

This is a script for the first chapter of a romance-themed visual novel titled 'No Objections to Love'.

Tracy Park, a 29 year-old Asian American with medium length hair and bangs, is parking a beaten-up, hand-me-down Volvo in a parking garage beneath a skyscraper in Manhattan.

Tracy, internally: *All these cars are so...ritzy.*

Tracy, aloud to herself: One day I'll drive something way nicer than these scrap heaps!

Tracy, internally: (Gosh...that one sure looks like Ms. Burkwood's...)

We flash back in black and white to a scene involving Tracy and her boss Donna Burkwood, a brunette woman in her mid to late 30's. The two are in Donna's office.

Donna, angrily: Misfiled reports AGAIN, Ms. Park!?

Tracy, sheepishly: I am, so, SO sorry, Ms. Burkwood. It won't happen again!

Donna, indignant: Oh, I know it won't! Because you're—*sigh*.

Tracy, internally: (Welp. Rest in peace to me!)

Donna, more level: Because I'm sending you to train with an old associate of mine for two weeks.

Tracy, deferentially: Ma'am, I—

Donna: Don't worry, you'll be paid the same as here. I called in a favor with an old colleague of mine.

Donna, sterner: Judging by your less than stellar performance thus far, I'd say you'll get *a lot* out of this experience. Thank me later.

Flash back to the present.

Tracy, internally: (I thought I was a goner for sure!)

Tracy: (Oh! There's the staircase up to the building!)

Tracy takes the parking lot stairwell, and we change scenes to a ritzy-looking reception area. Mitchell Germain, a black man with shorter nappy hair in his late 20's is standing patiently by the front desk, chatting with the woman working it.

Tracy, to Mitchell: Um, excuse me, is this Mr. Costello's office?

Mitchell: Yes, that's right.

Mitchell, amicably: Say, you wouldn't happen to be Ms. Tracy Park, the new trainer, would you?

Tracy: In the flesh!

Tracy, internally: (Tracy, do you always have to pick *the* dumbest thing to say at any given moment?)

Mitchell: Hi there! My name's Mitchell Germain. I'm a private assistant to Mr. Costello here at Costello Consulting.

Tracy: Great to meet you, Mr. Germain!

Mitchell: Mitchell's just fine!

Mitchell: Mr. Costello is in his office on the thirty-ninth floor. Follow me!

Tracy, internally: (Wow, the thirty-ninth floor...)

Mitchell calls an elevator and enters it along with Tracy.

Mitchell: So, Ms. Park, how long have you lived in the area?

Tracy: Well I've been in NYC for about five years now.

Mitchell: Greatest city in the world, right?

Mitchell: Just a little over a year myself. Got a place in Tribeca, another in Soho, the West Village...how about you?

Tracy, timidly: Oh, um, the Bronx, actually...

Mitchell, awkwardly: Ah...*ahem*.

Tracy, surprised: You've had three apartments in one year!?

At that moment, the elevator bell rings.

Mitchell: Uh—oh! And here we are!

Scene changes over to a bustling office space. Marble floors, exquisite paintings, and upholstered chairs make up the accoutrements of the place.

Mitchell: Believe it or not, this entire floor is comprised of people who work for Mr. Costello!

Tracy: No kidding...

Mitchell: Yup! Takes all hands on deck to keep this prestigious firm afloat!

Mitchell: Over there's accounting, that's IT, that there's legal...and that *barely* scratches the surface. We've got folks working here on floors 35-38 too.

Tracy, exasperated internally: (Am I gonna have to learn all this!?)

Mitchell: ...All working for the man, the myth, the...you know the rest.

Mitchell: Speaking of which, why don't I show you to his office now!

Tracy: Let's check it out!

Tracy, internally: (Oh man, this is a lot!)

Tracy: (Thank goodness for Mitchell. I wouldn't know where to begin on my own!)

Scene change to the lacquered double doors leading into Brent Costello's office.

Mitchell: And here we are!

Mitchell, smiling: Time to meet the man himself.

Scene change to the interior of Brent Costello's office. Brent—a suited-up, blonde man in his early 40's but who looks quite good for age—is on an important phone call, and the situation seems tense.

Brent, into the receiver: Yes—yes—that's right—

Brent: No, you're absolutely right. I understand *completely*, Mrs. Peterson, I—

Mitchell, whispering: Ms. Park has arrived, Mr. Costello.

