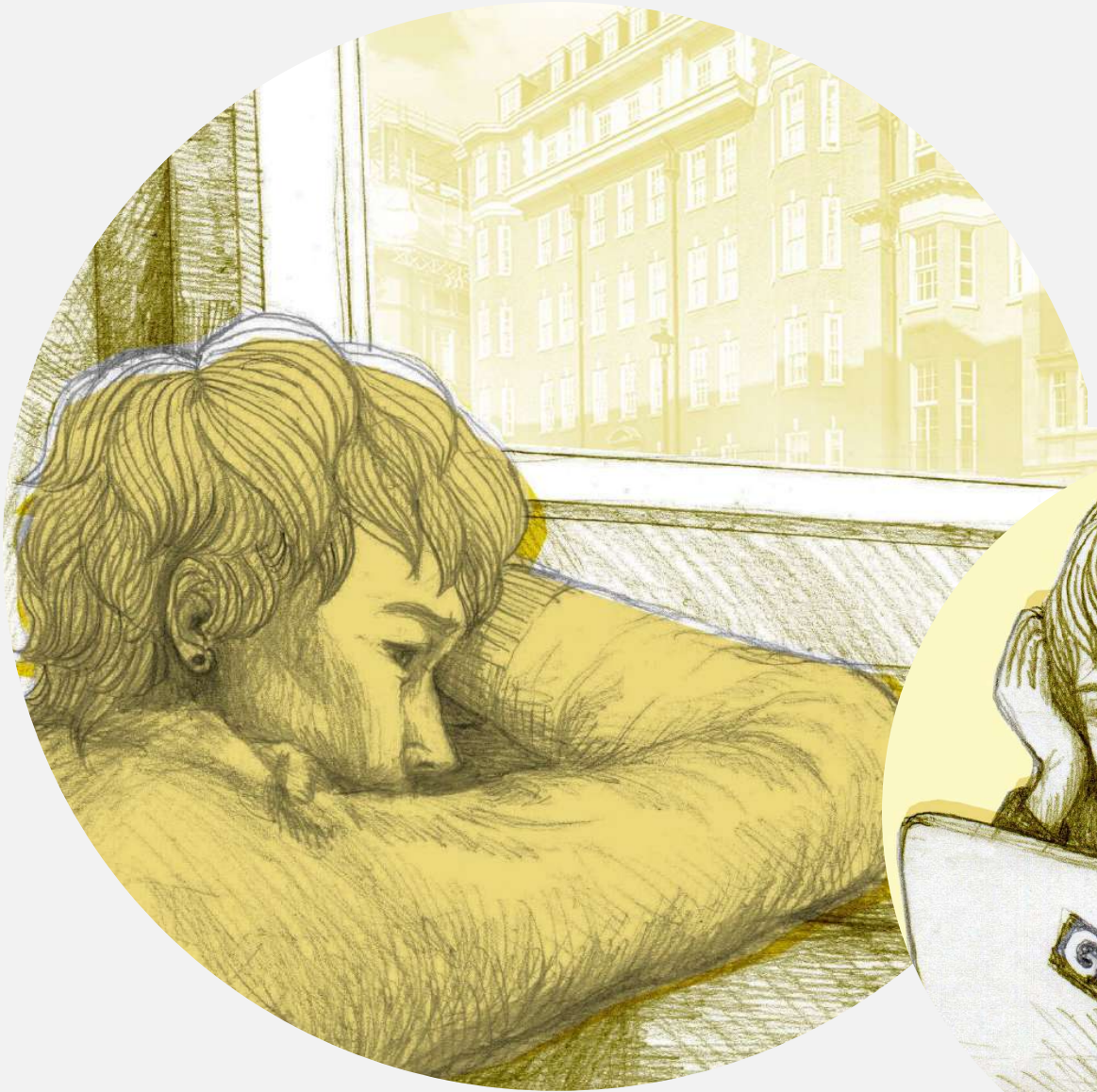




The influencer's dilemma

Adventure Book



START



You stare at the email again. Partnership Opportunity: TrendFast Fashion.

Behind the coffee shop counter, the espresso machine hisses, reminding you of another eight-hour shift for sixty-seven euros.

The mental maths repeats: rent 1,200 euros, loans, bills, travel, food.
Always more going out than coming in.

CONTINUE

TrendFast wants to offer you 12,000 euros for 6 months, which feels unreal. Your Instagram account, SustainableStyle_Sam, has grown to 18,247 followers who care about ethical fashion, supply chains, mending and waste. You've built a community that trusts you.

TrendFast is everything you usually criticise. Their clothes fall apart quickly and flood charity shops. Yet their email claims their new Conscious Collection uses sustainable materials, ethical production and verified transparency.

Is this real progress or polished greenwashing aimed at your audience?



CONTINUE



Scientific Pop-up:

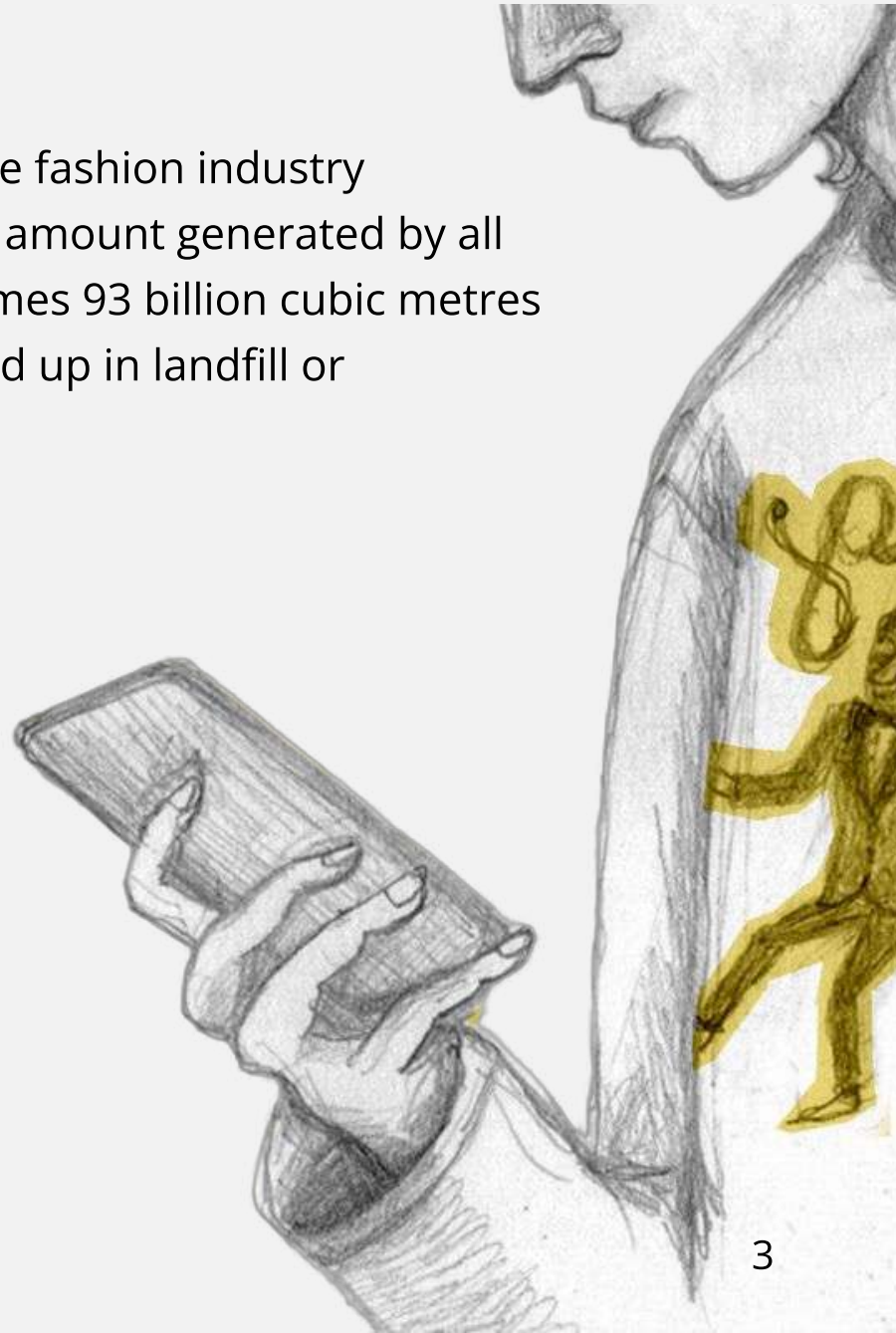
The fashion industry generates 1.2 billion tonnes of CO₂ annually - more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. It consumes 93 billion cubic metres of water each year, enough for 5 million people. Meanwhile, 85% of textiles produced end up in landfills or incinerators, often within the first year. One rubbish lorry of clothes is burned or buried every single second globally.

Think carefully about what you always write in your posts: that the fashion industry produces 1.2 billion tonnes of CO₂ a year, which is more than the amount generated by all international flights and maritime transport combined... It consumes 93 billion cubic metres of water every year, whilst 85 per cent of the fabrics produced end up in landfill or incinerators, often within the first year.

...every second, a lorryload of clothes is burnt or buried...

Your phone brings you back to reality and sends you the usual reminder about the rent.

CONTINUE





The offer is straightforward: six posts a month, behind-the-scenes Stories and honest reviews.

€2,000 upfront, then €1,500 monthly. Enough for rent, bills and maybe savings.

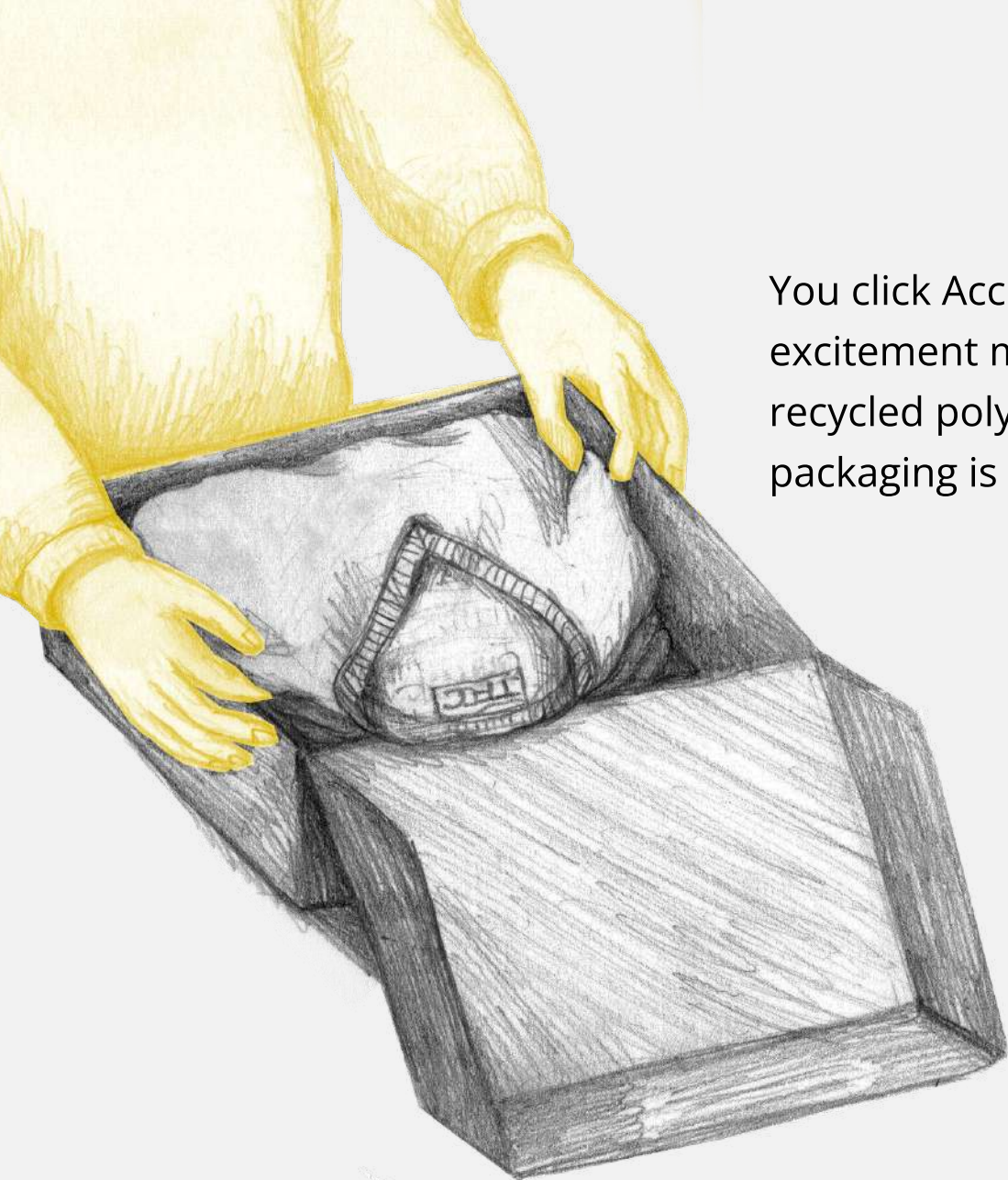
But your followers trust you. Many now shop second-hand or repair clothes because of your content.

