted, feigning shock.

“You’re missing out, Mands!” he teased, waving goodbye. With his camera bag slung casually over his shoulder, he sauntered off, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Our chats were always like this —comfortable, easy, and infused with a sense of humor. It was impossible not to be drawn to Jack. But now, I realized that what I felt for him transcended mere attraction. It was something deeper, something I hadn’t anticipated.

As the days went by, I found myself caught in a whirl of emotions — admiration for his talent, respect for his work ethic, and an undeniable attraction that I couldn’t ignore. But above all, I felt a sense of longing — for something that could never be.

Despite everything, I was glad to have met Jack. He brought a new dimension to my life, one that was full of creativity, passion, and unexpected emotions. But I knew I had to guard my heart. After all, he was taken, and I... I was just Mandy, the girl working with him on a campaign.

3

Every day brought a new revelation. I was becoming more aware of Jack, not just as a colleague or a friend, but as a man. The casual brushes of his fingers on mine while exchanging lenses, the soft whispers in my ear as we discussed shot angles—everything started to feel different. An undercurrent of electricity ran through each interaction, a tension that made my heart beat a little faster. My breath hitched a little higher.

One day, we were working on a particularly challenging shoot. Jack was squatting down, his camera focused on the model. His brow furrowed in concentration, the vein in his neck throbbing slightly. I found myself staring at him, my gaze lingering on his face, hands, and how his shirt clung to his lean frame.

“Mands,” he called, his voice snapping me out of my trance. “Can you adjust the light a bit? It’s casting a shadow.”

“Sure, Jack,” I replied, moving to adjust the spotlight. As I did, my hand brushed against his—a jolt of electricity shot through me, an intense sensation that took my breath away. I quickly pulled back, my cheeks flushing.

“Are you okay?” Jack asked, his eyes filled with concern.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just a static shock,” I lied, my heart pounding.

“Would you like to hang out at a bar in Roosevelt tomorrow night?”

He asked, his voice carrying a note of invitation. Without meeting my gaze, he added, "Unless, of course, you'd prefer one of those upscale places frequented by the rich and pretentious?"

"I'm not picky," I responded, my mind already plotting the route to Roosevelt.

"Great! I can't stand those ostentatious spots that practically scream, 'I'm expensive'," he confessed.

"Why do you dislike them? They're not all filled with snobs," I countered, attempting to challenge his preconceived notions about the wealthy crowd frequenting such bars.

"I just don't enjoy their vibe, which is why I steer clear of dating rich girls," he stated casually, his attention still riveted on his camera.

I chose to let his last comment hang in the air, unaddressed.



That night, as I sat opposite my father in the lavish setting of Eleven Madison Park, one of New York City's most notable restaurants, my mind was preoccupied with thoughts of Jack. My father conversed about business and politics, his words washing over me as my thoughts drifted.

"Dad, do you think it's feasible for two people from starkly different backgrounds to... well, have a meaningful relationship?" I ventured, absentmindedly pushing food around my plate.

He regarded me with a thoughtful gaze. "Mandy, love doesn't discriminate based on background. If two individuals genuinely care for each other, that's all that truly matters."

"Are you seeing anyone?" He inquired calmly, sipping his wine while I continued my disinterested dance with the food on my plate.

"No, Dad. My dating life is on hiatus for at least the next two years," I

'Bye, Jack

responded with a smile.

“Just remember to enjoy yourself and always be cautious,” he advised, tactfully sidestepping any reference to that one mortifying incident when I unknowingly dated someone only interested in gaining insider information for a business loan with my father’s bank. That experience had been a harsh lesson, prompting me to remain silent about my family background.

I nodded in agreement, my mind swirling with thoughts of Jack. I was the privileged only child of a top banking executive, while Jack was a struggling artist residing in Queens – that was the extent of what I knew about his personal life. Our worlds couldn’t be more different, yet something about him captivated me, igniting a desire for his company, his touch. But fear gnawed at me, fearing his reaction if he discovered my true identity.

For now, I resolved to hold my secret close. I would remain simply Mandy, his colleague and friend. But how long could I sustain this pretense, mainly when every glance, every interaction with Jack elicited emotions I’d never felt before? Only time would provide the answer.

4

"Really? Come on, Mandy, you were horny as we speak, right?" Jack questioned me, a challenging gleam in his eyes as he held my gaze with firm intensity.