Brent, to Mitchell: Yeah yeah, gimme a couple minutes—

Brent is taken aback by the sight of Tracy.

Brent: Mrs. Peterson, I'll have to call you back. Something's come up.

Brent abruptly hangs up the phone.

Tracy, shyly: Sorry, don't let me interrupt!

Brent, confidently: It's no big deal!

Tracy, internally: (Holy crap, he's, like, the hottest person I've ever seen!)

Brent: ...Guess you overheard me screwing up big time with Mrs. Peterson, haha...

Tracy: (So super-hot people make dumb mistakes too, huh...)

Tracy: Erm, uh, so what do you for a living, Mr. Costello?

Mitchell: ...

Tracy, internally: (OH MY GOD YOU IDIOT PLEASE SHUT UP!!!)

Brent, cheekily: Funny that you mention it. I actually run a consultancy agency much like this one!

Tracy: Yes, of course, I'm sorry, that was dumb, I wasn't making any—

Brent, laughing: You're good, you're good!

Brent: Mitchell, could you deliver these documents to Mr. Carmichael in accounting?

Mitchell, with a look of consternation: Right away, Mr. Costello.

Mitchell exits the scene.

Brent: So I hear you're struggling at work.

Tracy: You could say that, Mr. Costello.

Brent: Please, Brent is fine.

Tracy: Well, then I suppose you could say that, Brent.

Brent: The world of defense attorneys is harsh. Especially for someone your age.

Tracy, internally: (Was he this hot when he was younger, too?)

Brent, inquisitively: You look about in your early 20's, that right?

Tracy, blushing: I'm 29...

Tracy: Yourself?

Brent: Ha, me? I'm a geezer. Pushin' 40.

Tracy: Brent, you *definitely* don't look a day over 30.

Brent: Oh, stop. You flatter me.

Brent, flirtatiously: I would have thought you'd just graduated college!

Tracy: God, I wish. At least my lack of experience at that age would make sense...

Brent: Eh, so you're a late bloomer.

Brent: I was too.

Brent: So were a bunch of people working here. What matters is the road ahead.

Tracy: I suppose so...thanks Brent.

Tracy: Hearing that takes a weight off my shoulders.

Brent: Right on! So then, now that all the pleasantries are out of the way...

Brent: Let's start you with the basics of assistant work in this field!

Tracy, internally with dismay: (Oh boy.)

Brent: I trust Mitchell took you on a tour of the place?

Tracy: Yeah, he's so nice!

Brent: The man wears his heart on his sleeve!

Brent: That's why I hired him.

Tracy, laughing: Yeah, that's totally true. I hope him and I get along.

Tracy, internally: (That was SUCH a cute thing of him to say. Does this guy ever miss???)

Tracy: (...Although I could do without that Mitchell guy's opinions on my living arrangements...)

Tracy: (...Oh, who am I kidding? My apartment totally sucks!)

Brent: I'm confident the two of you will get along just fine.

Tracy, confidently: Brent, I promise you I won't miss a beat!

Brent: Right on! First things first, let's—

All of a sudden, the phone rings.

Brent: Ugh, I have to take this.

Brent: Here, write your address down. I'll pick you up for dinner at an old favorite of mine tomorrow night so we can talk more. My treat.

Tracy, internally: (WAIT WHAT!?!?!?!?)

Tracy, in hysterics: Uh—sure—absolutely, Mr. Costello—I mean Brent—I mean—

Brent: Just spend the rest of the day shadowing Mitchell. Best way to learn!

Brent: And take the day off tomorrow. I'm gonna be tied up with this Mrs. Peterson situation. I'll see you tomorrow night!

Brent, on the phone: Yes, so sorry, Mrs. Peterson, where were we...ah, yes...

Four or five hours pass, and it's the end of the day. Tracy and Mitchell are standing together in the reception room where they first met.

Mitchell: Great first day of training, Tracy!

Tracy, weary: Thanks, Mitchell! I'm lucky to have a teacher like you.

Tracy, internally: (Oh my God I am EXHAUSTED!)

Tracy: (When Mitch gets in the zone, it's like he forgets I'm totally clueless about all this stuff!)

Mitchell: I'm sure Donna will be thrilled to see all the progress you're sure to make over the next couple weeks.

