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With ear protection on, my gaze down the range, a newly acquired .357 revolver in my hands, I was isolated from the world. And yeah, I had opted for a heavier gun, bigger, rather than the pesky Glock I had from Sarah. It was stronger, louder, and more reliable, and I could handle it better. It was power. The great equalizer.

I was being composed. Anger had threatened to consume my judgment, but anger is loud and brash. With my hands wrapped around a .357 revolver, I was focused.

Slowly, I inhaled and held. Ready to shoot. Fuck. I reset and did it again, aiming this powerful handcannon down the range. I missed wide. The second shot missed too, but not as much. I felt a twitch in my eye and shot again. This time, I hit two rapid shots, though this was by no measure a solid group.

Lowering the gun, I glanced to either side. Why?

Heat flushed up my cheeks as I felt that unrelenting, unforgiving grip on my shirt as I was marched out of the locker room and thrown out. Fucking Luna. Naked and everything. How she had belittled me even as she humiliated me.

My collar suddenly felt tight, and I almost ripped trying to adjust it, frustrated with the material being so stubborn.

I aimed again to fire off the last two shots.

Wrong. That's what it was. Pure and simple. How dare she? How dare Luna make me feel like that? That bitch. She'd thrown me out like trash, with such public humiliation. All that power radiating from her, making me feel small and insignificant.

The gun lowered ever so slightly.

The memory of her hands on me, her voice laced with contempt, made my stomach clench. She'd clearly wanted it, she wanted what I offered... and then nothing. Just cold feet. Fucking crazy bitch.

Raising the revolver again, I took a steadier breath. Focus. The recoil from the .357 still tingled in my arms, but I ignored it, centering the sights on the target ahead. My shirt collar felt suffocating, sweat trickling down my back despite the cool air of the range. Two more shots fired, both closer to the bulls-eye this time. Small victories, maybe. But not enough. Not nearly enough to wash away the sting of Luna's rejection.

It wasn't fair.

It was wrong on every level.

Last night, I saw Luna and Kim. Laughing and with Luna in control once again. Comfortable in her own body. The signs of a true slut, showing off like that, as if it were open for everyone. Almost everyone. Denying some. My fist clenched. The arrogance that Luna displayed as she showed off, flaunting her assets. Kim even seemed in admiration, orbiting the dyke, letting herself be manhandled.

It was Kim I needed to focus on. She wanted Luna broken, but she wasn't doing what needed to be done. She was holding back. Fucking stupid. I could tell she was hesitant, maybe even afraid. But after I'd had Luna, I'd still have plenty left for Kim. Her body was tight—no denying that. She knew how to hold a man, how to take what she deserved. But right now, she was just wasting time.

That arrogance, it ran through their family like poison. Fucking Kim kept my cock satisfied, left me with a trophy I could parade right under Josh's nose, a constant reminder she was mine when he wasn't watching. But he was still the problem.

The worst part was that Josh didn't posture. He didn't strut. He didn't need to. People simply moved around him like gravity had picked a favorite. He was soft, and surrounded himself with fools who treated him like that softness was a virtue. But I remembered what those soft hands could do when they finally closed into fists.

It wasn't fear. I refused to call it that. It was calculation. A smart man didn't walk into another man's house without knowing where the exits were. I'd handle him. Probably. Not in some stupid, clean, fair fight, maybe, but life wasn't a mat, and it sure as hell wasn't fair.

Kim had been right about one thing, though. Conquering the women that surrounded him, breaking that circle of power, the thought alone made my dick stir.

They had made me feel small, and now I was taking back what I had been robbed of. Luna with her hands, Josh with his so-called superiority. Even Kim, with her games. The weekend would be a step in the right direction. It wasn't even revenge. Revenge, that was petty. This was balance.

Luna whimpering underneath me, putting that bitch in her place—what a treat that would be. And Linda... bending her over some kitchen counter, knocking her up, marking her as mine forever... my cock twitched against my jeans at the thought.

Kim had texted about a party this weekend. The message glowed on my phone screen in the dim light of the range. A chance to return to that mansion, to that world that had tossed me out like yesterday's garbage. My fingers tightened around the revolver, the metal cool against my sweating palm. A debt, that's what this was. A debt they owed me. Every single one of them. I could feel the pulse in my neck as my blood heated at the thought.

The party changed everything. Noise, alcohol, bodies everywhere. Josh couldn't watch every door, every hallway, every smile. It would be packed with people pretending that they belonged there.

I emptied the cylinder, checked it twice, then set the revolver back in its case. Just a range gun. Just practice, something to do between events. Nothing more.

The weekend. That's all I had to wait. Two more days until I could step back into their territory, not as an outcast this time, but as someone who belonged. Someone with a right to be there. And I'd make sure they remembered it.

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With the others preoccupied by the major new events, it had fallen to me to work the guest list and manage everything regarding the party. It was a great feeling to be constructive while also doing something for someone else. That's what it was, a small event to celebrate the success Luna and Josh had brought in. It was a task I did happily.

There's just something about it when someone asks for your help. And when it came from Josh, my ever-perfect husband, who did everything and anything, it made me so excited. I was not just helping, I was being useful. I belonged.