"What?" I stammered, taken aback. No one had ever spoken to me so brazenly before, not even my ex-boyfriend Jeffrey, with whom I had shared intimate moments.

Tonight, after a grueling day at work, Jack and I found ourselves unwinding in a local bar. Our conversation meandered towards the topic of casual workplace sex relationships, a subject I always maintained was overhyped. We debated back and forth over several rounds of beer, each defending our perspectives. This topic had a way of surfacing during our chats, only to be left unresolved as we moved on to other matters. But tonight, it appeared Jack was not inclined to leave the issue unexplored.

"We've danced around this subject many times," he pointed out, his fingers idly circling the rim of his glass as he took a drag from his cigarette.

"No, no, no, Jack! You're mistaken." I protested, cheeks flaming. We had been drinking, but not enough for me to forget this conversation come morning.

"I can see it in your eyes, Mandy," he said matter-of-factly, his arms folded across his chest, his gaze never leaving mine. "You're aroused.

'Bye, Jack

And if my guess is right, your panties are wet." His words sent a jolt of awareness through me. My face heated up further, whether, from embarrassment or the truth in his words, I wasn't sure.

A sheen of sweat trickled down my cleavage. My nipples hardened against my lace bra. "That's very straightforward, Jack," I murmured, dropping my gaze to my hands, too afraid to meet his eyes. My body was betraying me.

"But you're not saying no. Finish your drink, Mandy," he commanded. I watched him empty his glass and followed suit. As I reached for my bag to pay the bill, he stood up, holding out his hand. "Can you save our table? We'll be right back," he told the waiter.

Jack guided me to the restroom and locked the door behind us. He didn't kiss me as I had anticipated. Instead, he spun me around to face the lavatory counter and mirror. "Look at yourself, Mandy," he whispered.

Jack's touch was electrifying as he slowly slid his fingers up my leg, tracing a path that sent shivers down my spine. His fingertips danced over my bare skin, leaving a trail of goosebumps in their wake. He paused at the hem of my skirt, his touch light yet insistent. He hiked up my skirt, and he exposed my buttocks. My regular workouts had kept me in shape, and I could tell he liked what he saw.

His eyes never left mine as he looked at me deeply in the mirror. as he continued his exploration. His hands moved higher, his touch growing bolder as he traced the curve of my hip, causing a gasp to escape my lips. It was a mix of anticipation and desire that caught in the air between us, thick and intense. "Touch yourself for me, Mandy. Pleasure yourself," he commanded.

I was hypnotized, and I knew, and he knew, too, that at that very moment, I would do everything he asked. He didn't remove my panties, so I reached out to my pleasure nub and touched myself as I looked at him in the mirror.

He didn't rush, taking his time to memorize every inch of skin he exposed. His fingers traced the hollow of my waist as he watched me,

causing my breath to hitch. The tension was building, and I found myself leaning into his touch, craving more.

His hand splayed across my stomach, pulling me closer against him. His touch was warm, a stark contrast to the coolness of the restroom tiles. I could feel his breath against my neck, his lips brushing lightly against my skin. Somehow, he had deftly unbuttoned my blouse, the fabric parting under his skilled fingers. His hands found their way to my breasts, gently freeing them from the confines of my bra. His touch was firm yet gentle as he caressed them, his fingers teasing my nipples into hardened peaks.

A sharp tug sent a jolt of pain through me, but it was quickly swallowed by the rising tide of desire. The slight sting served only to heighten my arousal, pushing me closer to the height of pleasure.

The world outside the restroom ceased to exist. All that mattered was the intoxicating feel of Jack's touch, the way his fingers played over my body, stoking the flames of desire within me. The sensual dance of his fingers left me breathless, lost in a sea of sensations.

"Jack, I...I can't...take it anymore," I whimpered, my voice thick with desire. I was pleading for the release that only he could give me. His hands resumed their exploration of the curves of my buttocks, spreading them apart to expose me further.

Then I felt his fingers dance with mine on my pleasure nub, guiding me to the epicenter of my pleasure. As one finger slipped inside me, a surge of sensation nearly overwhelmed me. I found myself moving rhythmically against him, lost in the intoxicating dance of desire.

