

The Man Hunt Is On: Ramona in the City

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Ramona the Manhandler

Calm down, Imelda told herself. Every time the door swung open, she held her breath. It happened so often, she was getting dizzy. The Upper East Side Starbucks was always busy during the morning commute. Imelda knew that because she'd been staking out the place for over a week from the deli next door. Every morning, Ramona Singer breezed in at 7:50. But today was different. Today, Imelda finally worked up the courage to sit inside the Starbucks. Today would be the day she'd finally speak to her idol, Ramona.

Last month, after another horrendous first date, Imelda drowned her sorrows in a pint of Häagen-Dazs and the newest Cosmo. Between tears and chunks of cookie dough, she stumbled upon the article that would change her life: "Ramona's Top 10 Manhandling Rules." Imelda had never been handled by a man, or even manhandled herself, but she yearned to do it. She felt that Ramona was speaking directly to her. Imelda had to meet this titan; her livelihood and happiness depended on it. Another cold winter in Manhattan without love was not an option. Unfortunately, Imelda was painfully shy, so she needed a strong woman to show her the way.

The front office at Cosmopolitan wouldn't give Imelda the writer's address, and even threatened to call the police the seventh time she called. Eventually, Imelda ringed during a new intern's shift and convinced the novice to share the vicinity in which Ramona worked. Good enough—Imelda would figure out the rest! It was a hike to get from her fifth floor walkup in Queens to the chic streets of the Upper East Side, but it was worth it.

At 7:56, Imelda began to worry. Ramona was never late. But then, she saw her! Ramona was even prettier in person with her shiny blonde hair and svelte bod. She looked like that actress from Melrose Place, Heather Locklear. She was in a red power suit and held a bag that definitely cost more than Imelda's rent.

Imelda stood up, took a deep breath, and got in line behind Ramona. Imelda's palms were sweaty and her heart was racing, maybe because she was about to meet her hero, but probably because she drank five cups of the dark blend already.

"Excuse me," she said as she tapped Ramona's slim shoulder.

"Yes?"

Clutching her magazine, Imelda held up Ramona's article. "I'm a huge fan, your biggest fan."

"Oh!" Ramona's big eyes got even wider than seemed humanly possible. They were the exact shade of blue as the ocean.

"I, um, was wondering if I could talk to you for five minutes?"

"What would you like, ma'am?" interrupted the Starbucks barista.

"Let me get a double chai latte, Grande. No, make that Venti." Ramona turned to Imelda. "Would you like one too? My treat."

Brilliant AND generous? Imelda managed an enthusiastic nod.

Ramona grabbed the two drinks and said, "Walk with me?"

The two ladies began their way down 84th Street.

"So, tell me about yourself, Imelda. Are you a writer too?"

"Oh no. I'm a secretary for my uncle. I just...um, well." She wished she could stop stammering. "Your article really spoke to me."

"Wonderful! It's all true too."

Ramona was walking so fast that Imelda found herself running at a slow jog.

"That's the thing. I want to be able to handle men...like you," stuttered Imelda.

Ramona stopped in her tracks and looked Imelda up and down. Imelda suddenly felt like Ramona's eyes were mirrors on her messy hair, dated outfit, and unglamorous face.

"Be at the Equinox on 5th Avenue at 8am tomorrow morning. Don't be late. I don't have any more guest passes, but the owner has a crush on me, so it shouldn't be a problem."

Before Imelda could respond, Ramona turned a corner and disappeared.

Work It Out

Of course, her train was running late. Imelda ran from the station all the way to the gym. By the time she arrived, she was sweating from head to toe. She found Ramona jogging on the treadmill, dressed in a leotard and barely flushed cheeks. Suddenly, the sweatpants and oversized T-shirt Imelda bought at Ross the night before felt like a bad idea.

"You're late. Luckily, I'm the most forgiving person you will ever meet." Ramona hopped off the treadmill. "My seven-mile warmup is done. Time for free weights."

Ramona walked across Equinox with such an air of confidence, like she owned the place.

"As you know from my article, maintaining a fit physique is important. Not just for a man, but for you. It's a great release." She handed Imelda two 10-pound weights. "Copy me."

They started with bicep curls, then triceps, and incorporated squats and lunges. It was invigorating in a way Imelda hadn't felt before. She felt powerful.

"So, Imelda, tell me about your dating history. I need to know what I'm working with."

"I don't have much history. I haven't had a boyfriend since college. I've been on a lot of first dates, but that's it."

Ramona stared at Imelda with the look anyone would give a pigeon with a broken wing.

“I like to help people in need.” Ramona stretched onto the mat in a right split. “You may not know this, but I wasn’t always so outgoing. I had to work at it.”

“That seems impossible.”

“It’s true. I’ve been through the ringer, but I’m fighter and worked hard to get to this point.”

“That’s amazing.” Imelda hung on her every word.

“Also, I work in fashion. We need to get you a new wardrobe.”

Imelda couldn’t argue with that.