I enjoyed the trust. I know the party was mostly my idea anyway, but still, it gave me a sense of purpose. It wasn't too bad. I ordered beer, made lists for what liquor to stock up on, even bought a few things and items for games and entertainment. They had their little project, I had mine. It wasn't the same, but it was something.

Either way, cleaning the house was a priority. Josh and Linda usually did it, sometimes Luna, but I felt that came with the responsibility of hosting the party. Except for my laptop with the shopping list, the kitchen island was clean of clutter.

The marble was cool against my elbows as I took a sip of my coffee, sitting upright, giving the task the attention it warranted. Chips. Check. Sour cream for dip. Check. Homemade guacamole? I'd had to get on that closer to the weekend.

Friends and all of the good folks and Entrendy and Calhoun Holdings were invited, along with Mona and her crew. I didn't expect her to show up, though, as it was 'beneath' her, but it felt like the right thing to do, if anything.

I thought of something Linda and Luna had said before. Josh needed more friends; he was very much a lonewolf. He hung out with us mostly, and that was it. So hey, I invited the neighbors. Bran was just a few years younger than us, and his plus one would be Hope. Cool folks.

Amanda... I hesitated. The last time I talked to her, she had been a total bitch, but she was one of the folks we'd known the longest. Josh was also fond of her, so why the fuck not? I'd just stay clear of her if she started to act out of line again.

A small devious smirk crept across my lips. The guest list was my responsibility, well, if Amanda could come, then Zach could too. If anything, it would piss Amanda off. And well, the last time I had seen Zach, he and Alex had ran a train on me. I'd be able to rub that in her face. And Josh... he had no idea Zach had fucked my ass. God, just the thought of Zach, that smug bastard, smirking at Josh. Josh being confused why Zach was extra smug, not knowing it was because Zach had fucked his wife.

It would be fun, but maybe not a great idea. Which is why I added him to the list. Maybe he'd bring some of his douchebag friends too. Some of those 'alpha' jocks with their stupid alpaca haircuts, thinking they owned the world. Stoic in the most retarded way, without a clue who Zeno was. God, just having those empty meatheads flirt with me, give in to their false bravado,

pretending to be in control. Pretending they had the guts to do anything. It was a bit of a guilty pleasure for me, just letting them fuck me however they liked.

Yes. Zach had to come. Hell, even if he had gotten himself a girl or something, maybe I could let Toby loose on her.

Speaking of Toby…

Turns out, this responsibility yielded potential for some... fun. Excitement.

My eyes had landed on my last message to Toby. It was just the usual *'where the fuck r u'* message from earlier. I was still working Luna diligently toward trying him out. I still had that little surprise upstairs, the one she thought was just another toy. At the pool yesterday, I had felt Luna slide a little closer than she wanted to admit.

I hesitated. Zach was one thing. But Toby... Maybe it was too far.

I mean, he wouldn't do dick, as he was afraid of Josh, so he wouldn't do anything too bad... He'd probably linger in the outskirts of the party, being his usual aggressive, creepy old self. But...
... but I really felt like I had been good lately and deserved a bit of danger. Toby was exciting, if nothing else. Josh was stronger and all that than Toby anyway, and as I said, Toby wouldn't dare to do anything as long as Josh was around. And Luna, she could handle herself. She had already tied him up in a knot anyway.

Also, Toby was, no matter how I twisted and turned it, part of my life now. Eventually, he'd slide into a more public role, I'd imagine. If we were all supposed to be so open and honest, excluding him was hypocritical.

I felt almost giddy as I invited him, still. He had gone a bit AWOL, but maybe all the exitement drew him in.

I thought about how Linda would react if she saw the name on the list. I thought to Luna's "Nope" from the pool. I imagined Josh asking, why him? And he'd be able to guess his way to as to why. Because Toby has been hitting it right for the last few months.

Of course, the sensible part of me was that they'd never see him during, and that the guest list would never be checked.

Fuck it, I added the fat nerd to the list and let out a small giggle. If he didn't behave, well, that was what Josh was for.

With the list done, I compiled the Facebooks and the emails and the whatevers, and away they went, those pesky invites. A few taps were all it took.

The reply from Toby was immediate.

'ill be there,' he wrote.

It was done. I wasn't sure why I felt this weird weight on my lungs, but it was there. Fuck, it was so exciting. If anything, I'd be able to sneak off with him and get fucked real good. Hell, with a loud party going on, the fun semi-public scenarios came plopping into my head. A bathroom blowjob, sure. Some sexy fun by the pool where the lighting would be questionable? Maybe. This would make the part interesting. Toby would behave because he had to. Everyone was too tense about all this anyway. And hell, for putting all this together, I was deserving of a bit of extra excitement. Josh would sooner or later be able to accept Toby more and more into his life anyway.

Flickers of Josh mingling with his friends while Toby pumped me full of babies just out of view, or hell, excusing himself to go upstairs to watch his wife get her holes rearranged. Josh would resent it at first, but fuck, he'd love it. Even without a stupid scenario with ridiculousness, what if he simply walked in on Toby and me? That was just how life was now.

What would he think of me then, I wondered.

Maybe I should just ask Toby if he could bring a camera and film a small bit?

I sighed heavily, alt-tabbing over to the shopping list again, adding a bunch of frozen pizzas, vegetarian and non-vegetarian.