Mitchell, cautious: Oops. I shouldn't refer to her so informally like that...

Mitchell: Anyway, see you in a couple days! Enjoy your day off.

Tracy, happily: Thanks again!

Tracy, internally: (Hmm, that was strange.)

Tracy, inquisitively: (Did something happen between Mitchell and Ms. Burkwood?)

Scene change to nighttime at Tracy's house. She's in her bedtime clothes.

Tracy, aloud: I couldn't have wished for a better first day in training!

Tracy: It was overwhelming, but I've learned so much already!

Tracy: Say, it'd be a shame to let this newfound knowledge go to waste...

Tracy, defiantly: Think I'll pull a shift at Ms. Burkwood's tomorrow!

Tracy, scheming: She's gonna be SO surprised how quickly I'm catching on!

Scene change to Donna Burkwood's office the next day.

Donna: YOU WHAT!?

Tracy: Yeah, can you believe it? They showed me all the departments, and taught me how to file reports, so that won't be a problem anymore, and—

Donna: Not the reports, Ms. Park!

Donna, with venom: He's taking you to dinner!? As part of your TRAINING!?!?!?

Tracy: Oh, right, that.

Tracy: I mean, it happened so fast, and I couldn't say no, so—

Donna: HA!

Donna: Couldn't say no, huh?

Tracy: I mean, he's sort of my boss—

Donna, in defiance: So now HE'S your boss, is that it?

Tracy, deferentially: Temporarily, at least...

Tracy, internally: (Geez. Who peed in her cereal this morning?)

Donna: Well then...

Donna: Since you're doing *so* well this early into your training, surely you'd be up for a little productivity test.

Donna dumps a huge stack of documents onto Tracy's desk.

Donna, coldly: Sort these documents by the client's last name.

Tracy, internally: (Uh???)

Donna drops another stack.

Donna: And these too.

Tracy, internally: (UHHHHHHH!?!?!?!?!?)

Donna: Oh, and I need it all done before you clock out.

Tracy, exasperated: Y-yes, right away, Ms. Burkwood!

Tracy, internally: (Gaaaahh, I should have just stayed home!!!)

Fast forward to that evening. The documents sit on Donna's desk, perfectly organized and tidily stacked.

Tracy: All done, Ms. Burkwood! Not bad for one day in training, huh?

Donna: That's—right. This is, *ahem*.

Donna: Good work today, Ms. Park.

Tracy: Guess I'm off! I'll let you know how it goes tonight!

Donna: S-sure. T-try not to have too much fun, yeah?

Scene change to Tracy standing in front of her car in the parking lot behind Donna's office building.

Tracy, internally and looking triumphant: (YES!!!!!!!!!!!!)

Tracy: (I TOTALLY KILLED IT TODAY!!!)

Tracy: (Now to get home and figure out what to wear tonight!)

Tracy: (*ahem*)

Tracy: (Pull yourself together, Trace. Be cool. Be...)

Tracy: (...Not like yourself.)

Scene change to Tracy standing in front of her apartment, waiting to be picked up. She's wearing a scarlet red dress with matching lipstick and her hair in a tasteful bun.

Tracy, internally: (UGH I FEEL SO NOT COOL!!!)

Tracy: (I can't believe how quickly things are happening...)

Tracy: (I went from utter hopelessness, thinking I was gonna lose my job...)

Tracy: (...To...all this, practically in the blink of an eye!)

Tracy: (Makes my head spin!)

Suddenly, a limousine pulls up to Tracy's stop.

Tracy, aloud: Whoa, dude!

The driver, a white woman in her 30's with pink hair, rolls down the passenger-side window.

The driver: Tracy Park, yeah?

Tracy, with reservations: ...That's right.

The driver: Get the door, yeah?

Tracy: You're...not Brent—I mean, Mr. Costello.

The driver: Huh. Hadn't noticed.

Tracy: ...

Tracy: ...Who are you, exactly?

The driver: Alright, fun's over.

The driver: Mr. Costello's held up. Got the whole back to yourself!

The driver: See, when you make Mr. Costello kind of money, tardiness ain't a thing!

The driver: Now you got the door or what?

Tracy: Uh...yeah, sure, no problem.

Tracy lets herself into the back seat of the limousine.

