



"TAKE IT BITCH?"

While the rest of the country is still thawing out, Vancouver in spring 1999 pulses with life and energy. The city's skyline, a checkerboard of illuminated windows, creates a magnificent tableau against the evening sky. Down below, the streets teem with people and traffic, generating a symphony of chaos.

One of those is Jocelyn, a tiny woman, in size only. She walks down Burrard Street, each step with intent. Picture it! A runway-ready fashionista with a purple pixie haircut, wearing a vintage Chanel trench coat, paired with leopard print Manolo Blahniks. She enters the lobby of the Hotel Vancouver and walks toward the front desk.

Inside room 2304 of Hotel Vancouver, the windows are fogged on the inside. Discarded clothes litter the floor, mixing with empty bottles and dirty room service dishes. The rhythmic thump of a headboard against the wall fills the suite, leaving little doubt about what is transpiring.

Robert (Robbie) Duncan, twenty-six, naked and good-looking, pounds Rolland, a burly ginger bear in his mid-thirties wearing nothing but a backward ball cap. The green and yellow logo on Rolland's hat catches Robert's attention. A random question floats through his drug-addled consciousness: Is he balding under that cap? The thought makes him chuckle.

Beneath him, Rolland makes staccato breaths, bucking upward. "C'mon, buddy... Talk dirty to me," he encourages.

Robert freezes, his dramatic eye roll transitioning to genuine discomfort. "Yeah... you like that?" he says, sounding hollow and rehearsed.

Rolland doesn't seem to notice the insincerity, responding with an enthusiastic moan. "Oh yeah, Bro! Fuckin' pound me!".

Robert cringes, his voice flatter and more unconvincing as he attempts to comply. "Take it... bitch?"

Fucking shoot me, he thinks. Overwhelmed by dissociation, he pulls out, breathing hard and slick with sweat.

Rolland gets a surprised look on his face when he looks over his shoulder. "Why'd you stop?"

"Too high, need water," he mumbles, using the excuse to escape the awkward performance.

Robert stumbles toward the kitchenette, searching for a glass among the clutter, when a sharp knock at the door cuts through the room like a gunshot, changing the atmosphere from intimate to alarming. Rolland turns ghost-white; panic replaces pleasure.

"SHIT! My wife," He scrambles off the bed, grabs a velvet Crown Royal bag from the nightstand, and throws it to Robert. "Take this. If she finds it, I'm done," his eyes wide with fear.

Robert catches the bag on reflex. "You can't give them back!" he says in a hushed tone. "My guy don't do refunds."

Rolland's panic reaches a breaking point. "I don't care about the fucking money, just take them, they're yours! She'll take my kids!" His words transform him from a confident lover to a terrified husband in seconds.

The knocking grows louder. With no time left to argue, Robert dives into the closet, while Rolland bolts into the bathroom and fires up the shower.

Outside room 2304, Jocelyn stands, the fury simmering beneath her composed exterior. A nervous teenage bellhop shifts beside her. She extends her hand. "KEY! NOW!" She commands.

Inside the room, Robert crouches naked in the closet with the Crown Royal bag clutched to his chest. His heart pounds as he peers through the slats, watching as the door unlocks

with an electronic beep that sounds loud in the tense silence.

Heels click across tile as Jocelyn enters, her eyes sweeping the wreckage of the room and shaking her head. "Rolly?" she says. Her heels echo toward the bathroom where the shower runs at full blast.

Steam billows from the marble bathroom. Rolland peeks out from behind the shower curtain, attempting to project normalcy. "Wanna join me?" he says, trying to redirect her attention with sexuality.

"Don't touch me. This is Chanel," she says, turning to leave before pausing at the threshold. "Was someone else here?" The question hangs in the air, loaded with suspicion.

"Of course not."

While their conversation unfolds in the bathroom, Robert creeps from the closet and rushes to gather his scattered clothes. The bathroom door swings open, forcing him to crouch beside a potted ficus, like a piece of naked furniture.

Jocelyn crosses to the bed with purposeful strides, her focus elsewhere as she rifles through Rolland's discarded clothes. She finds his phone and scrolls through his texts.

In the bathroom, Rolland's eyes dart around the room, scanning, looking for a distraction. In a moment of surrender soaked with desperation, Rolland hurls himself out of the shower, bringing the shower curtain with him as he plummets to the floor. "HELP!" he yells.

Jocelyn runs back to the bathroom, giving Robert the opening he needs. He grabs the Crown Royal bag, slips it into his shoulder bag, collects his remaining clothes, and makes for the door on silent feet, until he steps on a belt buckle, which elicits a loud yelp.

Jocelyn pokes her head out of the bathroom. The last thing she sees is Robert's naked ass disappearing through the doorway, confirming her suspicions. Jocelyn's rage permeates the walls of the room into the hall. "YOU HAD ANOTHER

MAN IN HERE?"

In the hotel corridor, Robert's escape continues with comic absurdity as he collides with an elegant older woman dripping in jewels and fur despite the summer weather. The elderly woman shrieks in scandalized horror. "Relax, lady! I'm gay!"

Robert runs into the stairwell and dresses during his rapid descent. He drops the Crown Royal bag, scattering purple Pez-shaped pills across the steps. He drops to his knees and scoops them up. His new Sony Ericsson phone rings, and it shows "Dee" on the screen.

Three thousand miles away, in Windsor, Ontario, Daneeka (Dee) Black, a twenty-five-year-old ebony statue of a woman, stands outside her burning house with her fifteen-year-old sister, Rhonetta (Ronnie).

Around them, red and blue flashing lights cast eerie shadows over them as firefighters and EMTs blanket the scene. Their mother, Agnus, is wheeled by on a gurney wearing an oxygen mask. Ronnie bursts into tears and buries her face into Dee.

Dee pulls out her flip phone and speed dials the last number called. The phone rings, a moment later, Robert answers, sounding out of breath. "Hey Blackgirl!"

Dee's voice cracks and trembles as she speaks, all her usual strength stripped away. "Robbie, I need you." Her tone and the tremble in her voice say it all.

Back in Vancouver, the frantic escape energy changes in an instant. Robert stops and catches his breath.

His focus turns serious, "Give me two days, and girl, do I have a story for you."

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