Would this partnership honour that influence or undermine it?

YOUR CHOICE

⇒ You sign immediately. Go to page 5

⇒ You research TrendWave first. Go to page 10



You click Accept Terms before you can hesitate. Relief, anxiety and excitement mix. Within two days, a box arrives: organic cotton jumpers, recycled polyester dresses, eco-denim and linen trousers. The packaging is minimal and reassuring, but the fabrics feel flimsy.

The cream jumper is almost transparent, seams already puckering. Still, your first post goes up.

You style the jumper with vintage jeans and second-hand boots, writing about supporting brands that are trying to improve. Comments appear instantly: praise, encouragement and sharp disappointment.

CONTINUE



TrendFast? Really? Three weeks later, you attend TrendFast's London launch.

A curated warehouse space, reclaimed wood, bamboo displays, and a towering plant wall.

Everything looks sustainable, but nothing feels meaningful.



CONTINUE



Near the press wall, you meet Aisha from an NGO monitoring corporate sustainability.

She praises your earlier work on garment workers in Bangladesh, then asks about your partnership. Her tone stays calm but firm.

She explains that the Conscious Collection accounts for only 3% of TrendFast's production.



CONTINUE



Scientific Pop-up :

Bangladesh has historically emitted just 0.06 tonnes of CO₂ per person annually, compared to 120 tonnes per capita in the EU. Yet Bangladesh ranks seventh globally in climate vulnerability, facing devastating floods, cyclones, and rising seas - disasters it did almost nothing to cause. The country's garment workers, earning as little as €3 per day, produce clothes for wealthy nations whilst suffering the worst consequences of a crisis created by those same nations' consumption.



The remaining ninety-seven per cent still comes from factories paying about three pounds a day, producing hundreds of millions of garments that pollute rivers in countries already hit hardest by climate impacts.

Bangladesh emits almost nothing compared to Europe, yet it faces devastating floods and rising seas.

Workers earning a few euros a day bear the consequences of consumption elsewhere.

Climate colonialism in action. Rich countries cause the crisis, and poor countries suffer the consequences.

CONTINUE

Your throat tightens. The jumper suddenly feels heavier. You try to defend the partnership, but Aisha gently dismantles the marketing claims.

Most people never see the real numbers, she says, which is why companies invest so much in distraction.

She insists she is not judging you, only giving you the facts.

She disappears into the crowd. You stand alone, surrounded by a sustainability performance that feels increasingly hollow.

Three per cent echoes in your mind, over and over.



Go to page 18



You save the email to a folder labelled "Important - Check Later" and open a new browser tab. Research first.

TrendFast's website gleams with corporate professionalism. Their "Sustainability" page features impressive statistics: "30% Reduction in Water Usage Since 2019" and "Committed to Carbon Neutrality by 2050."

Photographs show smiling workers in clean factories. Everything looks perfect. Too perfect.

CONTINUE



Scientific Pop-up :

According to the UN Environment Programme, the fashion industry is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions - more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. It uses 93 billion cubic metres of water annually, enough to fill 37 million Olympic swimming pools. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation reports that 85% of textiles produced end up in landfills or incinerators, often within the first year. Producing one cotton t-shirt requires 2,700 litres of water - enough drinking water for one person for 2.5 years.

You dig deeper. The "Committed to Carbon Neutrality by 2050" means purchasing cheap carbon offsets rather than reducing actual emissions.

The "30% Water Reduction" applies only to headquarters, not manufacturing.

The smiling workers are from their single showcase factory, whilst investigations reveal at least thirty other supplier factories with documented safety violations.

A Guardian article from eight months ago details labour violations at TrendFast suppliers: sixteen-hour shifts, wages below living standards, workers fainting from heat.



CONTINUE

You focus on the Guardian article describing the violations of workers' rights at TrendFast's suppliers; you should also read their response: "We take these allegations seriously and are conducting an internal review." No results appeared publicly. Yet the Conscious Collection seems different. Independent certification from Fair Trade International. Organic cotton from verified farms. The line is small - you count only forty-two items - but it exists. Genuine change or sophisticated greenwashing?

Your bank account shows €243. Rent is due in nine days. Could promoting the Conscious Collection push them to expand it?