A sharp smack on my buttock steadied me, the sting serving to both ground me and heighten my pleasure. His daring fingers began to explore previously untouched territory, boldly charting a course into the realm of the forbidden. The anticipation, mixed with a dash of fear, only stoked the flames of my desire.

"Jack, don't. That's an uncharted territory for me," I protested weakly, apprehensive about the unexplored territory we were venturing into.

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'Bye, Jack

"Everything is mine now, Mandy. Including this," he murmured, his voice low and full of promise. "Remember, this is all uncharted territory to you. Are you on birth control?" I nodded in affirmation, my heart pounding in my chest.

The sound of his zipper being undone echoed in the silence, followed by the sensation of his arousal replacing his fingers. His movements were deliberate, each thrust sending waves of pleasure through me. He was sizable, and I gasped at the intensity of the sensation.

His pace quickened, and I felt a finger daringly venture into an area previously untouched. I was helpless against the pleasure that surged through me, climaxing suddenly and then again. Abruptly, he withdrew, spinning me around to face him.

"I want you to taste me," he commanded, his voice husky with desire. I slid down onto the cold tiles, taking him into my mouth. The taste of myself on him was both strange and intoxicating.

As I began to pleasure him, Jack's movements became more forceful, seemingly indifferent to my discomfort. He treated my mouth as his own personal playground, his words serving only to heighten my arousal. "This mouth isn't just for speaking or kissing. It's for my use," he declared, his voice thick with lust.

I looked up at him, tears streaming down my cheeks as I struggled for breath, but the arousal within me was undeniable. His movements became frantic, signaling he was close. Then he stilled, and I tasted the warm release down my throat. His moans were unintelligible, lost in the throes of ecstasy. I took it all in, savoring the intimate moment.

After he had finished, Jack gracefully helped me unto my feet and gently wiped my mouth with a tenderness that seemed out of place in the aftermath of our heated encounter. He helped me adjust my disheveled clothing before righting his own.

He cradled my face in his hands, his gaze intense but devoid of any attempt to bridge the distance between our lips. The room was heavy with the scent of our shared intimacy, a testament to the illicit activities the restroom had undoubtedly witnessed before.

Justine Castellon

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After the whirlwind of passion, I smoothed down my hair, attempting to regain some semblance of normalcy. Together, we exited the room, leaving behind the evidence of our shared desire.

5

It was a revelation that left me both shocked and intrigued. Jack and I had transitioned from being friends and colleagues to something far more intimate. It wasn't a traditional relationship by any means, but there was a certain allure to it that I couldn't deny.

The exhilarating thrill I experienced as Jack asserted his dominance was undeniable. In our intimate moments, he assumed control, guiding and educating me in ways I had never before encountered. There were instances when it felt demeaning, yet an odd satisfaction accompanied the act of relinquishing control to him.

One evening, following such an intense encounter, we found ourselves sprawled on a bed in a nondescript motel in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Jack's approach to lovemaking deviated from the norm — it was devoid of gentle caresses or affectionate kisses. Instead, it was a raw, unrefined expression of desire that was both exciting and overwhelming.

"I want to fuck. Time to get down to business, Mands," he'd say, a hint of impatience in his voice as he swiftly divested me of my clothes. He'd position me on all fours on the bed, his fingers threading through my hair, pulling just enough to tilt my head back. His touch would then wander, exploring the most intimate parts of my body, igniting a shiver of anticipation that left me trembling with desire. Then, without warning, he'd take me from behind, his hands charting a course across territories unknown to me, leaving me breathless and unable to voice any protest.

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Occasionally, he'd grant me the privilege of leading, allowing me to straddle him on a chair. But midway, he'd spin me around so I was facing away from him, his hand gripping my hair while his other hand seized my breast from behind. His command to ride him fast echoed in my ears, his teeth and fingers tormenting my nipples in a tantalizing rhythm. It was always rough, always intense, but I reveled in every minute of it.

The sheets were crumpled around us, evidence of the passion that had transpired. "Jack," I started, my voice barely above a whisper. "Why...why do you like this? The domination, I mean."

He turned to look at me, his eyes dark and unreadable. "I like teaching you, Mandy. And I like the idea of you being dominated. It's...different. Exciting."

His words sent a shiver down my spine. I was a rich girl, used to being treated with deference and respect because of my father. But here, with Jack, I was just Mandy—an ordinary girl who liked being dominated by a man who was anything but ordinary.