*

It had been a long while since we last had a proper party. It hadn't been since... my birthday? Jesus, that was last year. Time flies, I guess. It didn't feel that long ago, yet at the same time, it did. Time had flown, and yet it felt like a decade ago. The time between then and now was filled with all these small and major events, from top to bottom.

So it was great playing the host again. However, it was truly Kim's orchestration, all of it. A lot of people had shown up and I honestly doubted I'd be able to talk to everyone before the evening was done.

Music, people arriving, drinks, laughter, chit-chatter, all of it surrounded me as I moved the ice machine closer to the bar. It was all a perfect blend, honestly. I had been a bit wary of a party, but blowing off steam and celebrating our victory; well, it was a good idea. The playlist was well put-together, the various snacks and food were diverse and yet easy enough. Plenty of games and activities, and people seemed to have a good time. I'd give Kim that. She really pulled it together. She even chose my outfit: a bright suit instead of my usual black ones. It fitted the season anyway.

"You owe us a fight, champ," I said, wrapping my free arm around our neighbor, Bran. He had come on over with his girlfriend Hope, but stood out a bit, as most of these folks were people I knew or who were related to the company. Luckily, Nolan, one of my sales folks who was good with people, had taken it upon himself to entertain our new neighbors.

"Hey there," I said, reaching out for Nolan's hand. "Nolan, great to see you."

"Hey, boss. Nice party." Nolan lifted a hand toward his girl. "This is my girlfriend, Grace."

Grace, I had barely met before. A stunning blonde who I'd gotten to know a little bit through her gardening company, or what it was. I visited her and Nolan at a work site once. She had some… impressive assets, even wearing overalls. I know I wasn't supposed to take note of an employee's girlfriend, but I'm only a guy, right? And in that summer dress she wore now… I imagined Nolan's head was on a swivel.

"Fiancé, you should say," I laughed, slapping Nolan's back. "Great to have you both." I turned more to Grace, wanting to not drown the conversation with work talk that excluded her. "I heard you stopped by to check out my backyard?"

"I did, but you weren't home," Grace replied. I chuckled. Fuck, that dress was a fucking magnet. A bit short, showing off plenty of leg. "I was quite surprised by the size of the project."

"I can imagine," I replied. My 'backyard' was 30 acres, plus-minus some. It was just an open field, and Linda and I wanted to do something about it. And why not employ some up-and-coming local business? "It's going to be amazing. You know, I can't wait. I was thinking a small creek? With ducks and carps? Maybe a bridge?"

"Sure, but it's going to cost," Grace replied, a challenging smirk and glance that told me that she was one who didn't shy away from most things. Nolan must've been a very lucky guy, was all I could think.

"Oh, money is no issue. Just make it perfect for me," I said, trying not to sound like I was gloating. Grace smiled, so I guess it worked.

"You can count on it," Grace said. "So, this is your first house, or did you upgrade?"

"No, this is my first. Sometimes I wish I hadn't gone so overboard. It's a bit big," I said, and my mind drifted to how I wanted to fill it with a huge family. How so much had happened in this house. It had been too big, but ironically, it had grown on me a bit. "Nate! Didn't see you there!" I did, but he had sort of lingered behind the other two.

"Heh, I was just outside checking out your cars. Didn't think you'd remember my name," the older man grunted. He was dressed in a regular button-up Hawaiian shirt and some khaki shorts. He looked more out of place than Bran probably felt.

"Well, I hired you. Of course, I'd know who you are," I laughed. He was a bit of an unsavory type, rough around the edges. He had trimmed his stubble and donned a shirt over his large frame, at least. He was a veteran in the PR game, though, and Nolan had gone good for him, so here we are. "I thought you said you wouldn't come?"

"Erh, I'm the designated driver for these two rascals," he said, nodding at Grace and Nolan, who were drifting toward the rest of the mansion. It was nice to see some normal couples around like those two. Or Hope and Bran.

"Kids these days, needing a babysitter," I joked.

"You're one to talk," Nate said, and we both laughed, Nate drifted off.

"Entrendy is growing fast," Bran said. "Last time I checked, you were grabbing at straws looking for exposure."

"Yeah, we signed any sort of riff raff," I joked, earning a laugh from both Hope and Bran. Bran was one of those early signings. He wasn't a celebrity or anything, but an athlete that needed a wardrobe. I shook my head as I started to mix up drinks for our small group.

"So, is Mona Marcetto as terrifying as she seems?" Hope asked.

"Even worse," I said. Hope raised an eyebrow. "Nah. She's not someone to mess with, though. Why, she got your vote?"

Hope shrugged. "She's a bit of a badass. And those calves in nylon? Sheesh."

"How's it going, broski?" Luna said, stumbling over. I wasn't sure if she had drank too much, or if it was because she had just wrestled someone out by the pool.

"We're discussing Mona's calf in nylon," I replied.

"Hey, don't harass my client!" Luna snickered, shoving me with her shoulder. I was tempted to shove her back, but knowing us, that would end up with us both on the floor, grappling away. A bit early in the party for that. "And put down those cups. Linda can mix. You need to relax. We've deserved it. Where is that Linda, anyway?"

