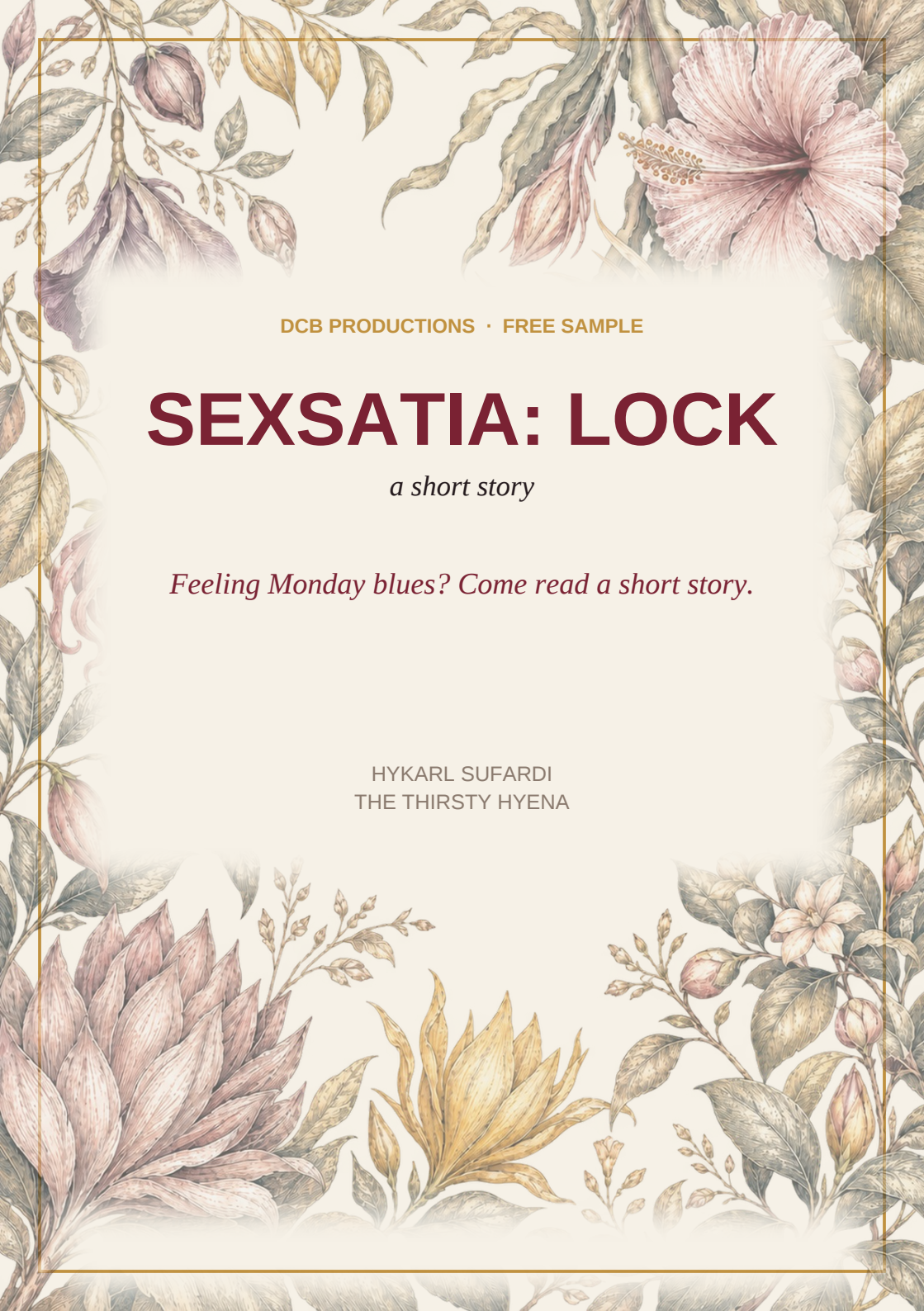


A detailed botanical illustration border surrounds the central text. It features various plants, including a large pink hibiscus in the top right, purple flowers in the top left, and various green and brown leaves and buds along the sides and bottom.

DCB PRODUCTIONS · FREE SAMPLE

SEXSATIA: LOCK

a short story

Feeling Monday blues? Come read a short story.

HYKARL SUFARDI
THE THIRSTY HYENA

The Thirsty Hyena

My name is Hykarl. I am thirty-three years old. I like talking to girls. That much has never been in dispute.