There was one thing, though, that bothered me. Despite our intimacy, Jack never kissed me. And sometimes, he pushed the boundaries, doing things that made me feel degraded.

"Why don't you kiss me, Jack?" I asked, trying to keep my voice steady.

He looked at me, his gaze softening. "Kissing is personal, Mandy. It's intimate. And I don't want to blur the lines."

His words stung, but I understood. This was purely physical, a game of control and submission. And as much as it bothered me, I couldn't deny the thrill it gave me.

As I lay there next to Jack, I realized this was a part of me I hadn't known existed. A piece that craved domination and control. A part that was willing to be degraded for the thrill it brought. But I also knew that, in the end, I had the power. I could choose to walk away at any time. For now, though, I decided to stay. To explore this new side of

'Bye, Jack

myself with Jack as my guide.

6

As time passed, I found myself growing more comfortable in my relationship with Jack. It was unconventional, yes, but it was also exciting. I felt a newfound confidence, a sense of liberation I had never experienced before.

But for Jack, our relationship held a different meaning. To him, I was just a pastime, a substitute for when his girlfriend wasn't available. Sometimes, he would push the boundaries, using me to fulfill his fantasies, things he couldn't do with his girlfriend. There were times when he would humiliate me, making me feel like I was nothing more than an object to him.

One day, we were alone in the office, working on some photo editing. Jack was hunched over his computer focused on the images on the screen. I walked up behind him, casually draping my arms around his neck. "Hey, want to have fun?" I asked.

"Entertain yourself, Mandy. I'm in the middle of something," he said, shrugging off my arms without even looking at me.

His words hit me like a punch in the gut. I could feel my face burning, the humiliation coursing through my veins. Without a word, I turned and walked away, grabbing my coat as I left the office.

Outside, the chilly wind of New York City whipped against my face, but I barely noticed. Tears welled up in my eyes, blurring my vision. I had never been turned down in my life, never been treated with such

'Bye, Jack

disregard. I hated myself for allowing Jack to treat me this way. I was better than this. I deserved better.

As I walked aimlessly through the city, the tears streaming down my face, I made a promise to myself. I would no longer allow Jack or anyone else to treat me like this. I was worth more than that. And it was time I started acting like it.

But I knew it would only take one word, one touch from Jack, and I was his again.

In the subsequent days, we returned to our routine grind. Jack busied himself with editing photos for the layout artists, and I immersed myself in crafting copies for the new ad campaign. The episode from the previous night seemed to have evaporated into thin air as if it had never transpired. That evening, Jack invited me to our regular haunt to vent work-related frustrations. We were tucked away in a secluded corner, just the two of us, far from the usual crowd.

Jack was drinking heavily and smoking continuously. His fingers traced an unhurried path down my back, eventually slipping under my shirt to explore the bare skin underneath. His hand moved higher, reaching my breast and teasing it gently as we continued our drinks.

I consciously decided not to overthink the situation, opting to surrender to the moment's thrill. I could feel his fingers delicately pinching my nipple through my bra. His breath, heavy with the scent of beer and cigarette smoke, grazed behind my ear as he whispered, "Mandy, can you touch yourself?"

"Jack, I can't. People will notice," I protested weakly, but his insistent hands on my breast were causing me to betray my own objections.

"Mandy, no one's paying attention. I want you to feel your own arousal and let me taste it through your fingers," he murmured boldly. His audacity always left me reeling, and more often than not, I found myself succumbing to his requests.

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The casual relationship between Jack and I continued, always at his convenience. Each encounter chipped away a little more at my self-respect until I was left feeling hollow and empty. I despised myself for allowing it, for letting Jack treat me like an afterthought.

One bustling day, amid the chaos of looming deadlines and the pressure to deliver, I was engrossed in my work. I had plans to meet my dad for dinner at The Marks later and was racing against the clock to finish up. Suddenly, Jack appeared at my cubicle, a grave expression on his face. "Mandy, you need to stop behaving like we're an item," he whispered, his voice icy.

His words struck me like a bolt from the blue. I had never treated him like a boyfriend. Sure, our relationship had its physical aspects, but I had always maintained a level of detachment, a boundary I never dared to cross. I understood the rules of our game and played my part well. I was well aware that what we had was transient, a mere dalliance. I never harbored any illusions or expectations beyond the status quo.