My eyes scanned the room, cutting through the throng of laughing guests and clinking glasses until they landed on Linda. She was standing near the kitchen doors, a slight sweat making her shine. Almost as if we were connected by some invisible string, Linda's gaze met mine from across the room. Just for a moment - a silent exchange that said more than words could. Then she turned and made her way out toward the pool, maybe needing a breath of night air to cool her skin. She did look a bit pale. Maybe she was feeling worn out after everything.

I eyed Kim too. She was over by the kitchen with a cluster of people, laughing and enjoying herself. I was glad she did. I felt grateful for what she'd managed to pull together on such short

notice. Seeing employees and friends, neighbors, and the like laugh and chatter away, the party was indeed a success.

"Bran, we really need to talk about your next ring walk," Luna said, snapping me back to the current.

"Eh," he replied.

"And you said I should relax?" I teased.

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While it was summer, the air outside was liberating compared to inside. The heat, the noise, the music were all left behind inside as I found myself at the far edge of the pool deck. It wasn't that I sought seclusion, but rather just a small moment.

The heat inside had made me feel slightly nauseous, and the smell of alcohol... it never used to bother me, but I guess the sheer quantity of it and the setting made it more apparent. Too many people, cheap and expensive perfume thickening the air, noise. Maybe the whole situation. I was a bit more tired than I usually felt during social gatherings. A lot had happened lately, that was for sure.

But it was pretty warm and moist this fine evening, and I could also have eaten more. Drunk more water. Not worn a skin-tight pair of jeans I knew Josh would drool over. As I had hiked it on, I had pictured his face when he saw his favorite pants wrapped around his favorite thighs. But I was regretting it now.

Fresh air helped, though.

Kim had cut the grass earlier today too, so the smell was absolutely divine. I loved the smell of freshly cut grass. Part of why I loathed robot lawnmowers.

Moving down the small steps on the far side of the pool deck, I glimpsed toward the mansion where the rest of the world was. My world at least.

Josh. It sometimes felt like a dream. Or a fever dream. But now, he was being himself to the fullest. Socializing, being happy, mixing drinks, being the host. That was what mattered. And that bright suit was really working on him, I had to say.

I saw him check on people without prompt, talking with them, even remembering names which he had been so bad at before. He was laughing and joking with Luna. And I saw him even break Mirella out of her shell a tiny bit. His smile and energy pulsed through every interaction I saw him in. And yeah, I know my own bias as I observed him. I couldn't help but fall in love with him every time I saw him, especially when he was being himself like this. I wouldn't call it careless, but rather stress-free. Bright. Josh was never careless. Keeping an eye on folks even when he was relaxing.

Luna was bright and animated. That was her in a bubble, always the center of attention either by her own doing or by her own being. I smiled as I saw the two at each part of the party, being who they were put on this earth to be. Amazing people.

Kim was also laughing and being charming, behaving like she usually did. She had been trying, and she had been really useful in putting this whole event together. She had done a good job, and her mood was reflecting that. She was helpful, smiling, attentive, and almost sweet. In all, Kim was being good tonight. And still, I couldn't find myself entirely trusting the quality of that happiness.

A faint unease settled in my stomach. Maybe it was just exhaustion talking. God, how I wanted to shake it off. There was nothing concrete, after all. Kim was playing the perfect hostess tonight, laughing easily, engaging with guests. The party was humming along beautifully on the surface.

I told myself not to be that woman—mistaking old grievances for genuine intuition. Our history was messy, I knew that. I tried to focus on the positive, on how she'd stepped up. She stole a glance at her phone, a quick, almost secretive movement. Her smile when she laughed at someone's joke didn't quite reach her eyes. Her gaze swept the room again, searching, a flicker of... excitement? Tension?

I tried to follow her line of sight, but the crowd was thick. When I looked back, she was still in the kitchen, her focus seemingly absorbed by a game of beer pong. She sank a shot, eliciting cheers, her bright laugh ringing out over the music. But the unease stayed, coiled tight in my gut. It was nothing. It had to be nothing.

It was certainly not enough to make a huge fuss over. Things had been working lately, and we'd better keep it that way.

She was being good. She had helped. Those were things that were true. I should perhaps learn to be more fair. Distrust was unfortunately one of my bad habits.

Sitting down on the edge of the pool, dipping my toes in the cool water, I enjoyed the feeling of the cool air against my skin, the sounds of people laughing and having a good time in the background.

I let my toes bob in and out of the water, sending small ripples across the surface. The mansion lights didn't reach this far corner of the pool deck, casting everything in a dimmer glow. As I watched my small waves spread, distorting the reflections of the stars above, I noticed a figure emerge at the opposite side of the pool. That someone was approaching me. At the opposite side of the pool, a silhouette moved with somewhat lumbering steps, coming closer and closer. The light was dimmer here, away from the glow of the mansion, making it hard to see who it was.

The figure came closer, and my heart skipped a beat when I realized who it was.

"You look how I feel."

I sat up a little straighter, the water cooling my ankles suddenly not enough.

Amanda.

Of all people, that was not the one I'd expect. The blonde bombshell meandered her way up the pool, rounding the corner making her way toward me. I can't lie, she wasn't exactly my favorite person in the world, but she didn't come with her usual energy. Still, I watched her as she approached. She was wearing a casually nice pair of suit pants and a loose blouse, but there was still an air of elegance about her, like she'd just stepped out of a photoshoot. She must have made an effort for this party, even though she seemed... unwell. Her hair was slicked back, her makeup minimal, but I could tell something was off.