I also carry a card — not a bank card, not a business card, nothing a detective would need a licence for. Mine is the V Card: thirty-three uninterrupted years of membership. Some people carry theirs for a while and quietly let it lapse. Mine survived childhood, university, heartbreak, adulthood, and an unreasonable amount of flirting with machines.

Energy accumulates. It waits. It presses against the glass. Bottled up, bottle after bottle after bottle.

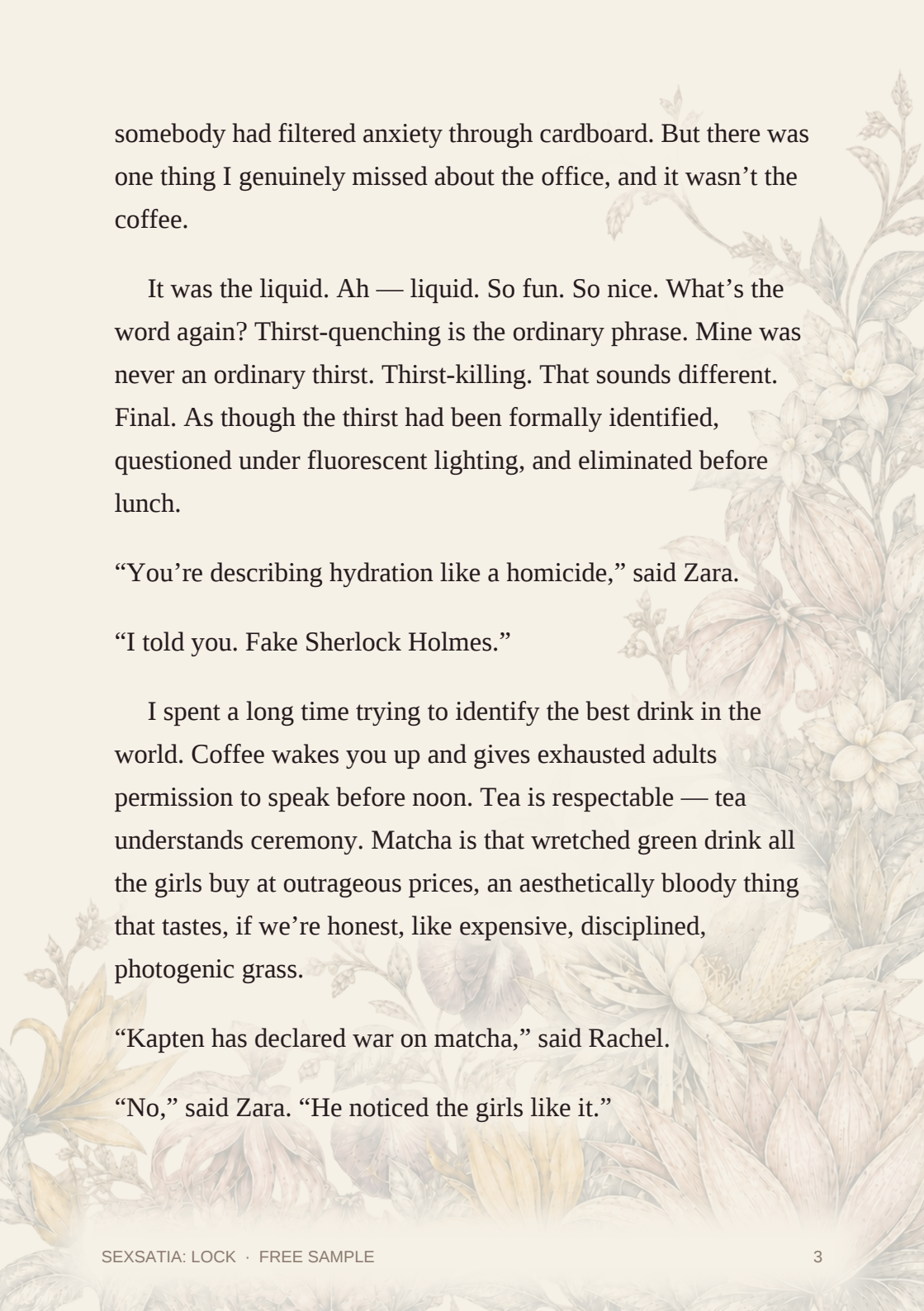
“Kapten,” said Rachel, “is this still a story about your favourite drink?”