Or provide cover for continuing exploitation? The clock shows 11:47 PM. Tomorrow's shift starts at seven.

YOUR CHOICE



You sign Anyway - Need the money. Go to page 18



You email asking about sustainability practices. Go to page 13

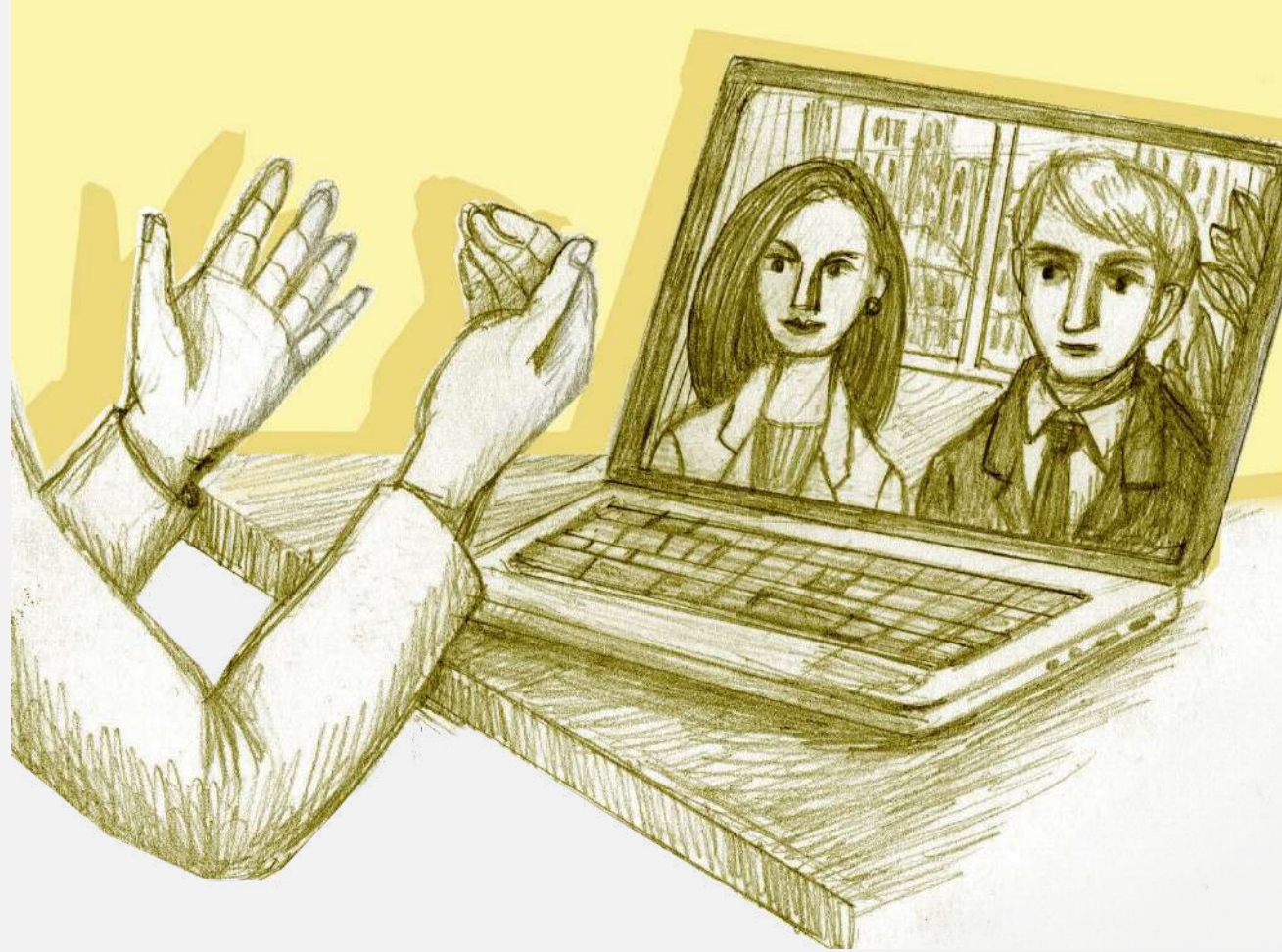


You decline - Can't promote this. Go to page 30

You compose an email at 1:23 AM, deleting and rewriting multiple times. The final version is professional but direct, with seven specific questions about TrendFast's practices.

The response comes quickly. Elena Martinez, Brand Partnerships Manager, suggests a video call for Thursday. You swap shifts to make it work.

Elena appears on screen with their Sustainability Director, Marcus. They spend ninety minutes addressing each question. The Conscious Collection represents 3% of production - they acknowledge this openly. Plans exist to scale to 15% over three years.



CONTINUE

"We're not claiming perfection", Elena says. "But we're genuinely trying to transform a massive industry. Change takes time. We need voices like yours to help.

TrendFast's "Conscious Collection", whilst representing just 3% of total production, still uses materials that contribute to environmental harm. Recycled polyester, marketed as sustainable, still sheds 700,000 microplastic fibres per wash cycle.

Their "carbon neutral by 2050" pledge relies heavily on cheap carbon offsets from questionable forestry projects rather than actually reducing emissions. Their main production line continues to generate approximately 240,000 tonnes of CO₂ annually from 200 million garments.



CONTINUE

Marcus details their factory audit programme and partnerships with certification bodies. But when you ask about worker wages, there's hesitation. "Living wages are our goal. Currently, we're above minimum wage in all facilities." Above minimum wage in Bangladesh still means poverty.

Elena concludes: "We believe you could be part of the solution from within. Your voice matters. You could hold us accountable whilst helping promote real progress." After the call, you sit in the quiet flat. They were more honest than expected. But "part of the solution from within" could also mean 'useful cover for business as usual.'