I eyed her belly. She was a long way into her pregnancy. I guess I was a bit surprised. I hadn't seen her in so long, and there hadn't exactly been any grand announcement from her like she'd do in high school for something way less significant.

"That bad?" I asked, waving to a nearby lounge chair. "Then you should sit down."

Amanda didn't reply. Instead, she made her way over to the chair and collapsed into it, her body almost melting into the plush cushion. She let out a soft sigh, closing her eyes, her hand resting on her forehead. Even tired and damp, a bit disheveled, and even with my prejudice against her, Amanda was fit to be a model. Hell, I still remembered our night together as one of... great experiences. Even that felt like a lifetime ago.

I noticed that she had left some space. Amanda hadn't opted for the closest lounge chair, but the one next to it. She wasn't intruding on my space, nor was she asking to be a part of it. The

distance represented so much more than just physical space. We'd probably never be close friends. I wasn't one to wallow in my own grief or cry over spilt milk, but Amanda had really made my childhood a living hell. I guess I was still harboring some resentment.

We sat in silence for a few moments, listening to the music from inside, the muted conversation from the guests. The world was out there, but we were in our own little bubble. I wasn't sure what she was doing, really. But the cooler atmosphere over here, the smell of cut grass, the glass she had brought with water and ice, it seemed to ease whatever she was dealing with. Her and Zach had spent years making rooms seem small; now she kept her distance.

"Party looks good," I said, feeling a bit awkward.

"Kim is being Kim," Amanda said, followed by a short snort that I felt I could mirror. I recognized that fierceness in her eyes as she studied a group of people, that gaze that had so many crumble. But I hadn't seen it like this. Her eyes moved toward the mansion, and the pain in her eyes seemed to change to another type, before relaxing into a more status quo expression. "He looks happy."

"He is," I said, warily.

"Good. He deserves it," Amanda said, shifting herself into a more comfortable position. Her tone seemed genuine. "I saw Kim. She invited me. I was surprised, given how our last little encounter went. It would be typical for her to exclude me–"

Amanda stopped herself, probably noticing she was highlighting too familiar behavior. Not that she was wrong. The pain made a brief return.

"She's trying," I replied, still gauging where this was going.

"Kim tries the way drunk people walk in a straight line," Amanda snorted.

"Amanda, why are you out here?" I asked point-blank. "You didn't come over to talk about Kim."

"Why, aren't she such a fascinating topic? I wonder, how did the shy nerd become so outgoing?" Amanda said. "No. The music is just too terrible."

I didn't reply. I wasn't here to argue with a pregnant woman, and certainly not Amanda. Amanda leaned forward in her seat, and her almost flawless face was illuminated by the dim lights of the pool. She was a beautiful woman, one who carried herself with confidence and authority. There was no question that she was in control. But I could see it, the slightest bit of hesitation, something that made her seem more human. Once upon a time, I'd doubt she even was human, and I'd many times wished to see her in disarray... but now that I saw it, it wasn't pleasant.

"I came out here because I owe you two conversations, and I was hoping like hell I'd find a way to avoid both," Amanda began, looking into the calm water, not really looking at it. "Life's cruel like that. Though, I guess I don't get to complain about cruelty to you."

I looked at her.

"I'm sorry, Linda," Amanda said, meeting my eyes for what seemed like the first time this evening. "I was too dumb to realize. I used you as a place to put my own vile cruelty. I was following Zach because it was easier than being decent. But I honestly have no excuse. If only I had been as strong as you, perhaps I could have treated you differently, but I didn't. I've taken so much from you and... it honestly amazes me how you still became someone better than me anyway. You were gentle, and I punished you for it."

The outside area surrounding the pool suddenly felt even quieter than it had been up till now. I didn't really look at Amanda. I wasn't sure when my gaze had broken, but it had, and I was looking at some tile that had a crack in it, thinking back to those days of hopeless despair.

The words hung between us, heavy and awkward, like uninvited guests at a party. It sounded like something she had been carrying for a while, and, in not an unkind way, it was good that it gave

her pain. Maybe that was the only way she could finally feel what she'd done. She was being honest, and I could tell she had changed. Her fingers traced the rim of her water glass, leaving faint trails on the condensation, and I found myself watching that instead of her face. Watching the way her hand trembled slightly. Amanda, trembling. If that wasn't a sign of how far she'd fallen from the pedestal she'd always stood on in my mind, I didn't know what was.

And now she sat here with me. Heavily pregnant, apologizing. She looked almost pitiful.

"I believe you."

"That's not the same as forgiving me," she said.

"No. It isn't," I replied, a bit lower this time. I didn't want to seem cruel, but it would be too easy to just brush it aside. Amanda stood from her chair, and I felt inclined to get up and give her support.

"I hurt you for years," Amanda continued and I met her eyes again. "Then you became the kind of person I didn't even know people could be. And now, I'm here again, standing here with this—" she gestured to her belly. "—and I'm terrified I'm about to take something from you again."

My eyes slowly trailed down from her face to her belly and back up to her face. I saw it in her expression. The way she looked toward the house. Toward…

My stomach turned.