The driver: Name's Rose, by the by. Nice to meetcha'!

Tracy: Um...yeah, likewise!

Scene change to the exterior of a fancy restaurant.

Rose: And here's the place!

Rose: Pleasure doin' business witcha', Ms. Park!

Tracy: Just Tracy, Rose.

Rose: Well how's about you take my number 'case you need a ride somewheres, Ms. Tracy?

Tracy, taken aback: Oh, wow! That's...so thoughtful of you!

Rose: Yeah...thoughtful. Sure.

Rose: Anyways, sees ya when I sees ya!

Rose departs in the limousine. Tracy's best friend Stacey, a blonde white woman in her late 20's, appears with Tracy and Stacey's mutual friend, Logan Wallace, a bearded white man with brown hair around Tracy's age.

Stacey: Damn girl, you're workin' that dress!

Tracy: Thanks babe!

Tracy: Logan, what's up, brother?

Logan: Oh, hey Trace. Y'know, just...on a date with your best friend.

Tracy: And lookin' dapper!

Logan: You look beautiful, Trace.

Trace: Aw, thanks...

Tracy hits Logan with a pair of friends-only finger guns.

Tracy: Mind if I one-on-one your date for a sec?

Logan: Yeah, sure thing. She's all yours.

Logan disappears from the view.

Tracy: Hey, thanks for doing this.

Stacey: No worries! First dates can be dangerous.

Stacey: You know I've got your back, girl!

Tracy: Yeah, I know. Means a lot.

Stacey: Nervous?

Tracy: Feel like I should be more than I am.

Tracy: Honestly, more than anything, I'm frickin' stoked, man!

Stacey: Ay, killer! That's the spirit!

Stacey: Now, you know this'll be tough for Logan...

Tracy: Yeah, well, I've gotta get through to him somehow.

Tracy: He and I just...didn't work out. Not like we didn't try.

Tracy: I gotta move on, y'know? *He's* gotta move on.

Stacey: Yeah, I feel you, Trace. But...I don't know that I'm the girl to make that happen for him.

Tracy: Stacey, come on! You've had your eyes on him for years now. I don't know a woman more charming, fun, and sexy than you.

Stacey: Well I AM charming, fun, and sexy. That all checks out.

Stacey: Still...it just feels wrong somehow. Like driving a stranger's car.

Tracy: Well he's my ex and you've got my blessing, babe. That's all that matters.

Stacey: Yeah, yeah...*sigh*. Okay.

Stacey, with excitement: Let's not keep our dates waiting!

Stacey: SO can't wait to meet your, uh, "new boss"!

Tracy: About that...he's late.

Stacey: Ooooffff. Brent, buddy...

Tracy, slightly annoyed: Yeppppp!

Scene change to Tracy sitting alone at the restaurant bar manned by a single person, a Cuban man with a southern accent in his mid-30's.

Tracy: Excuse me, sir! Mezcal, on the rocks, please.

The bartender: Comin' right up, miss.

Tracy sits quietly, awaiting her drink.

Tracy, internally: (*sigh* Everyone's having the time of their lives...)

Tracy: (Everyone, 'cept for me.)

Tracy: (Ha. What a drag.)

The bartender arrives with Tracy's drink.

The bartender: Mezcal on the rocks!

The bartender places the drink on a coaster in front of Tracy.

The bartender: Heavy starter there, don't mind me sayin'.

Tracy: Yeah, lookin' like that kinda night.

The bartender: Gotta story?

Tracy: Eh, not much. Suck at my new job, sent off to paid training for a couple weeks...

Tracy: One thing led to another and here I am on a date with my trainer—

The bartender: And he ain't one for hard commitments. I know the type.

Tracy: It's wack.

The bartender: That's plain to see.

The bartender: So how you make a living?

Tracy: I'm an assistant for a private lawyer. Got the job thanks to my clingy ex, who I set up with my best friend over there to make sure I don't get murdered.

Tracy: What about you, mister...?

Phil: Name's Philip. But you can call me Phil.

Tracy: I'm Tracy. But everyone calls me Trace.

Phil: Well Trace, when I'm not making cocktails, I moonlight as a psychiatrist. Here's my card.

Phil pulls a business card from his wallet and hands it to Tracy.

Tracy: Whoa! What are you doing here, then!?

Phil: Full custody of three kids is what I'm doing here!

