

Becca Lundberg

“Just Delaney”

The waterbed needed to go, Delaney decided as she lay in bed late Friday afternoon. It was far too old-fashioned for her taste. Plus, there were so few acceptable linen options for waterbeds. If she and David owned a classic innerspring mattress, they could buy some high thread count sheets and pitch these scratchy, oatmeal-colored ones. These made their lovemaking rather uncomfortable.

Delaney watched the ceiling fan spin round and round, doing its best to cool down the spacious room. It was still awfully balmy, so she'd slept without the corduroy duvet once David pecked her on the cheek and left for work at 6 a.m. She didn't mind his early departure; he was in high demand as the best software developer at his startup.

It was almost time to get out of bed, but she decided to critique the paintings hanging on the stark white walls first. The pieces were done by Picasso or van Goh or whomever the artist whom painted *The Starry Night* was. She was being productive, you see. Starting her day with a bit of culture and analysis.

With her dark curls fanned out against the pillow and her petite frame sprawled about the mattress, she felt like a model. She'd call up Barbizon or one of those other agencies later.

With a reluctant groan, Delaney sat up and slid out of bed, the cold wooden floor a rude awakening to her bare feet. She could use another hour or two of shut-eye, but the sheets felt like cacti on her skin. Besides, she had work to do.

Before she started making calls, she wanted to feast her eyes on the glory of the day. She pulled apart the curtains, which were made of the same dreadful corduroy as the duvet cover, only to see a typical dreary Seattle afternoon. No matter. She'd go downstairs to drink some coffee and start making calls to customers.

She took her time making her way down the carpeted stairs. She felt as stately and beautiful in David's Brooks Brothers button-up as Scarlett O'Hara must have felt in her ruffled gown in the opening scene of *Gone with the Wind*.

The leftover batch of coffee David brewed earlier was cold, so she poured it into the porcelain sink and scooped some fresh grounds into the coffee maker. She pressed the brew button, waiting by the coffee pot for a moment to allow the sound of the liquid brewing to fill her ears. It was beautiful, just as everything else in her life was beautiful.

Once she'd settled herself at the kitchen island on one of the vinyl bar stools, she grabbed the almost antiquated cordless phone and dialed a number from her list of prospective customers.

"Yeah?" grunted a deep male voice from the other end of the phone.

"Hello, sir. My name is Delaney and I'm a representative for Carlie's Cosmetics. I'm calling today to offer you or someone in your residence the chance to have a whole new look in time for the New Year! From ruby red lipstick to electric blue mascara, we have something for you!"

"Do I sound like I wear ruby red lipstick, lady?"

"Well, sir, I would never assume that you don't based on—"

The line went dead. Some people just didn't know proper phone etiquette. Though this man wasn't nearly as vicious as the woman who wasted 10 minutes of her time with a rant on the pitfalls of corporate America last week.

Delaney looked at the phone screen and then at the number on the list, realizing she'd dialed a six instead of a nine. Whoops! Oh well. She'd start fresh in a little while with the correct number.

She poured herself some coffee in David's Mount St. Helens mug and sipped it slowly, wanting her palette to fully experience the flavor of the coffee beans.

Or the bitterness. Yuck! She looked at the container on the counter—Folgers. What was David, a successful software developer, doing buying Folgers? From now on, they would drink nothing but fair trade.

Delaney was about to get up to pour the coffee down the drain when she noticed a flash of pink near the trash can. She walked over to have her suspicions realized: it was, in fact, a pair of underwear that was certainly not hers. Disgusted, she rifled through drawer after drawer before she found a pair of tongs. She wrinkled her nose, retrieved the fuchsia panties, and dropped them at the center of the kitchen island. David would explain this to her later.

The doorbell interrupted her thoughts. A welcome distraction. She walked into the foyer and opened the door to see a balding mail carrier at the stoop.

"Hello, ma'am," the man, whose nametag read, "Jerry," said. "I've got a package. You've just gotta sign."

Delaney clapped her hands together excitedly. "Ooh! I love packages."

As she took the clipboard, she felt Jerry's stare.

"So, you David's girlfriend or somethin'? I haven't seen you here before."

Delaney finished signing with a flourish of her pen on the “y” of her name. She didn’t bother including a last name. She never did.

“David and I prefer the term ‘partners,’” she informed him.

“Wow! He moves quick,” Jerry said. “Just last week I saw him with another broad.”

Delaney shrugged. “Thank you, Jerry darling. I’ll have our package now.”

Jerry handed her the package and made his way out the door. He was a sweetheart. He really was. But he was too inquisitive for his own good.

Before she could close the door, she saw David, his hair askew in the exact adorable way it was the night they met.

“What the hell are you still doing here?” he demanded. “I told you I’d be home at four!”

He was acting out of character. It must have been a long day, she decided.

“Yes, sweetheart. I so looked forward to seeing you all day. You look exhausted. Let’s drive into the city and get some dinner.”

David shook his head.

“I told you when I’d be home so you would be gone. I didn’t expect you to be waiting here all day. I’m sorry, but I can’t even recall your name.”

“Oh, David,” she said, delicately touching his stiff shoulder. “Are you all right? It’s Delaney. Just Delaney.”