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Kristin Rothell

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Of Stained Ceilings and Strong Hands

Kristin Rothell

The blood flows through my veins like sludge, crawling so slowly that my brain struggles to comprehend what is happening. I peel open weighted eyelids and stare up in a hazy daze for lord only knows how long before the visual input actually starts to compute.

The ceiling is cracked white tiles that have seen better days, their edges fading and spots of lord knows what seeped through until it looks like someone threw their coffee at the ceiling in a fit of rage.

It is a familiar ceiling.

I'm at work.

But why is my bed at work?

My body droops against something hard and it takes a minute for me to realize that I'm not lounging against the fuzzy blankets of my bed, but a hard, stained, carpeted floor. My head is not on my familiar pillow with the indentations *just so*, but against something coarse and made of wool that smells like my apartment. My coat. What the hell is my coat doing on the floor at work? What the hell am *I* doing on the floor at work?

A warm hand on my shoulder startles me into an upright position that I immediately regret. My stomach pitches, my eyes flutter, and I feel the bile rise up until all I can do is open my mouth and lurch forward. My stomach upends itself and I hear it

splatter into something plastic. I don't feel it against my legs, on my thighs, soaking into my pants. Instead, as I open my eyes to find out, a garbage can has been placed in front of me, containing the smelly mess.

It is moved away from me and the pounding in my head thanks whoever places a soothing hand at the small of my back.

I let my eyelids slide shut before I even attempt to vocalize my appreciation.

What the hell is happening?

I cast my mind back to the morning, trying to retrace my steps. Because surely something horrible happened to leave me feeling like this. All I can remember is waking up, seeing my dark brown hair and eyes in the mirror, my makeup just so, my new form-fitting dress a testament to Ross' superb sales, and entering work, a perfect, untouched coffee in my hand and sitting down at my desk to work.

After that? Ceiling. Ugly ass ceiling.

I shift slightly and lean back into the hand still on my back, letting it take the weight as I shift my hands to my face, hiding my mortification. I don't know what happened, but I must have done *something* to feel this bad.

"Can you hear me?"

I finally realize that the hand is speaking and twist slightly to my right to find the form lurking there. His warm, hazel eyes are soft and concerned. I know this man. I work with him.

“Eric?” I ask and I cringe at the sound of my own voice. It’s like I’ve gargled rocks and kept a few in my mouth for safe keeping.

And don’t get me started on the taste. I could probably choke a dog if I breathed too hard in its direction.

“Hey, you with me?” he asks, his deep voice a soothing contrast to the ever-present pounding in my head. It’s getting harder to stay upright but I struggle to keep myself together.

I have to know what happened.

I struggle with the question, my vocal cords exerting their dislike at being used, but I’m sure I must make some semblance of sense because Eric lets out a huff and his eyes turn hard and angry.

“Someone roofied you.”

The pieces fall into place. My memory loss. My general feeling of roadkill. The confusion.

Well. Shit.