Tracy: Wow...you're a man of many talents, Phil.

Phil: Kind of you to say, Trace.

Tracy: So, Phil the Bartending Psychiatrist...any advice for a woman who hasn't been on a first date in like seven years?

Phil: If I knew things like that, wouldn't be hangin' around this joint!

Phil: ...Just be yourself. You seem more than fine to me, Ms. Trace.

Phil: That's all this gentleman approaching my bar could hope for. What are you havin', sir?

Brent approaches the bar from behind Tracy wearing a fashionable tuxedo.

Brent, timidly: I'll, uh...have whatever she's having.

Phil, with a hint of intimidation: Mezcal, on the rocks. An excellent choice. Coming right up, sir.

Brent: Is that a heavy drink?

Tracy: Yes, Brent. That's a heavy drink.

Tracy: And you're here!

Tracy: You're here!

Brent: I am. And I'm late, and I owe you an apology.

Brent: Bartender, make sure all her drinks go on my tab, yeah?

Phil makes a hand signal to signify he'll oblige the request. Scene change to Tracy and Brent sitting at a table together. The two have just ordered.

Tracy: Good choice. I love chicken marsala! And this restaurant, I mean, God, it's just gorgeous here!

Brent: Used to bring dates here all the time and order that exact thing.

Tracy, annoyed internally: (Other dates, huh? Alright, player. Cool.)

Brent: That was before I started the business...nothing quite like that taste.

Brent: Your pasta with spicy peanut sauce is sounding pretty good, though...

Tracy, flirtatiously: I'll let you taste mine if you let me taste yours...

Brent, deflecting: Oh, um, sure!

Brent takes a sip of his drink.

Tracy: ...

Brent: ...I feel like a total idiot for making you wait like that.

Tracy: Brent, it's alright, man! You're the boss here.

Tracy: Plus you're making it up to me by footing the bill, remember?

Brent: Ha, yeah, right.

Tracy: You look good, by the way.

Tracy, internally: (Understatement of the year, Trace. Holy hell.)

Brent: Thanks! You too.

Brent: Anywho, how was your day off?

Tracy: Funny story...

Tracy: I actually pulled a shift at work.

Brent, confused: I don't follow?

Tracy: Spent the day organizing documents for Ms. Burkwood.

Brent chokes on his drink.

Brent: Oh...*cough* really? That's *cough*, um, swell of you.

Tracy: Yeah actually managed to get it all done. It's all thanks to Mitchell!

Tracy, concerned: You okay, man?

Brent: Yeah, yeah, don't mind me...

Tracy: Right...um, how'd your day go?

Brent: God, don't even get me started...

Brent: It's this thing with Mrs. Peterson, the client on the phone yesterday.

Brent, wearily: She's driving me up the wall!

Tracy: Sounds rough!

Brent: You don't know the half of it.

Brent, embarrassed: Sorry.

Brent: You should have ordered something while you waited for me!

Tracy: Hey, I don't roll like that!

Tracy: The Mezcal was appetizer enough.

Tracy: Plus, having to wait for the dishes to arrive just means the night goes longer.

Brent: That is true...

Brent: So, what are you looking for out of this arrangement?

Tracy, internally: (Er, does he mean like, workwise, or...?)

Tracy: Hmm...

Tracy: I just want to be the best me I can be, you know?

Tracy: The last two days, it's like I'm a new me.

Tracy: But I'm worried it's all just a fluke.

Tracy: Having to be this on top of things every day...

Tracy: How does Mitchell do it?

Tracy: How do *you* do it?

Brent: Question of my life, sister.

Tracy, internally with concern: (Sister...)

Brent: I'm the type to bury myself in work to distract from, like, everything.

Brent: And Mitchell...he's the same.

Brent: Maybe that's the real reason I brought him on.

Tracy, internally: (Great, I've fallen for the, 'Sorry, babe, I've gotta work on our anniversary!' type.)

Tracy: And how's that worked out for you so far?

Brent: Well, single and pushing 40...

Tracy: So swimmingly, then.

Brent, laughing: Yeah, exactly.

There's a bit of an awkward silence between the two.

Tracy: You know, I think you'll find someone sooner than later.

Brent: Oh yeah? When do you figure?

Tracy puts her hand on Brent's.

Tracy: Sooner.