His accusation stung deeply. "Listen carefully, Jack," I responded calmly. "I have never mistaken our relationship for something more. I am fully aware of the fact that this is nothing more than a casual fling."

He laid his phone before me. "Your messages, Mandy, they're bothering me."

* * *

'Bye, Jack

I couldn't help but laugh. "These are just casual chats, Jack! Our daily exchanges, remember? What's happening here? Are you just in a bad mood? If so, I'll just chalk this up to one of your mood swings," I retorted, maintaining my composure despite the rising urge to lash out.

"This isn't normal. I interpret these messages as signs of a relationship that was not part of our agreement. I'm not cut out for relationships, Mandy," he tried to backpedal, but I wasn't about to let him off the hook this time.

"Damn it, Jack! You're not even on my radar. I have a million things on my mind: deadlines to meet and a future to plan. You don't figure in any of it," I shot back. I knew I was bending the truth slightly, but I needed to protect my dignity. In this argument, I was holding my ground, and I intended to make a dignified exit.

"Mandy, don't overanalyze things. I'm simply uncomfortable with this level of communication," he tried to clarify.

I picked up his phone, swiftly deleted all my messages, and handed it back to him. "There you go. Problem solved. You'll only hear from me regarding work-related matters," I declared, my voice steady. "Now, please leave my cubicle and stop gaslighting me."

The full impact of my folly hit me then. I had allowed Jack to exploit and degrade me under the pretense of a casual relationship. I loathed him for what he had done, but even more, I despised myself for permitting it.

At that moment, I made a vow in front of him. I refused to let Jack or anyone else treat me in such a manner. I deserved respect, love, and kindness, and I wouldn't settle for anything less.

"Bye, Jack," I said, maintaining a firm tone despite the storm raging within me. Rising from my chair, I turned and exited, leaving him behind with a puzzled expression on his face.

As I walked out, a wave of relief washed over me. It was over. I was liberated. I had finally gathered the strength to sever ties with Jack, to

walk away from a relationship that brought me nothing but heartache.

I dialed my dad's number on my phone. "Dad, can you ask Lino to pick me up from work?" I requested.

"Of course, what made you change your mind?" He queried.

"Nothing specific. I just don't want to hide anymore. I want people to know who I am. See you later, Dad!" I replied before ending the call.

I held the phone to my chest, like cradling the man who loved me unconditionally close to my heart. My Dad. I knew the road ahead would be difficult. Healing would take time. But I also knew that I was strong enough to face whatever came my way. Because in the end, I had chosen myself. I had chosen self-respect over a degrading relationship. And that was something to be proud of.

As I was caught in the traffic with Lino on my way to meet Dad, I penned my a poem that signified my fimsal farewell to Jack.

Harsh words spoken,
regret in our wake,

A bond once unbroken,
now starts to break.

With hearts heavy
and eyes teary,

We part ways,
memories growing weary.

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'Bye Jack

'Bye, Jack' is a heartbreaking tale of love and the strength to make difficult choices. It revolves around 24-year-old Mandy, a gentle soul drawn to the rogue charm of her friend, Jack. With his carefree attitude, smoky allure, and candid demeanor that borders on hurtful, Jack embodies everything Mandy shouldn't want -- but does.

Jack's emotional maturity might compare to a pea's, yet his straightforwardness, often misconstrued as harsh, captivates Mandy. Despite being in a serious relationship, Jack flirts with Mandy, offering her an intoxicating dose of attention she finds hard to resist.

Mandy's love for Jack feels right, like two puzzle pieces fitting together seamlessly. Simultaneously, it also brings her a whirlwind of pain as she becomes a secondary character in Jack's life, caught in the crossfire of his existing relationship.

As Mandy's love for Jack deepens, so does the pain. She's at a crossroads, grappling with a decision that could liberate or break her altogether. Will Mandy continue to live under Jack's shadow, silently bearing the heartache? Or will she gather the courage to say 'Bye, Jack,' paving the way for her own happiness? The story unravels this emotional dilemma, making readers question the boundaries of love and the price one is willing to pay for it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justine Castellon is an accomplished and creative brand strategist who enjoys exploring the different sides of life. With a heart full of creativity, she loves to read everything from classic novels to the paragraphs on the back of cereal boxes and milk cartons. Writing has become her biggest passion, pushing her out of her comfort zone and into a new exciting world.