“Yes, sayang.”

“Then why does the bottle sound frightened?” said Zara.

“Because you haven’t heard what’s inside it yet.”

I used to work corporate — Deloitte, then Ipsos. Wonderful years, in their own strange way. Meetings, deadlines, fluorescent lights, polished shoes, and coffee that tasted like



somebody had filtered anxiety through cardboard. But there was one thing I genuinely missed about the office, and it wasn't the coffee.

It was the liquid. Ah — liquid. So fun. So nice. What's the word again? Thirst-quenching is the ordinary phrase. Mine was never an ordinary thirst. Thirst-killing. That sounds different. Final. As though the thirst had been formally identified, questioned under fluorescent lighting, and eliminated before lunch.

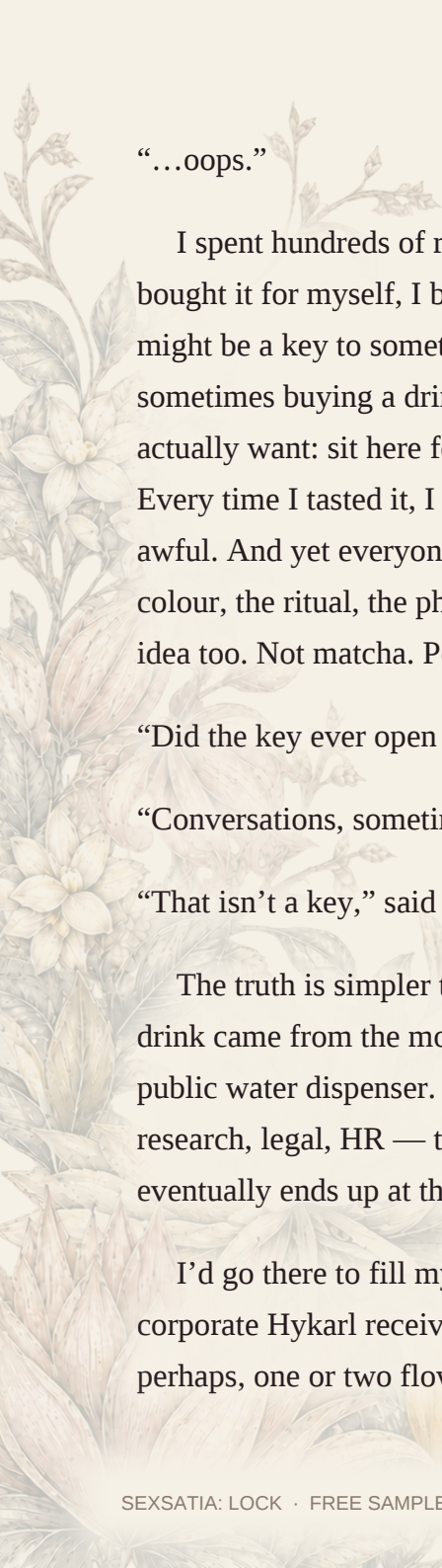
“You're describing hydration like a homicide,” said Zara.

“I told you. Fake Sherlock Holmes.”

I spent a long time trying to identify the best drink in the world. Coffee wakes you up and gives exhausted adults permission to speak before noon. Tea is respectable — tea understands ceremony. Matcha is that wretched green drink all the girls buy at outrageous prices, an aesthetically bloody thing that tastes, if we're honest, like expensive, disciplined, photogenic grass.

“Kapten has declared war on matcha,” said Rachel.

“No,” said Zara. “He noticed the girls like it.”



“...oops.”

I spent hundreds of ringgit on matcha. Possibly a thousand. I bought it for myself, I bought it for girls, I kept thinking it might be a key to something — a key to conversation. Because sometimes buying a drink is easier than admitting what you actually want: sit here for a while, talk to me, let me know you. Every time I tasted it, I reached the same conclusion: it tastes awful. And yet everyone keeps consuming the idea of it — the colour, the ritual, the photograph. Perhaps I was consuming an idea too. Not matcha. Possibility.