YOUR CHOICE



You sign - Push for change from inside. Go to page 8



You ask for contract modifications. Go to page 16



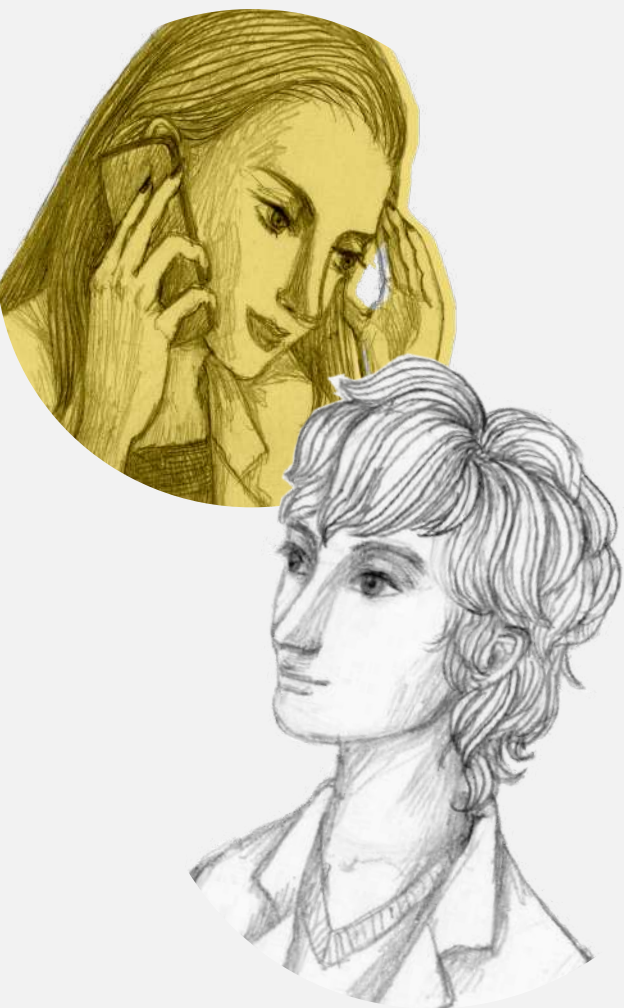
You sent the email at 11:00 PM. The message outlines modified terms: freedom to discuss sustainability challenges openly, quarterly detailed updates, and permission to walk away if progress stalls.

"I want to work with you", you write, "but I can't promote something whilst hiding its limitations. My followers trust me because I'm honest. That honesty has to continue."

Elena calls two days later. Your counter-proposal generated interesting conversations. The corporation is divided.

"Some think you're difficult. Others think you're exactly the authentic voice we need." She pauses. "We can't give you everything. But here's what we can do."

CONTINUE



The modified terms are in place: you can discuss both achievements and challenges, provided the framing remains "balanced and constructive."

Quarterly sustainability reports will be shared with you before public release. Priority access to Conscious Collection development meetings. Annual review clause allowing either party to exit.

It isn't everything. "Balanced and constructive" could be interpreted restrictively. But it offers more transparency than most partnerships do. You read the revised contract three times. The rent reminder appears: €1,200 due in four days.

YOUR CHOICE

⇒ You walk away - Not enough transparency. Go to page 30

⇒ You accept the modified terms. Go to page 18

Three weeks into the partnership, life looks different on the surface. Your bank account shows 2,000 euros instead of 243. You have cut your coffee shop shifts to three days a week, giving you space to breathe and create.

You film better styling videos, post more thoughtful Stories and actually reply to followers instead of typing between espresso orders. Your account has grown to over 21,000 followers, boosted by TrendFast's promotions.

But the clothes are already falling apart. The cream jumper developed holes after four wears. The organic cotton feels more fragile than ordinary fabric. A recycled polyester dress faded after one wash, the print now barely visible.

Seams unravel at the slightest pull, buttons drop off, hems come loose. The quality is shockingly poor. These garments seem designed to last weeks, not years, despite all the sustainability claims about durability and conscious production.



CONTINUE



Scientific Pop-up :

Fast fashion's business model relies on planned obsolescence - clothes deliberately designed to fail after minimal use, forcing consumers to buy more. This drives catastrophic climate impacts: the industry produces over 500 million pieces per year and requires 2,700 litres of water to produce a cotton t-shirt. Meanwhile, 500,000 tonnes of microplastic fibres from washing synthetic clothes enter oceans annually, poisoning marine ecosystems. The constant production cycle creates mountains of textile waste: 85% of all textiles end up in landfills or incinerators, with one rubbish lorry of clothes burned or buried globally every second.

You can't post about this honestly without breaching the contract.

"Creative freedom within brand guidelines" means freedom to praise, not criticise.
Freedom to style, not to interrogate quality or durability.

So your posts continue, carefully framed, strategically worded:

"Styling this piece three different ways!" instead of "This piece will only survive three wears before it falls apart."

The deception feels small at first. Omission rather than lies. But it accumulates, each carefully worded caption a tiny betrayal of the community you built.

