

## **THE LAST OF THE INTERNS**

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I was on the train from Vassar to the city— to my internship at *Classique* magazine— when *Condé Nast* announced the end of its internship program. *Should I even go in to work?* I thought. But it was too late to turn around so I sat back in my seat and looked out the window as we passed Croton Harmon. The city skyline loomed ahead, thunderclouds gathering like volcano ash.

The subway was down so I hailed a cab. As the taxi pulled up to the 4 Times Square, my credit card was declined. Embarrassed, I stammered that I'd try it again but the driver fixed me with a pair of vacant eyes and murmured, "Forget it. There's no point anymore." Uneasy and bewildered, I stuttered "thank you" and jumped out of the cab. I reached the revolving doors a split second before the skies opened and pummeled the ground with rain. The lobby desk was strangely unguarded so I went straight to the elevator and rode an empty car up to the twelfth floor.

The elevator doors opened to reveal a desolate space that had once been vibrant and glamorous; no young women with judgmental glares pushing racks of couture; no editors rushing back and forth; no photographers waving glossy prints of famous faces. A young receptionist gazed, teary-eyed at the floor where the tattered pieces of the September issue were strewn. As I knelt to pick them up, a gust of wind came out of nowhere and further scattered the pages. A group of my fellow interns rushed past me, the click-clack of their high heels echoing down the hallway. I ran to ask them what was going on and was cut off by an exasperated cry: "Oh you know damn well," one of them said, bursting into tears as the group rounded the corner. Confused and frightened, I hastened to my boss's office.

I arrived at the door of Alexei Kauffman: A tall, elegant man of thirty-three with piercing blue eyes, always impeccably dressed and subtly masculine, yet graceful and effete. I knocked and the door swung open to reveal Alexei, seated facing the window. He turned around and I saw that his eyes were tired and sunken, his hair was less-than coiffed and his once manicured fingernails were all chewed-up.

"Sophia, dahling."

"Hello Alexei," I said. "What happened here? It's like an alternate universe! Are the interns all fired already? Am I fired?" Alexei raised a shaky hand to silence me. With a sickly smile he responded, "Dahling, yes they're fired, but you're not. You're the lone survivor of a once-great internship program. I don't know why it's over, why they can't just pay the interns, but it's too late now..."

"What are you talking about, Alexei?"

He gave me a creepy, knowing look before swiveling in his chair to face the window again. "Sophia, go into the main closet, I need you to collect some things for Victoria."

*Victoria Summers?! "What do you need me to get?"*

"You'll see once you're there. Go now," said Alexi. "Oh and Sophia, dahling... No Prada... Victoria hasn't worn Prada since... you know."

In the hallway I passed a room where an editor pressed her face against the copy machine glass, scanning it again and again as a coffee pot behind her overflowed with scorched brew. Someone shouted "I NEED A LATTE please GOD somebody get me a FUCKING LATTE". I kept walking. Turning the corner I arrived at the heart of the *Classique* offices. Whimpering magazine workers cowered beneath their desks. The major news networks blared from televisions that hung in the center of the room. I dodged the debris of overturned tables and discard-

ed platform pumps, past a once-stylish IT guy huddled half-naked on the floor, muttering to himself.

Anderson Cooper's shrill voice pierced the air. "CNN can confirm that Condé Nast has ended their coveted internship program after being sued by over-worked interns they never paid. A tragic story the ramifications of which—"

The whole building suddenly shuddered. I stumbled back down the hallway and into an office where a disheveled executive sat on the floor drinking scotch from the bottle. He looked up at me with the eyes of a nearly-rabid dog. "It's happening," he croaked. "There's no going back. Dear God what have we done?" I retreated slowly towards the door. "We've known for weeks. Now the world knows too. The interns, the damned *interns*." I stopped. "The interns?" I asked. "Yes, the interns!" he shouted. "Don't you see? Have you never played *Jenga*?! Don't you understand the principle at work here?" He slurred, "Without interns, *Classique* crumbles!" He cackled insanely. I ditched my heels and sprinted towards the main closet. Other laughs and screams added to the cacophony and outside the windows I raced past, men and women in few and tattered clothes smashed computers through the glass of the high-rise buildings opposite.

I slammed the closet door and bolted it with a Dries Van Noten scarf. Turning to face the gleaming racks of Saint Laurent and Alexander Wang, I was knocked to the ground by what felt like a Steelers linebacker and smelled like a venetian garden. The most famous face in fashion swam into view inches from mine. A razor-sharp bob of hair cut into my cheeks. Victoria Summers pinned me to the ground with shocking physical strength. "You're here," she said. "It's time to set things right".

Stunned, I could hardly squeak: "I don't understand."

"Of course not," said Victoria. "You're an intern. But not just any intern— you're the chosen one... To appease the publishing gods there must be a sacrifice... an intern sacrifice."

The blood raced to my head and my extremities grew numb.

"What an opportunity for you, my dear!" said Victoria as she bound my hands with a luxurious velvet ribbon.

I gathered my strength enough to ask, "Will I get course credit for this?"