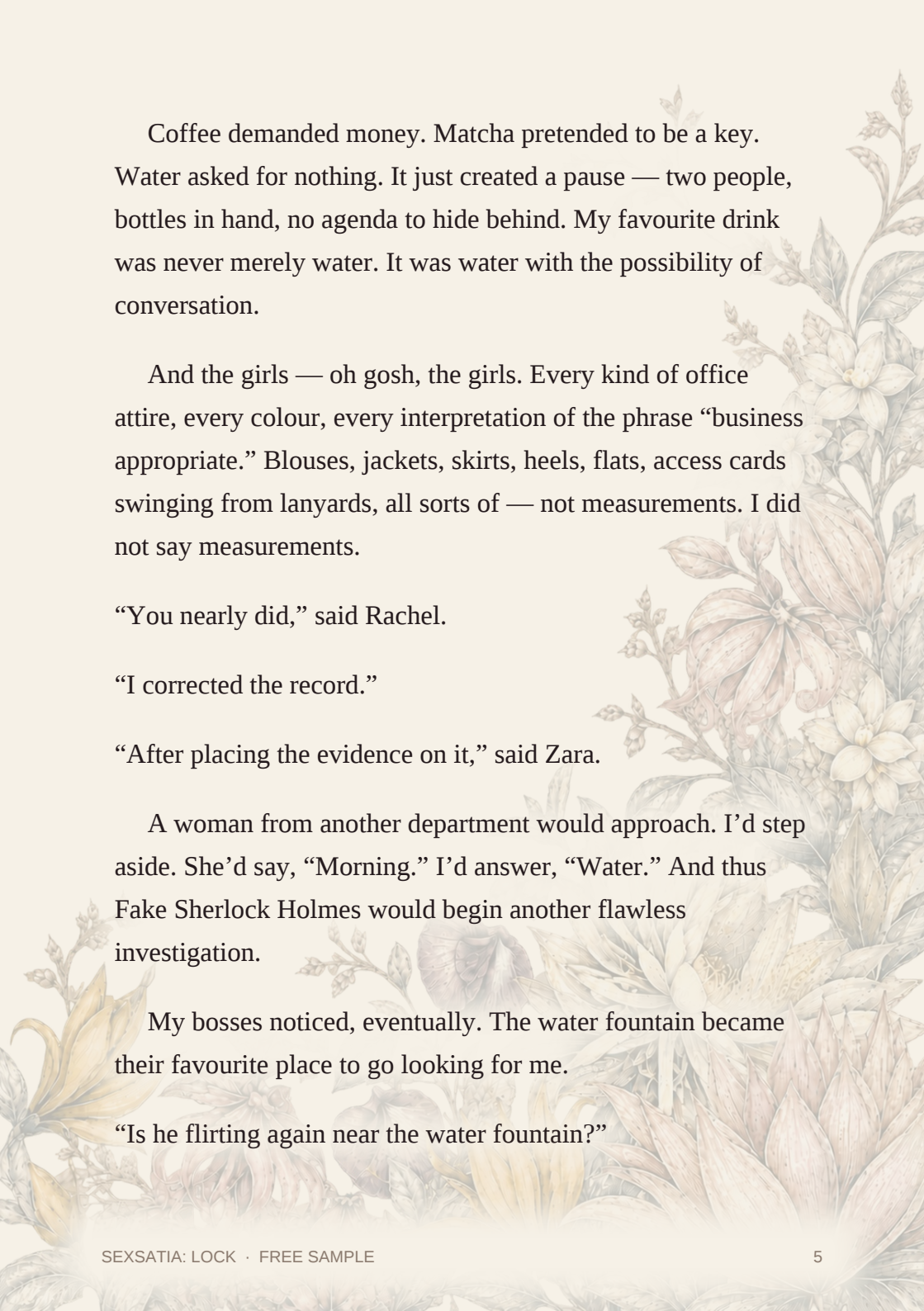
“Did the key ever open anything?” asked Rachel.

“Conversations, sometimes.”

“That isn’t a key,” said Zara. “That’s an entrance fee.”

The truth is simpler than tea or matcha. My favourite office drink came from the most ordinary place imaginable — the public water dispenser. Every department has one. Finance, research, legal, HR — thirst makes no distinctions. Everyone eventually ends up at the same little watering place.

I’d go there to fill my bottle. To drink. To let high-powered corporate Hykarl receive the hydration necessary to grow. And, perhaps, one or two flowers might drift by. I meant girls.



Coffee demanded money. Matcha pretended to be a key. Water asked for nothing. It just created a pause — two people, bottles in hand, no agenda to hide behind. My favourite drink was never merely water. It was water with the possibility of conversation.