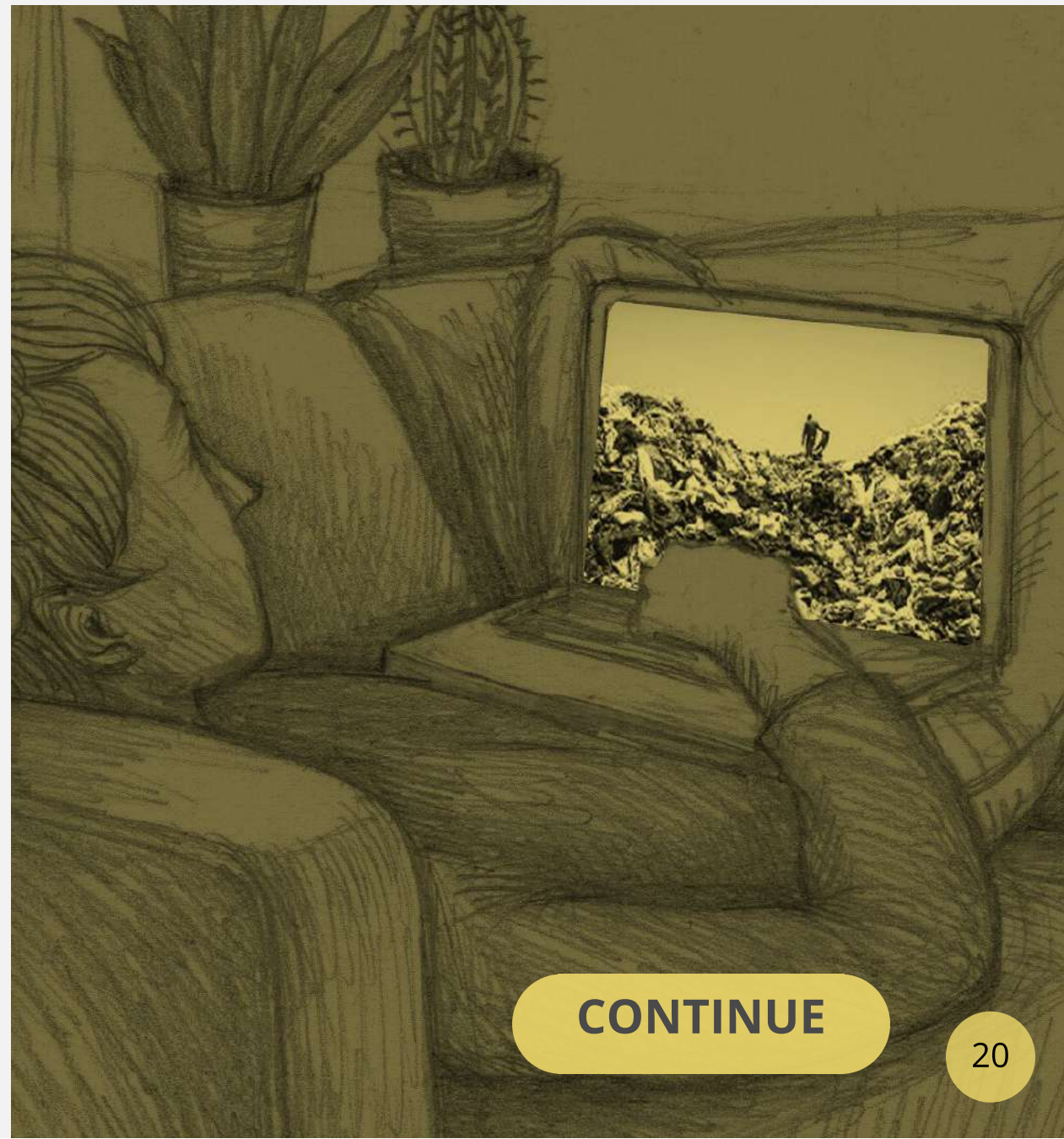
CONTINUE

At 2:47 AM on Tuesday, unable to sleep, you watch "The True Cost" documentary on your laptop in the dark.

The footage of collapsed factories, workers' testimony about inhuman conditions, rivers running purple and red with textile dyes, mountains of discarded clothes in landfills in Ghana and Chile.

It feels unbearably close, unbearably relevant to the choices you've made.

The cream jumper sits folded on the chair across the room, its holes visible even in the darkness, a small monument to planned obsolescence and exploitation dressed up as sustainability.



CONTINUE

Morning brings a comment on your latest post.

User @LilyChangesThings has written: "Love your usual content, but confused about this partnership. TrendFast's environmental record is pretty terrible. Have you seen the Clean Clothes Campaign report? Would genuinely love to hear your thoughts."

The comment has forty-seven likes and is climbing. Other followers are responding, some defending you, others agreeing. The conversation is spiralling.

You read the contract clause about "reputation management": "Partner agrees to moderate comments that could harm TrendFast's brand reputation."

Technically, this qualifies. You have the authority to delete it. But @LilyChangesThings isn't being rude. Just asking questions - the kind you used to ask.

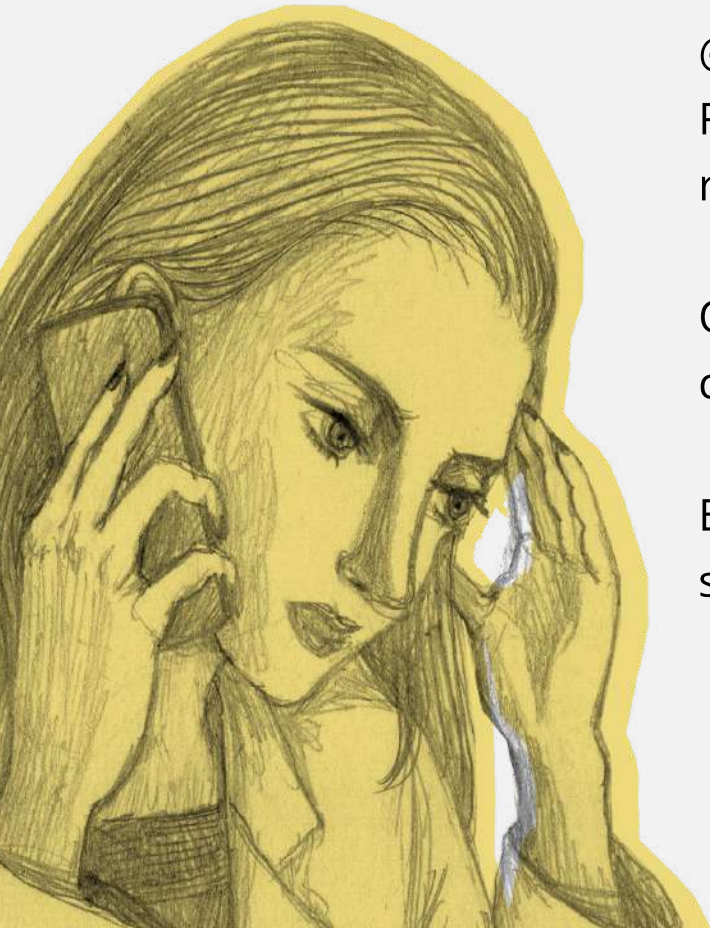
YOUR CHOICE

⇒ You delete the comment - be professional. Go to page 28

⇒ You respond honestly and engage. Go to page 22

You respond to @LilyChangesThings:

"I'm learning too. Share your resources?" Thirty seconds after posting, your phone feels heavy with what you've just done. This might cost everything.