"It's Josh's," Amanda said, her voice more filled with grief than joy.

Of course. I knew what this could mean. Should mean. When Josh learned of this, there was only one outcome, and I felt my throat tighten around a sudden lump. It was almost unbearable. He'd do what was right. Amanda knew it. And now I knew it. And that was the problem. He had even

wanted to start a family. I felt my eyes close as I felt something loathsome trickle down my cheek in one single file. How I hated when that happened. I really thought I was done with that.

I opened my eyes and saw him laughing and enjoying the harvest of his and Luna's hard work, seeing the one thing I never thought I'd experience. Being loved. Being loved by him. I was so ready to fight for him, and would do what I could for him to have the best and safest life he could, securely held tight to my heart. But I could already hear him say it, the inevitable choice. His heart would break, but his duty would be clear. He'd do what was right, and that was what Amanda knew.

The worst part is, I'd be right there by his side as he did it, smiling and supporting him. I was sure that the thought of Amanda being a mother made him happy, and I couldn't find myself disagreeing.

The house that had been so empty would get its rooms filled. And soon. Amanda was very pregnant. It was absurd to think about, how the rug could so easily be pulled from under you. And it wasn't even that sort of scenario. This was just what was right.

How that one tear annoyed me. It wasn't me; I was done with that. I had grown to become a stronger version of myself, and that stinging trail down my cheek was the opposite of that.

"I haven't told him yet," Amanda said, the words barely escaping her lips. Her fingers tightened around the water glass, knuckles white. "I know I should have. A long time ago. I just... didn't want to be the one to break you two. For him to choose duty over happiness and—" Amanda's voice cracked, something I'd never heard before. Something raw. "—I didn't want to become the reason you'd lose again. I couldn't stand the thought of him looking at me with that kind, responsible face and making that decision."

I wiped my face, regaining whatever little composure I had, failing miserably. Yet, when I talked, it was with a calmness I didn't recognize in myself.

"How?" I asked.

Amanda hesitated, not sure where to start. There was no vanity or hubris in her face.

"Josh brought me with as a plus one on a work trip. Kim had allowed it and given... permission. I was curious and perhaps selfish, and perhaps wanted one up on Kim or something... Josh was vulnerable. I should've been more careful, and I feel so incredibly dirty for how it happened, especially... when he took care of me the way he did. It became something I didn't expect... I never intended it to..."

Amanda's chest expanded with a sigh that seemed to lift more than air away from us; it lifted whatever thin veil of confidence she'd managed to drape over herself. Her gaze slid away from me, off toward the dark water of the pool, and I thought I caught the glimmer of shame there. She looked small—smaller than I'd ever seen her. The Amanda I knew was never small.

If it wasn't for this strange numbness that had settled over me since the words left her lips, I think I might have felt more. Sympathy, or rage, or something in between. Instead, there was just this hollow ache in my chest, this disbelieving calm. The whole thing reeked of cruel irony—of life having this way of tearing you down just when you'd dared to think you were standing on solid ground. The kind of mess that can't be cleaned up, only lived with.

"I guess I fell for it. Kim opened the door, and I somehow thought it was a good idea to walk through it," Amanda said. "It was never my intention to... take your place. I didn't know what I was doing then."

I believed her. I could see it in how she was talking. But it didn't feel like it mattered, or that it changed anything. It sounded like Amanda had gone in with one intention and gotten another. God, how right had I been in revoking Kim's 'green card' to Josh. How stupid had I been? Naive?

I felt so incredibly numb, sad, angry, frustrated, and a bit dizzy. It was all so much. Too much. But that hollow feeling that sat like a rock in my chest refused to move.

"Do you love him?" I asked, regretting the question immediately.

"How can you not?" Amanda answered, her voice cracking like thin ice. "Of course. I love him, yes." The confession hung between us, heavy as her swollen belly. Her eyes drifted toward the mansion, where Josh's laughter carried faintly through the night air. "But I'm not trying to claim him. I love him enough to know what telling him will do."

She looked away, her fingers unconsciously tracing circles on her stomach.

"And I love him enough to be ashamed that part of me wants him to do exactly that. I'm not telling you this to hurt or to make some sort of move. I'm telling you because I don't know what else to do."

I drew in a slow breath, resetting my breathing. I wasn't calm by any means, not yet. Who knows if I'd be that at all tonight.

"That man needs to keep his dick in his pants," I muttered.

Amanda laughed, despite herself. The alternative was probably crying.

My hand moved to my own belly as the nausea returned, sudden and sour. I blamed Amanda's news because I needed it to be Amanda's news.

"Josh needs to know," I said. Amanda nodded. "But perhaps not tonight. But soon."

"Tomorrow?"

I knew that would be the right answer but... I looked back at the house. It was as if Kim was treating people like pieces on a board, where actions didn't have consequences. Amanda had

been moved. Josh had bled. And somehow, I felt like I was the one sitting here trying to decide how much of the board could be saved.

"Soon."

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"That's it for me! I need a break," I laughed, moving away from the pong table, getting a disappointed small cheer and pouts from a few of the guys. It almost made me want to go for a few more rounds, just to satiate them. They had all been so complimentary for my work with the party!