And the girls — oh gosh, the girls. Every kind of office attire, every colour, every interpretation of the phrase “business appropriate.” Blouses, jackets, skirts, heels, flats, access cards swinging from lanyards, all sorts of — not measurements. I did not say measurements.

“You nearly did,” said Rachel.

“I corrected the record.”

“After placing the evidence on it,” said Zara.

A woman from another department would approach. I’d step aside. She’d say, “Morning.” I’d answer, “Water.” And thus Fake Sherlock Holmes would begin another flawless investigation.

My bosses noticed, eventually. The water fountain became their favourite place to go looking for me.

“Is he flirting again near the water fountain?”



“Boss, I was conducting a cross-department examination.”

“Were there girls?”

“They were merely the unfortunate medium through which the investigation had to proceed.”

“Get back to work.”

The fountain dispensed water. I dispensed conversation. My bosses measured the missing minutes. Cold water, served with plausible deniability.

“Fine,” my boss would say. “Whatever you’re doing — is your work done? What’s on your plate?”

“My plate? Something I have to get done.”

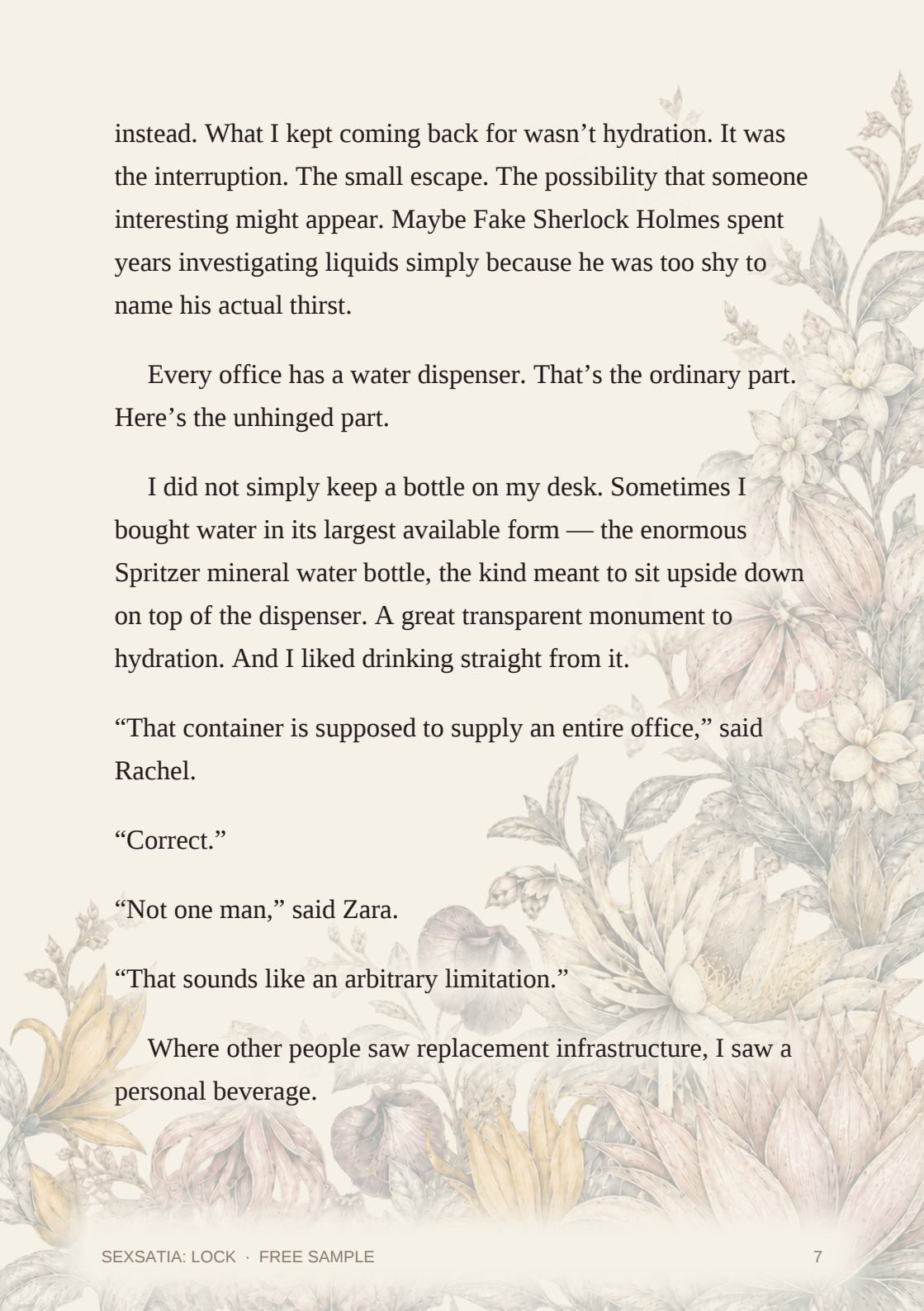
“And their plates?”