Brent looks a bit taken aback. All of a sudden, Donna and Mitchell walk up to their table.

Donna: If it isn't MY assistant: Ms. Park!

Tracy: Uh, hi, Ms. Burkwood.

Donna: And with my old colleague, Brent Costello! What a surprise!

Brent, shocked: Donna!

Brent, confused: And...Mitchell?

Tracy, internally: (You gotta be kiddin' me.)

Mitchell: Uh...good evening, sir.

Tracy, annoyed: A real turn of events...

Tracy: So what brings the two of you here?

Donna: Well if you MUST know...

Donna: I suppose I've been feeling out of sorts lately, what with work and all.

Donna: Seemed an old-fashioned night out would do the trick!

Donna: And Mr. Germain here was free, so I just figured, why not?

Brent: How...nice.

Mitchell, awkwardly: I...hope you have a great time tonight, sir.

Brent: Likewise, Mitchell, erm, Mr. Germain...

Donna: Oh, we will! And Mr. Costello, I trust you've plenty of vital insights on the intricacies of law with which to educate my assistant, hmm?

Brent: Oh, yes, of course...

Stacey trots in with Logan toward Donna.

Stacey, fake surprised: Oh. My. Gosh.

Stacey: You must be my friend Tracy's new boss, that famous lawyer!

Stacey: Mrs. Burnwood, was it?

Donna, annoyed: Erm, it's Ms. Burkwood, actually...

Stacey, fake excited: Incredible coincidence! Me and my boyfriend here were just talking about enrolling into law school.

Stacey: Weren't we, dear?

Logan, embarrassed: Oh, uh, yeah, that's right. Can't wait, babe!

Stacey: Say, Ms. Burkwood, mind walking us newbies through the process?

Donna: Erm, well, I suppose...

Stacey: Great! Just pull your chairs to our table over here...

Mitchell, whispering to Brent: Sorry, sir...

Brent gestures to him to signify everything's alright. Donna, Mitchell, Stacey, and Logan all depart from the scene.

Tracy and Brent's food arrives, and they eat quietly for more than a moment.

Tracy, awkwardly: How's yours, uh, taste?

Tracy, internally: (Please just dig me a hole to bury myself in.)

Brent, awkwardly: Oh, it's, it's good. You know, I've had it before, so...

Tracy: Right...

Tracy, quieter: ...Right.

Brent: How's yours?

Tracy: It's great! Here, try some—

Brent: Oh, no, that's alright. Thank you though.

Brent, sheepishly: I'm allergic to nuts, actually...

Tracy: Ah, jeez, sorry about that.

Tracy, internally: (I would like to die bare minimum four-thousand consecutive deaths.)

Brent: Oh no, it's all good!

Brent: Anyway...

Brent: Like I was saying, law's like anything else. It's all about how much you want it.

Brent: If you work hard, people won't notice when you're wingin' it.

Brent: Well, they won't notice *much*.

Tracy: Ah. Yeah...that makes sense.

Brent: Yup. Work hard, focus, all that stuff. You got this.

Tracy: Right...thanks.

Tracy: ...Is that all you have for me?

Brent: Well, you can shadow Mitchell for the rest of the training period. Like I said, best way to learn.

Brent: ...If that works for you.

Tracy: Uh...yeah. That works. For me.

Brent: Awesome! Cool.

Tracy, internally: (Wow...)

Some time passes.

Brent: Well, I'm stuffed.

Tracy: Ditto.

Brent: Cool. I'll just grab the check...

Scene change to the interior of Brent's limousine, with Rose driving again. Brent and Tracy are quiet after the awkward dinner date.

Brent: ...

Tracy: ...

Tracy, internally: (I feel like a third wheel *for myself*.)

Rose elects to break the silence.

Rose: So! Bring me somethin' nice from that fancy restaurant?

Brent: Hah, sorry Rose. I'll make it up to you tomorrow.

Rose: Ah, foey. Used to bring me stuff from your other dates there all the time. Remember that time when—

Tracy, interjecting: Yeah, me too! Let's grab a drink sometime, Rose.

Rose: You've got my number! I'll drive.

Rose: Just kidding! Would never take the wheel when I've had a sip.

Brent: ...

Scene change to the exterior of Tracy's apartment late at night, where both Brent and Tracy are standing.

