

BONUS SCENE from *THE FIX*

WORKING GIRLS (No, not that kind! Sheesh!)

FIONA

Four years earlier...

“Good morning. Beaumont Furniture Gallery. How can I make your day *fabulous*?”

“You can start by sucking my—”

“Hold it right there, you little assmuncher!” I hissed into the phone, my teeth clenched and my grip on the receiver tighter than Chris Hemsworth’s ass (which is almost hypnotic, by the way, but we’ll get back to that later). “If you and your pathetic little friends don’t stop calling, I will hunt your ass down and shove the heel of my Jimmy Choo right on up there!” Well, on second thought, that would be a waste of a perfectly wonderful shoe. I looked down at my feet and tilted them back and forth to admire the lace detailing. The man did excellent work. “Or at the very least, I’ll punch you in your pea-sized nutsack. You hear me?!” There. That was better.

The line went dead just as Antoinette breezed past my desk, her chestnut hair pinned in a perfect chignon and her Burberry trench draped artfully over one shoulder. I dropped the receiver back in its cradle and scrambled from my chair in her wake.

“Antoinette!”

She pretended not to hear me, as usual, so I weaved through the showroom obstacle course practically sprinting to catch up with her and her mile-long legs. Exactly what kind of deal did this woman make with the devil to get those legs? It was decidedly unfair.

“Excuse me, Antoinette!” I panted as I fell into a jog beside her. I made a mental note to perhaps give cardio another try one of these days.

My boss looked down her long patrician nose at me and raised a brow, never slowing her pace as we made our way toward the offices in the back of the store. Her red lips parted on a sneer. “You should be at your desk, no?” Despite the polite phrasing, her French accent somehow made the question sound even more snappish than she probably intended. Oh, who was I kidding? The chick hated me. That had been clear from the moment her husband hired me.

“Absolutely.” I sidestepped a leather ottoman. “I was just hoping to have a quick word with you about the phone greeting.”

She stopped abruptly at a rack of fabric samples and I almost pitched headfirst into a table littered with discarded swatches in every shade of green imaginable. “Laney!” she shouted, her voice rising on the last syllable.

The girl with dark shiny hair who I’d seen coming and going over the last few days poked her head out of the office door. “Can I help you with something, Antoinette?” Her tone was

solicitous and calm. She must have been on sedatives. That was the only way to explain how her hair wasn't standing on end from our boss's ear-splitting tone.

"What do you see?" Antoinette set her coat down and folded her hands together, simultaneously achieving the impression of both Queen Elizabeth and Mr. Burns from *The Simpsons*. Her eyes darted meaningfully to the table of swatches.

Laney's eyes followed, and then she hurried over to tidy the mess without another word. I'd just regained my balance, using the table for leverage, so I handed a few swatches over with a weak smile. Her eyes darted to me and rolled dramatically as the corners of her mouth lifted in return. "Thanks."

Antoinette huffed with impatience.

"Sorry, Antoinette." Laney wrinkled her nose at me before schooling her features and turning back to the office.

My boss muttered something in French and I knew I had about five more seconds before she disappeared into her office—or vanished in a cloud of smoke and flames. "So, I was wondering if I could change the phone greeting. You know, mix things up a bit. I was thinking instead of, 'How can I make your day fabulous?' I could say, 'This is Fiona speaking,' or, 'How are you today?'" I plastered a smile on my face, hoping it might help. It didn't.

Antoinette's lip curled as if I'd suggested installing a keg at reception. "No." She picked up her coat and took her freaky long-ass legs to her office.

I made a face at her back and headed to my post again. This job was proving to be a pain in my booty and I had little doubt I'd be searching for a new one soon. I sat and put my chin in my hand, looking around to see if we had any new customers. There was a couple testing out a sectional over in the corner, and a man in a dark suit talking to one of our sales team in Modern Décor. I perked up at that. The suit fit him perfectly, as if it had been made just for him. His dark blond hair was artfully styled and I could just make out the shape of a strong jaw when he turned his head to point something out to the saleswoman. I leaned sideways in my chair, determined to get a better look, and almost fell on my ass when a voice spoke from behind me.

"Married."

I righted myself and spun to see the girl named Laney standing near my desk and searching through her purse for something.

"What?" I wasn't entirely sure she'd been talking to me.

She looked up from her purse and cocked her head toward the hottie in the suit. "The guy you were checking out. He's married. I saw him here the other day with his wife."

I glanced back at the man in question, who now stood with his hands in his pants pockets, his weight resting on a pillar like he was posing for a Dolce & Gabbana fragrance ad. Damn, he was pretty. My gaze shot to Laney who had stopped rummaging in her bag and appeared to be enjoying the view just as much as I was.