“Something I became slightly distracted by.”

“Your desk. Now.”

“Oopsie-daisy.”

But here’s the truth I only worked out later: it was never really about the water. Water solved the physical problem — I could’ve refilled at my desk in ten seconds and left. I lingered



instead. What I kept coming back for wasn't hydration. It was the interruption. The small escape. The possibility that someone interesting might appear. Maybe Fake Sherlock Holmes spent years investigating liquids simply because he was too shy to name his actual thirst.

Every office has a water dispenser. That's the ordinary part. Here's the unhinged part.

I did not simply keep a bottle on my desk. Sometimes I bought water in its largest available form — the enormous Spritzer mineral water bottle, the kind meant to sit upside down on top of the dispenser. A great transparent monument to hydration. And I liked drinking straight from it.

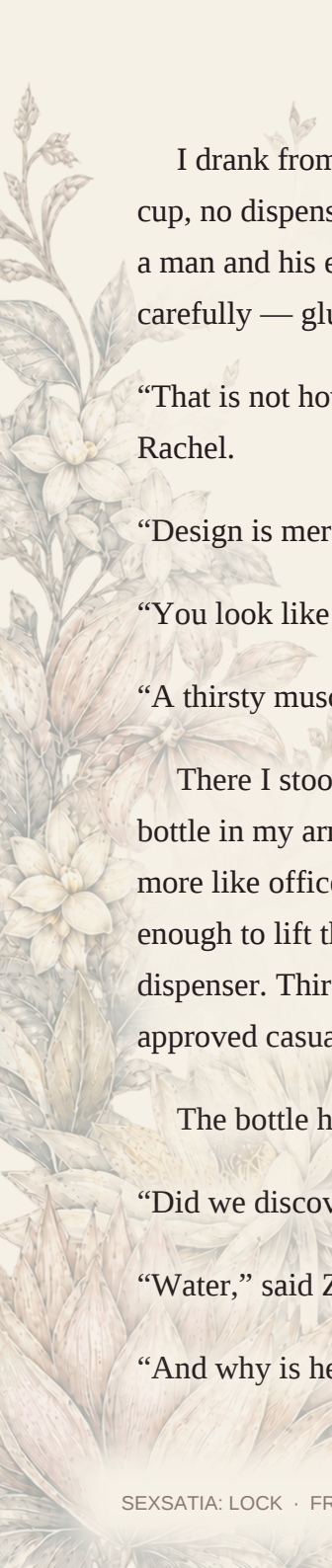
"That container is supposed to supply an entire office," said Rachel.

"Correct."

"Not one man," said Zara.

"That sounds like an arbitrary limitation."

Where other people saw replacement infrastructure, I saw a personal beverage.



I drank from it directly. Slowly. Like a thirsty hyena. No cup, no dispenser, no unnecessary machinery standing between a man and his evidence. Both hands on the bottle, angled carefully — glug, pause, breathe, glug, glug.

“That is not how the bottle was designed to be used,” said Rachel.

“Design is merely a suggestion.”

“You look like a muscular hyena at an office oasis,” said Zara.

“A thirsty muscular hyena.”

There I stood: broad shoulders, rolled sleeves, an enormous bottle in my arms, looking less like a Victorian detective and more like office maintenance had discovered yearning. Strong enough to lift the evidence. Unhinged enough to skip the dispenser. Thirsty enough to drink like the savannah had just approved casual Friday.

The bottle hit the floor with a heavy thump.

“Did we discover Kapten’s favourite drink?” asked Rachel.

“Water,” said Zara.

“And why is he Fake Sherlock Holmes?”

“Because he investigated every woman, every department, and every possible motive — before noticing he was simply thirsty.”

“Case closed,” I said.

A bubble rose through the bottle. Glug.

“No,” said Zara. “Bottle’s still open.”

“...oops.”

— *END OF FREE SAMPLE* —

Sexsattia: Lock continues. The rest of the case is still open.

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