@LilyChangesThings replies within minutes, sharing links: Fashion Revolution's website, the RiverBlue documentary, Clean Clothes Campaign reports, and academic studies.

Other followers join, adding resources, sharing experiences. The conversation grows - 200 comments and counting.

Elena calls Friday morning, voice tight. "We need to talk about the comment section. The optics aren't good. Corporate is concerned."

CONTINUE

"People are having a genuine conversation about sustainability", you say carefully. "Isn't that what we want?"

"A conversation that questions our entire brand. You were supposed to moderate harmful content."

"It's not harmful. It's honest."

Silence stretches. Finally: "I'll discuss this internally. But you need to understand - this partnership only works if there's mutual respect."

That weekend, you draft a post. It goes live Sunday evening: "I need to be honest with you. I accepted this partnership because I needed income and believed I could push for change from within. But I'm struggling. These clothes aren't lasting. The sustainability claims feel limited. I don't have all the answers. I'm figuring this out with you. Thank you for holding me accountable."

CONTINUE

The response is overwhelming. The post is shared 47,000 times. Comments flood in - thousands. Some were angry, but more supportive:

"This is why we follow you."

"Honesty matters more than perfection."

"Thank you for being real."

By Monday, you have 28,000 followers.

Elena calls on Monday afternoon. "Corporate is split... Half want to terminate immediately. The other half think this is exactly the authentic partnership we claimed to want. They want to meet with you. Wednesday at headquarters."



CONTINUE

TrendFast's headquarters fills twelve floors of a glass tower in Canary Wharf. The meeting room looks out across London. Sandra Chen, the VP of Marketing, sits opposite you, with Elena and someone from Corporate Communications on her right.

"Your honesty created a problem", Sandra says. "But it also created an opportunity. Your post generated more engagement than months of planned content. People trust you, and that trust has value."

She slides a document across the table. "We want to offer you a new role. Sustainability Ambassador. Three thousand euros a month. A two-year partnership. You would have more access to our supply chain, attend quarterly strategy meetings and receive sustainability reports before publication."

CONTINUE



You skim the proposal. The compensation would transform your life. But one question stands out. "What percentage of your production does the Conscious Collection represent?" "Five per cent", Sandra replies without hesitation. "We aim for twenty per cent within three years." Five per cent of 500 million garments. Twenty-five million made slightly better, while 475 million remain tied to exploitative, environmentally damaging practices.

CONTINUE

Elena adds, "The contract includes monthly content, attendance at key events and public support during controversies. We need reliability."

"Public support during controversies means defending them when workers protest, or environmental reports emerge. It means becoming part of the system."

You think about your 28,000 followers, many gained because of your honesty. You think about @LilyChangesThings and the conversation she sparked. You think about workers earning three euros a day while executives discuss "sustainability" from the twelfth floor of a glass tower.

YOUR CHOICE



You negotiate harder - Demand real commitments.
Go to page 33



You decline - Five per cent is greenwashing. Go to
page 30

Five years later, you stand in your Mayfair flat, wondering when success started to feel like imprisonment. Your account now has 67,000 followers, your bank balance shows 4,500 euros a month, and your wardrobe is full of TrendFast clothing you rarely wear.

The morning the factory fire is reported, you are getting ready for a TrendFast gala. Seventeen workers died in Bangladesh. Locked exits. No proper fire safety. The news breaks at 11.00 am. The gala begins at 7.00 pm.

You still go. You wear TrendFast, smile for photographs and talk politely about slow but steady progress. Back home, you check your latest post. Every critical comment has vanished. Every keyword related to labour abuses has been muted. The comments section is pure praise.

When did that start? The first deleted comment was Aisha's, five years ago. Once you deleted one, the next was easier. Then easier still. Protect the partnership. Maintain professionalism. Soon, removing criticism became routine. You scroll through old posts from before TrendFast. The passion is unmistakable.

CONTINUE

Posts about exploitation, climate justice and environmental damage. Followers are challenging you and each other. Hard conversations, real engagement. That version of you feels far away now.

The flat is beautiful. The income is steady. The account looks successful. But sitting alone at three in the morning, scrolling through sanitised praise, you finally see it clearly.

The cage is comfortable. But it is a cage. And you built it yourself, one deleted comment at a time.

THE END





Scientific Pop-up :

73% of influencers report pressure to promote products they don't believe in, but continue to do so due to financial dependence (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2022). Fashion remains the second-most polluting industry globally, accounting for 10% of carbon emissions. Factory accidents have killed over 3,000 garment workers in the past decade. Change requires courage before we're trapped.



You walk away from TrendFast. The decision is made in Sandra's office, London, stretching out below.

I appreciate the offer, you say, but I cannot be a sustainability ambassador for a company where sustainability accounts for only five per cent of the business.

My followers deserve better. Workers deserve better. The planet deserves better. The next month is brutal.

CONTINUE



You return to the coffee shop full-time, earning sixty-seven euros a day. Rent becomes harder to manage. Your Instagram growth slows, and some followers leave. But the ones who stay engage more deeply.

Your platform grows again. By year two, you have 52,000 followers who are genuinely engaged. Articles cite you as an example of ethical advocacy.

Other influencers ask for advice on navigating partnerships responsibly. Your impact spreads further.

By year three, you move into a Digital Strategy Director role for a coalition of sustainable fashion organisations, earning 3,200 euros a month.