“I’m not perfect, though it may seem like I am. I had my heart broken. I had to learn to love myself before any man could love me.”

Imelda wanted to tell Ramona that she loved her too, and that she was everything Imelda had ever wanted to be, but she held her tongue.

Ramona switched to a left split.

“The heart is a muscle. You have to work at it, just like you would your bod.”

“I’m ready to do the work,” Imelda promised.

“Let’s meet tomorrow at Bergdorf’s to continue our makeover. I know you won’t be late this time.”

Dress for Love

Bergdorf’s was not in Imelda’s budget, but she had some money tucked away for an emergency, and this certainly felt like one. Ramona was laughing with a handsome sales associate when Imelda caught up with her.

“Imelda! Meet Frederick. He’s helping us out today.” She handed Imelda a stack of dresses. “I picked some things out for you. I think your color is purple.”

“Oh yes, me too. Definitely purple, maybe red?” Frederick said, smiling.

Imelda could feel her cheeks burning.

“You’re the expert, Ramona.”

“Oh, hunny, you flatter me, but yes, I am!” She hit Frederick on the shoulder and shooed him away.

“Did you see what I did there?”

Imelda didn’t.

“Flirting—smiling, laughing, and finding excuses to touch him.”

Ah, manhandling tip number two . How could Imelda forget?

“Well, he seems to like you too.”

“Oh hunny, he’s gay!”

Imelda had lived in New York for seven years and had never met an actual gay person.

“Gay men are perfect for practicing your flirting skills. There’s nothing to lose!”

Ramona really was too clever.

All the dresses Ramona picked out were a size too small, but she convinced Imelda to wear the purple Todd Oldham for drinks at the Plaza with her tomorrow night. “No ifs, ands, or buts about it.”

The price tag was steep, but it was worth it.

Get Out There

The Plaza was straight out of a movie. Men in suits, gorgeous women, and cocktails for \$20. Being dateable was expensive, but Ramona said to never pay for your own drinks. It was all part of her education.

“That dress really does look fab on you!” Ramona said as she drank her Pinot Grigio. She explained it was her “signature” drink. Every woman should have one.

“Any men catch your eye?”

Imelda scanned the room. They all caught her eye.

“Remember, hunny, he doesn’t need to be—“

“—Kevin Costner,” said Imelda, finishing Ramona’s sentence. That was number one in the article.

“I love, love, love that you pay such close attention!”

She took Imelda by the arm and dragged her to other end of the bar where two Wall Street types were drinking whiskey.

“Hello, I’m Ramona and this is my very dear friend, Imelda. Call her Melly.”

They exchanged pleasantries, and Ramona wouldn’t stop laughing. Imelda couldn’t tell why she was laughing, but the men liked it.

“So, Melly, what do you do?” asked the shorter, less attractive one.

“She’s an executive assistant!” Ramona exclaimed. “She works for her uncle. It’s very lucrative.”

“Ah, a family business. I work for my father at the Stock Exchange.”

“Will you boys excuse us while we powder our noses?” Ramona whispered.

The second they entered the bathroom, Ramona got cross.

“It’s like you aren’t trying. I didn’t see you smile once, Melly.”

“I’m sorry, Ramona. I’m so nervous. I’m not interesting or beautiful. I’m nothing like you.”

Grabbing her shoulders, Ramona looked Imelda in the eyes, slapped her face, and turned her toward the mirror.

“Melly, look at that girl.”

All Imelda saw was an awkward woman in an ill-fitting dress. Imelda shrugged.

“Melly, I see a very pretty young woman who is smart and sweet. You just need to know it.”

Ramona’s kind words made Imelda cry. Just as a tear slipped out, Ramona slapped her again—hard.

“I don’t mince words. I only speak truth. We’re going back out there, and you’re going to ask that nice stockbroker for his digits.”

“Number three. Always ask the man for his digits?”

“That’s right, Melly. You’ll boost his confidence...”

“...and have the power” Imelda had read those words in Ramona’s article a thousand times, but never thought she would actually use them.

The men they’d been talking to had left, but Imelda was determined to make Ramona proud. After two more Pinot Grigios and three more slaps from Ramona, Imelda made her way to the dance floor. The DJ was playing “All That She Wants” by Ace of Base. Supplied with liquid courage and a dance move Imelda had seen on MTV’s *The Grind*, Imelda went up to a guy that was awkwardly swaying from side to side. He was shorter than her, but had a friendly smile.

“Can I have your digits?” she yelled over the music.

“Yes, yes, of course.” He fumbled while taking out his business card. “I’m between jobs, that’s my home number.”

The second he placed it in her palm, she raised the card like a trophy. All her hard work had paid off. Ramona let out a squeal of pride and shouted, “It’s turtle time!”

Ramona danced like a banshee. Imelda couldn’t believe her elegant friend had such impressively spastic moves. After two back flips and a breakdance, Ramona kissed Imelda on the cheek and disappeared into the crowd. It was the last time she ever saw her, but the gifts her angel, Ramona, gave her lasted the rest of her life.