Tracy: I guess I'll see you tomorrow.

Tracy: Thanks for dinner, Brent! It was fun.

Brent: Of course!

Brent: Have a good night!

Tracy starts to open the door to her apartment, but Brent stops her.

Brent: Trace, sorry, hang on a sec.

Tracy: Hmm?

Tracy, internally: (???)

Brent: That...didn't exactly go as planned.

Tracy: Seems so.

Brent: I, look, there's something I gotta get off my chest...

Brent: You probably noticed my...unease around Donna.

Brent: Er, Ms. Burkwood.

Tracy: I sensed some history, yeah.

Brent: Yeah...I worked with her at Barnes & Schluster. That is, until I quit.

Tracy: Wow, really?

Tracy, sarcastically: Can't imagine why you'd do such a thing.

Brent: We were...an inappropriate object.

Tracy, internally: (Whoa, wait, hang on, what!?!?!?!?!?)

Tracy: Wh-wh-pause. Time out.

Tracy: ...That's a lot.

Brent: Tell me about it.

Tracy: You first!

Brent: What's there to say?

Brent: We were hires at the same firm. Cubicles right next to each other.

Brent: A couple long and stressful nights led to another and...

Tracy, internally: (Yuck.)

Brent: It was nice. But those things always are at first.

Brent: The work piled up, and so did my misgivings about the two of us.

Brent: Things she'd say would stick around in my mind. And not in a good way.

Brent: I started having doubts about us in the long term.

Brent: So one day I just broke it off.

Tracy: Wow, just like that?

Brent: Prepared some lame excuse about our relationship being a professional liability for her career development...that sort of thing.

Tracy: And she didn't take it so well, I gather.

Brent: No. No she did not.

Brent: That was when I knew I had to start afresh.

Tracy: So the origin story of Costello Consulting comes down to a bad break-up.

Brent: Sadly there's more. Around that time, there was an assistant interning at Barnes & Schluster looking to transition to full-time. He showed *a lot* of promise.

Tracy: Wait, you don't mean—

Brent: Mitchell, that's right. I coaxed him to come work with me for a better salary than what B&S were willing to pay him, which to be fair I followed through on.

Tracy: Money talks, I suppose.

Tracy: So what does this have to do with Ms. Burkwood?

Brent: Well...

Brent: See, Donna sort of wanted Mitchell to be *her* assistant...

Tracy, internally: *Oh, Brent. Buddy.*

Tracy: So you didn't just kick the hornet's nest, you shoved your foot in up to your knee and—

Brent, interjecting: It was a tense time.

Brent: That's why when Donna called up out of the blue about your training, I felt like I couldn't say no. I owed her that much.

Tracy: So I'm professional collateral, then.

Brent: No, Trace, it's not like that!

Brent: Matter of fact, I've been impressed how quickly you've picked up on things around the office.

Tracy, a little annoyed: Stop it...

Brent: No, I'm serious.

Brent: It's more than just your looks that I fell for.

Tracy: You...what?

Brent: I...

The two stand in silence for a second.

Tracy: Brent, look, that's a fun story, but why exactly are you telling me it?

Brent: I mean, because...gah.

Brent: Can't think of how to say this.

Tracy: So don't think.

Brent: After all that stuff went down, I swore I would never again date somebody in my professional sphere.

Brent: Until the moment you stepped through my doorway.

Tracy: Brent...

Brent: You shell-shocked me, Trace.

Brent: Look at me! I'm the CEO of a successful law consulting agency on a first date with a woman who's got me tripping over my words like a little kid.

Brent: If that doesn't mean anything, I don't know what could.

Tracy: I...I don't know what to say.

Brent: Look.

Brent: The way things are headed at work, pretty soon I'll be too busy to date, period.

Brent, seriously: Which is why I want you to come work for me.

Tracy, internally: (Whaaaaaaa—)

Tracy, shocked: Come again?

Brent: It's my company, so if anyone takes notice of us and has something to say about it, well...

Brent: You get the idea.

Tracy: This is...a lot to think about.

Brent: I know.

Brent: So don't think.

End of chapter one.

Next chapter: Tracy and Brent's relationship tests Mitchell's patience, while Donna does some prying. Tracy gets a hang of the job, while struggling to answer Brent's big question. Finally, an important phone call leads Tracy down a road she couldn't have anticipated.