But I was losing badly, and I needed to mingle a bit. I was the host after all. So stumble away from the kitchen, I did. I eyed Josh and Luna doing their respective things, so I couldn't be worse, could I?

"Great job, Kim," one said. Some nameless jock. One of Zach's empty-headed alpha friends. Ironic that they all looked at themselves like that, as there could really be one alpha in a pack. They were honestly more like sheep.

"Thanks," I beamed.

"I hope your effort is... appreciated enough," the meathead said, obviously flirting with me, checking me out without hiding it. Maybe he had no idea who my husband was. Or maybe he did, but Zach had bragged about fucking the shit out of me, and he hoped to get one over on Josh as well, as the first thing he did. I figured that would stroke this idiot's ego, confirming that he was, in fact, it.

I bit my lip at the thought of this alpha male fucking me, his stupid face filled with smugness, fucking me stupid. Or doing what he thought that was. Why did I have a weakness for idiots with egos? It was the wrongness of satiating these base desires with something as shallow and mindless as these types.

"I'm sure it will," I purred. "I love to be appreciated when I do a good job."

The guy smirked. God, they were so predictable.

"I'd appreciate you. Rumor has it, I'm pretty good at it too," he said. He probably thought he was being charming or something. "You did a really great job. The drink selection is pristine." Such big words. Pristine? Had he watched Pristine Edge before he came here and accidentally opened up a dictionary afterwards?

I perked up a bit. The compliments may come from a mouthbreather, but it didn't go... without appreciation.

"Enjoy the evening," I said, a simple dismissal, and walked away. Fuck, I honestly felt tempted to lead him outside to get fucked by him, just to see if he'd do anything different. And honestly, I deserved a treat. But alas, not now. Perhaps later.

My eyes wandered around the party, looking for more people to socialize with. A group of Josh's employees stood around a table out near the hot tub, chatting excitedly. As they should, given the success of the last few days.

"Everything alright?" I asked, entering the group. A few of them looked surprised, but adapted quickly. "Have we been hosting you well?" God, I was getting good at this.

"Sure thing, Kim," one of them said. A black fellow. I wasn't sure if I knew his name, but he had been here at Josh's birthday. "Helluva celebration!"

"Sean here is worried about staffing. Says we need to perhaps move out the building," one of the folks said, a brasher guy. Probably a PR guy or salesperson. "This thing is huge. I'm not sure how the fuck Luna landed it, but she did!"

"Luna is talented," I contributed.

"No shit," the brash one said, not really looking at me. His smugness shifted into a more earnest expression. "And how I landed here? Fuck, I thought I flunked the job interview, but apparently Josh saw something in me."

"Well, he has an eye for that sort of thing," Sean said.

"Except Alex. What the fuck was that about?" the brash one said. Was he shit-talking the only person I actually hired?

"He got shipped to Alaska. Doing pretty well," one other guy said.

The talk then moved back into staffing, the Mona contract, campaign optics, and how the future of the company looked. And a lot of Josh and Luna glazing. They were very complimentary toward them in fact, not a mention of my efforts with the party.

But I played the good host. I nodded, tried to contribute, but it all felt surface-level. They all responded politely, but in a dismissive way, clearly not taking what I said as anything but shallow party banter.

My eyes wandered to Josh and Luna, who were doing their own individual rounds as well. Their eyes met mine across the room, and they gave me small nods. Luna smiled. Josh winked, looking dashing in his bright suit, oblivious to the appreciative gazes he was getting. He then waved at someone and made his way to that part of the room. But the response they were getting was

eager nods, attentive listening, and gravity seemed to be towards them when they talked to people.

I shifted my stance as I stood there watching the ease of them, feeling more than just awkward. Slightly annoyed, I'd say.

I checked my phone. Toby said he'd come. I thought I saw him earlier, but he hadn't really made his presence known yet. Perhaps for the better. We had a huge place, but my proximity had been too close to Josh for Toby. Plus, Toby was kind of wary of crowds. I used to think it was shyness, but it was honestly more like... he just didn't want to be there. I guess that made sense. If you were a loser, why would you want to be around people?

When had the temperature risen? I felt my pulse increase a tiny bit as I stood in the middle of the room, taking in the scene. This wasn't even about me, this party. I had put it together, but it seemed like only those without a brain wanted a part of me. And that was a certain part of me. The attention I had received now felt like a backhand.

I excused myself, wanting a bit of privacy to text him. Or maybe I'd video him something spicy. Tension was building.

Drifting through the door, I saw almost walked into someone with a very heavy pregnant belly, blocking the door by accident. I looked up and saw Amanda's almost perfect face. Puffy from her pregnancy. Wait, when did she even get pregnant?

"Amanda!" I said, not really getting out of the way. It had been a while. "You came."

"And now I'm leaving," she said dryly, pushing past me.

"Who's the dad then?" I said, adding unsavory sweetness to my voice. If Amanda was going to be a bitch at my party, I'd be one back. "Where'd it happen? A random bus stop?"

Amanda turned to look at me with a mix of tiredness, scorn, and annoyance. As if she had any position for any of that.

"God, you're such a fucking idiot, Kim," she said with that arrogant calmness, utterly dismissing me. That fucking cow.

"What the fuck, who the fuck did this?!" Zach suddenly boomed from a few feet away, making his way over, staring at Amanda's belly.

