CHAPTER // ONE

My fingers ached. I took a deep breath and stopped for a moment to let my hands rest. I stared blankly at the screen in front of me, while massaging the tendons in my hands. The monitor was filled with various windows and documents that I was instructed to organize for the day. I had no idea what the work I was doing was even for. It all seemed like tedious busywork that only served to keep me busy.

Before I could get back to slaving away at my computer, I felt something sneak up behind me. Instinctively, I reached for the stapler on my desk, swiveled my chair around, and launched a firm shot out at my target.

```
???????:
    > Woah, hey!!!
    > Cool it, Annie Oakley!
```

I dropped the stapler and clasped my hands over my mouth after realizing who I nearly sniped with a staple. It was my coworker, Roxanne. She was the only one of my coworkers I could stand to be around. And the only one I considered a friend.

```
JEAN:
    > oh my- gahgh!!!
    > holy shit, rox i am so sorry!
    > you scared the hell out of me!
ROXANNE:
    > Yeesh!
    > I thought we were friends, Jean!
```

I bent over in my chair to retrieve the stapler from the floor, and looked up at Roxanne. I noticed her gaze following me as I sat back up straight.

JEAN:
> sorry! sorry!
ROXANNE:
> Nah, don't worry!
> It's alright!
> I'm just messin' with you.
JEAN:
> oh- uhm-
> okay!
> did you need anything?
ROXANNE:
> I was just gonna tell you that I'm clockin' out for the night.
JEAN:
> oh alright!
> wait- is it that time already?

I glanced down at my wrist to check the time, but I was hit with a wave of embarrassment as I realized I had left my watch at home. I glanced up at Roxanne and saw her, very obviously, also looking at my empty wrist.

ROXANNE:
> Mm-hm.
> Are you gonna stay back for a bit longer?
JEAN:
> eh... i mean- i probably should...
> but i'm getting a bit drowsy.
> i'd rather not fall asleep in the office.
ROXANNE:
> That makes sense.
> I'll see you tomorrow!
JEAN:
> yep!
> bye rox!
ROXANNE:
> See ya!

I watched as she made her way to the elevators. Roxanne was always unusually upbeat, even at work. I didn't find it weird or anything though. I admired it if anything. Her bubbly personality made the atmosphere in the office feel a little less dull. There was something about the way Roxanne looked too. She stood taller than nearly every one of my coworkers, at 6'1". She was also a bit broader in the shoulders, giving her height even more of a presence. I always thought she was quite pretty. *Objectively, of course...*

ROXANNE:
> Oh right- one more thing!
JEAN:
> wh- huh?
ROXANNE:
> If you're gonna be clockin' out too,
> I was wondering if you'd be down to go grab a drink with me or somethin'?
JEAN:
> oh! uhm...

This question made my heart jump a bit. Me and Roxanne were great friends, but we had never really interacted outside of work before. So naturally, I had no idea how to react to her sudden invitation.

JEAN:
> i mean... uh...
> ...
ROXANNE:
> Hey it's okay if you don't wanna!
> I just thought I'd ask.
JEAN:
> no- no- no- sure! i'm down!

Before I even got the chance to think things through, my reflexes ended up deciding for me. I could feel the anxiety eating through my stomach lining.

ROXANNE:
> Haha! Awesome!
> I'll wait out in the atrium for you!
JEAN:
> alright!
ROXANNE:
> See you in a bit!
JEAN:
> mhm!

As Roxanne turned back around and stepped into the elevator, I let out an incredibly large sigh that left me a bit lightheaded.

JEAN:
> goddamnit, jean...