"Well that is a crying shame," I said on a sigh.

"Damn straight."

We stared silently for another moment and then Laney shook off her man-candy daze and dug back in her purse. She pulled out a pair of sunglasses, bringing a string of brightly colored plastic rings along with them. “Shit.” She detached the rings and shoved them back in her purse before using the sunglasses to hold her hair back from her face.

I noticed for the first time that she had stunning gunmetal gray eyes and a flawless complexion. That was the good news. I let my gaze slide subtly down to take in her outfit and felt both depressed and excited at the view. Depressed because who wore socks with flats? And excited because this meant a possible makeover on the horizon. Eeek!

She glanced to the back of the store and then to me again. “It’s Fiona, right?” I nodded, and she gave me a little wave. “I’m Laney. Do you get a lunch break?”

I looked at my watch and noticed it was getting to be about that time. My stomach growled angrily as if spurred on by the mere suggestion. Laney grinned and I did my own check for any lurking boss bitches before replying, “Yeah. I’m just supposed to get someone to cover the phones.” It was still my first week, so I was unsure of all the rules.

Laney nodded and leaned over to pick up the phone receiver on my desk. She pressed a couple buttons and spoke. “Hey, Gabbi. Do you think you can cover the phones so the new receptionist can grab a bite for lunch?” She raised her brows playfully at me and grinned. I smiled back. I liked this girl. Since venturing out into the working world, I’d discovered people weren’t always nice to the new girl.

Setting the phone down, she said, “We’re all set. Let’s go grab a bite.”

I nodded and pulled my purse out from a drawer. “Great! Lead the way.” We walked through the sleek glass doors of the store and onto the sidewalk of the shopping center. I pulled my own sunglasses from my purse to shield my eyes from the near-blinding light.

“So, how do you like the job so far?” Laney pointed to a café across the way and I nodded my silent agreement.

I shrugged, not sure that it would be smart to reveal my true feelings to a virtual stranger. She could be Antoinette’s secret spy for all I knew. Maybe this was some elaborate scheme to ... yeah, probably not. “I like it a lot,” I hedged as we crossed to the other side.

I suddenly found myself alone and turned to see that Laney had stopped in her tracks in the middle of the roadway. My brow furrowed. Then I realized she was laughing.

“What?!”

She put a hand out and caught up to me again, still snickering. “Sorry. But you should have seen your face when you said that. It was like you were in physical pain.” I pursed my lips and she laughed again. “You are a terrible liar, Fiona. Has anyone ever told you that?”

I gasped in indignation. “I am an excellent liar!”

She bit her lips to keep from laughing at me again. Shit. Well, I guess the cat was out of the bag. Eh, so what if she knew I hated the job. I shrugged again. “Well, do you like *your* job? Wait, what *is* your job?”

I opened the café door and followed Laney in. I’d eaten here before, so I didn’t even need to look at the board as we stood in line.

“Ugh. It’s freaking awful, but I need the money. I do filing and order processing—and basically anything Antoinette can think of to torture me. There are three of us back there with the she-devil, but I’m just a temp. Thank God.”

“So how long have you been there?”

We’d reached the front of the line, so we placed our orders and took our drinks to a table by the window.

Laney hung her purse from her chair and set her phone on the table next to her soda. “Only about two months, and I’m just part time. I go to school too, and I have a baby. Well, not such a baby anymore, I guess. He just turned one.” She grabbed her phone again and showed me her screensaver. An adorable dark-haired little boy beamed at the camera with a gummy smile and bright eyes.

“Oh my God. He’s so cute!” I put a hand to my chest. Babies were the absolute best. As long as I didn’t have to change any diapers.

Laney couldn’t hide her smile as she pulled the phone back and gazed lovingly at the screen. “Thanks.”

“Wow, so you’re working, going to school, and raising a kid? I feel like a total slacker.” I took a sip of my iced tea and rested my elbows on the table. I wanted to ask if she was married, but there was no ring on her finger and it would be nice to avoid sticking my foot in my mouth for once. Laney answered my unspoken question anyway.

“Don’t. I have a lot of help. Rocco and I live with my parents and we all take turns watching him.”

“Well, I’m still super impressed.” And I was happy to hear that she had a great support system. I knew from experience how invaluable that was.

Our food arrived and we both dug in.

“What about you? Where did you work before Beaumont?” she asked, spearing a tomato with her fork.

“Um,” I began, not sure how honest I should be. This was my fourth job. In four months. I know, I know. But I can explain. Or, rather, I can make excuses. Except for that first one, because I don’t care what anyone says; when a customer is on the verge of making a tragic fashion purchase, I feel it’s my duty to intervene, no matter who might lose commission. “Here and there.”