The work contributes to measurable change: a small decline in fast-fashion sales among your demographic and increased pressure for transparency.

CONTINUE

It has not been easy. Financial security came slowly, and there were moments of doubt.

But every time you questioned your path, you remembered Aisha's comment and your choice to respond honestly instead of deleting it. That moment shaped everything.

You do not have a Mayfair flat or a follower count inflated by corporate partnerships. But you have 52,000 people who care, a career built on integrity and work that creates real impact.

And when you look in the mirror, you are proud of the person you see.

THE END





Scientific Pop-up :

The 30 Wears Challenge reached 200,000 participants globally within three years, with measurable climate impact. Research confirmed that extending clothing life by just nine months reduces carbon emissions by 20-30%. Pressure from campaigns like yours contributed to a 3% decrease in fast fashion sales. The secondhand clothing market grew at eleven times the rate of traditional retail, according to ThredUp's 2023 Resale Report. Individual choices, amplified through authentic advocacy, created measurable change.

You open your notebook. "Here's what I need: a twenty per cent production reduction within eighteen months, living wages in half your factories within a year, quarterly public reports with independent verification, and full freedom to criticise if you fall short."

Sandra's face remains unreadable. Elena looks tense. The Corporate Communications officer shakes his head.

"That is extremely ambitious", Sandra says. "We will need to discuss this internally. Expect a response within seventy-two hours."

CONTINUE



Three days later, their counteroffer arrives: a twelve per cent production reduction in eighteen months, living wages in fifty per cent of factories within two years, quarterly reports with final approval retained by TrendFast, and permission for constructive criticism.

Not everything you wanted, but far more than most brands commit to. You accept.

The first year is demanding: factory visits in Bangladesh and Vietnam, meetings where profit margins clash with worker welfare, quarterly reports that are transparent yet diplomatic, and occasional public criticism when deadlines are missed.

Progress is mixed but real. Production drops by eleven per cent, cutting emissions. Thirty-five per cent of factories introduce living wages ahead of schedule.

Water use falls by twenty-two per cent, and supply chain data becomes public. Still, many factories remain non-compliant, and the Conscious Collection stalls at eighteen per cent.

You push constantly, balancing pressure and cooperation. Activists accuse you of selling out; executives find you difficult. Yet the data shows impact: improved wages, reduced emissions and far better transparency.

CONTINUE

After two years, you step away. The relationship has reached its limit. You move into independent consulting, advising several fashion companies over the next three years and pushing each towards better practices.

At thirty, you are not wealthy or universally praised. Consulting pays inconsistently, and you live between two worlds: too corporate for some activists, too radical for some brands. But the work has results.

Your time at TrendFast produced measurable change: an eleven per cent reduction in production, living wages for around fifty thousand workers, a twenty-two per cent cut in water use, and full supply chain transparency.

Research later confirms that companies change more when pressure comes from both inside and outside. Real progress requires both forces working together.

THE END

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1

5

2

3

4

Next



How do you evaluate claims of "sustainable" or "ethical" fashion when shopping?

Look beyond marketing language to substantive data:

What percentage of production is actually sustainable?

Are workers paid living wages? Is the brand reducing total production or just making some items "better"? True sustainability requires transparency, accountability, and a willingness to produce and sell less.



What role do individuals play in addressing systemic problems like fast fashion's climate impact?

Individual choices matter but aren't sufficient. Wearing clothes longer, buying secondhand, and demanding transparency create pressure for systemic change. However, real transformation requires policy changes, corporate accountability, and challenging the growth-dependent economic model that drives overproduction. Individual action is most powerful when connected to collective movements pushing for structural change.



The story presents climate change as a climate justice issue. What does this framing mean?

Climate justice recognises that those least responsible for causing the climate crisis suffer its worst consequences. Countries like Bangladesh, which contributed minimally to global emissions, face devastating climate impacts whilst producing cheap clothes for wealthy consumers. Climate action must address these inequalities, not perpetuate them.



Is it more effective to push for change from within corporations or to build alternatives outside the system?

Both approaches have value and limitations. Inside advocates can access decision-making power but risk co-option. Outside critics maintain independence but may lack influence over corporate practices. What role does your own position and privilege play in determining which approach is most accessible or effective for you?



Which ending did you choose? What factors influenced your decision?

Consider the trade-offs between financial security, personal values, and potential impact. How might Sam's material circumstances (precarious employment, financial pressure) have influenced the ethical complexity of the choice?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Next

**Documentaries:**

- "The True Cost" (2015) - Examines fast fashion's human and environmental impact
- "RiverBlue" (2017) - Documents fashion industry's water pollution
- "Untold: Inside the Shein Machine" (2024) - Investigates ultra-fast fashion

Organisations:

- Fashion Revolution - Global movement for transparency (fashionrevolution.org)
- Clean Clothes Campaign - Labour rights advocacy (cleanclothes.org)
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation - Circular economy research (ellenmacarthurfoundation.org)
- Good On You - Brand ethics ratings (goodonyou.eco)

Reports and Studies:

- UN Environment Programme: "Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain" (2018)
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation: "A New Textiles Economy" (2017)
- ThredUp Resale Report (published annually)
- Clean Clothes Campaign reports on labour conditions and corporate accountability

Books:

- "Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion" by Elizabeth Cline
- "Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes" by Dana Thomas
- "Loved Clothes Last" by Orsola de Castro

ACTION STEPS

Next



Action Steps:

- Buy fewer items, choose quality, wear them longer (aim for 30 wears minimum)
- Shop secondhand, swap with friends, rent for special occasions
- Learn basic repairs - sewing on buttons, fixing seams, patching holes
- Ask brands #WhoMadeMyClothes - demand transparency
- Support worker-led movements and labour rights organisations
- Advocate for policy changes: living wages, environmental regulations, corporate accountability
- Share information, have conversations, build collective pressure for systemic change



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