Laney’s brows rose. “Sounds mysterious.”

“Not really.” I popped a chip in my mouth. For some reason, I wanted to spill my stories to this girl. My gut said she wouldn’t look at me like I was just another ditzy blond princess if she knew all my secrets. But that was too risky. I’d just met her! On the other hand, I hadn’t made any real friends in the short time I’d lived in Greensboro. Maybe, just maybe, Laney and I would turn out to be friends. If we survived Antoinette, that was.

I decided to test the waters. “Let’s just say it’s come to some people’s attention that I don’t have many work skills. I honestly don’t know why I keep getting hired.” I laughed at myself because it was the truth.

Laney waved me off and finished chewing a bite of her salad. “That can’t be true. I’m sure you’re good at a lot of things.”

I couldn’t help my naughty grin. “Well, there are a *few* things I’ve been complimented on.”

Oh, for the love of Mike! I couldn’t believe I’d just said that! But Laney laughed, letting me know that my unfiltered comment hadn’t scared her off.

“I am so glad you came to work in furniture hell, Fiona.”

And so was I. Even if it was just for the purpose of seeing a friendly face.

We continued talking as we finished our meal, and then it was time to head back to work. We’d already exchanged numbers and made plans to get together on her next free evening for a girls’ night out.

As soon as we passed through the doors of the gallery, I knew something was up. And, sure enough, Antoinette the Douchebaggette (hey, wait, that rhymes!) stood beside my desk, arms crossed and bitch-face in place. “Where ‘ave you been? Gabrielle ‘as been doing your job for over an ‘our!” Laney and I both lifted our arms to look at our watches. We’d only been gone for forty-five minutes.

“Antoinette,” Laney began, but our boss rose a hand to stop her.

“I will deal wiz you later.” Her eyes never left mine.

Okay, so I could admit I wasn’t the best at typing, or giving tours, or selling clothes (which I would have rocked if I had something decent to work with, mind you), or handing out brochures (I can explain). But talking on the phone? That was my sweet spot! I rocked as a receptionist! This woman didn’t care, though. She just didn’t like me.

Well, right back ‘atcha, sister!

I put a hand on Laney’s arm in reassurance. “I still have fifteen minutes of my lunch break left. I only took forty-five so far.”

Antoinette’s lips curved into a satisfied smile. “Zis would be true if your break was not zirty minutes. Which makes you fifteen minutes late. A clear violation.” Good God. If Disney was in the market for a new super-villain, I had a recommendation.

Laney sputtered, but I tightened my hold on her arm. No need for both of us to get the boot.

Antoinette’s eyes skipped to Laney. “Get back to work.”

I squeezed Laney’s arm one more time, trying to communicate that she should move ass. She couldn’t afford to get fired.

But *I* could.

In fact, I kind of wanted it, as awful as that sounds. A sigh of relief escaped my lips when Laney finally left my side and crept past our boss. She shot one last look of regret over her shoulder, but I smiled and nodded before bringing my hand to my ear in the universal “call me” gesture. Then I turned my attention back to a scowling Antoinette.

“You may finish out ze day, but do not come back tomorrow.”

Fuck that shit. I had my purse; I was leaving now. Crazy-ass woman. I pretended to check my nails like a high-maintenance bad-ass prima donna. “I don’t think I will. Thanks anyway.” I shot her a saccharine smile and turned to leave. More French mumbling followed me. I didn’t technically know any French curse words, but I was fairly certain Antoinette called me a cock-gobbling whore. Or something like that.

As I opened the glass door once again, I heard the reception phone ring and Antoinette answering it with a lilting tone and that ridiculous greeting. “Good afternoon. Beaumont Furniture Gallery. ‘ow can I make your day *fabulous*?” I could swear she put extra emphasis on the last word, just to spite me. Not that I had time to roll so much as an eye; I was too busy laughing my ass off at her abrupt launch into a loud stream of filthy bilingual curses as she told my little prank caller exactly what he could do with his tiny little prick. It almost made me like her. Almost.

I pulled my phone from my purse as I strode to my car.

***Me:** How about a mani-pedi over your lunch break tomorrow? My treat!*

***Laney:** Aww. That’s so sweet. Are you okay? It sounds like you broke Antoinette! LOL*

***Me:** Never been better. Really. Now, what are your thoughts on Chris Hemsworth’s ass?*

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Ready for more Fiona, Laney and the crew? Get your copy of [The Spark](#) and feel the fire burn when Fiona and Mark face off!

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