"A real man," Amanda said, glaring back at Zach.

"Yeah? So who's the poor bastard then? Hope you at least--" Zach began.

"Zach?" Josh said, making his way over. The party hadn't noticed, but Josh, of course, did. "Why are you here? Get the fuck out. Who keeps inviting this asshole?"

Zach raised his hands and backed away, not wanting to be embarrassed in front of everyone again. But he was still full of spite.

"Your fucking wife did," he said. "I'm leaving."

Josh didn't even look at me. Did he not believe Zach? Did he, but he couldn't deal with me right now? The thought of the latter made my blood boil.

"I'll grab a glass of water," Amanda said, not wanting to leave along with Zach. She reached a hand to support her lower back. "I'll head out afterwards."

"No, you're also--" I began, but Josh talked over me. I half expected him to ask why Zach was invited, and I momentarily braced myself.

"Let me find you a chair, and I'll bring the water," he said, wrapping an arm around Amanda. Too hard, I guess; her knees seemed to buckle a bit. But effectively leaving me there in the door. He didn't even look at me.

It would've been better if he was angry.

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"Zach," I called, hurrying after him. He had only made it just past the garage by the time I made it outside. While Zach was an unsavory character, I wanted to smooth things over. "Wait up!"
"What the fuck do you want?" Zach asked over his shoulder, still walking away.

"Wait, stop," I said, not wanting to chase him all the way down the driveway. "Come on."

Zach paused, and I could see him raise an eyebrow. Slowly, a smug smile crept over his face, and he turned to me.

"I knew you couldn't keep away," Zach smirked. God, the way this bastard spoke. He made no attempt to approach me, making me walk to him, but that suited me just fine. It was a bit more secluded on the far side of the garage, more shielded from the party. Well, the party was still in a dangerous proximity. Dangerous? Why would it be dangerous? I was here to be a good girl.

His eyes raked over me in an almost possessive gaze. It was disgusting, the way his eyes lingered on my cleavage, his pupils widening. It made me want to throw up or claw his eyes out. But that was exactly why I was here, wasn't it?

"You like that dress?" I asked, trying to sound unimpressed and dry. I probably failed, and my question sounded flirtatious instead. "A good dress, don't you think?"

"Bet. It's a decent dress," Zach said, sounding as cocky and self-centered as usual. "You always dress to your looks, so even an average outfit works well for you. Is that why you're out here, to talk about the dress?"

He looked behind me toward the house, then back to me, licking his lips. He looked at me like I was the only thing in front of him. Not a wife or a hostess, not some idiot standing uselessly in her own house. Just something he wanted right here and now.

"Amanda thinks she's better than everyone," I began, trying to trail it back to why I was here. "She just ruins the mood when she's like that."

"I shouldn't have let her walk away feeling like she won that," Zach spat, looking off to the side, recounting the event. "She was always a slut anyway. The kid is prolly some low-life trailer trash she hitched a ride with. Did you know that? She once blew a guy when I couldn't drive her home from the club once."

Amanda always felt so superior, but yeah, it goes to show what a fucking pedestal she really had. But I kept quiet, knowing I wasn't supposed to defend Amanda. I was just a little girl, and I was trying to not make things worse.

"But you, Kim, you're better than that, aren't you?"

"Yes. She was just being mean, wasn't she?"

"Fuck yeah," Zach smirked.

I bit my lip and looked up at him. "You should be nice too. You're not a bad guy."
Zach smiled, his hand reaching up to my hair.

"Nah. You know I can be nice," he said, brushing his fingers over my hair. "Really nice."

"That's true," I breathed. I hated that this was turning me on. Zach was such an idiot... but my thoughts trailed to Amanda calling me one... Josh hadn't even looked at me. Somehow that was worse.

"Does Josh know I fucked his wife?" he asked, his voice rough, his grip on my hair tightening. "No," I murmured.

"Good," Zach chuckled. His other hand grabbed my ass. "You were a good slut then, weren't you?"

"Ugh," I grunted, pushing against him. Zach pushed back, his hand moving from my hair, wrapping around my throat.

"Oh yeah, fight me. I'm not your little husband. You need someone like me to remind you who's in charge."

I gasped and squirmed. It was wrong, and it felt so, so right to just be treated like this. I could feel him through his pants, grinding into me.

"That's it. You're a slut. A good girl."

Zach pushed his lips against mine, his tongue forcing itself into my mouth, and I was reminded of the last time he had his way with me. How dirty and humiliating it had been. Alex and him had run a proper train on me for hours at a dirty motel. I was just a way for Alex to pay off some stupid debt or what it was. Zach had only been along for the ride. But fuck, how that had been a ride. I had been sore for days afterwards.

It didn't take long before I had my hands down his pants, feeling his already hard cock. He was throbbing, eager to take his frustration out on me. Zach's hand moved up my thigh and under my dress, pulling my panties aside as he stroked my pussy. My hips bucked, and I let out a little whimper.

"What do you want?" he asked. I wanted to tell him to shut up, to stop talking, but I didn't have it in me. I wanted to be fucked so badly.

"I want it," I breathed. "Fuck me."

Zach spun me around and pushed me forward, shoving his hand over my mouth to muffle my surprised cry. I reached forward to steady myself, my hands finding the wall of the garage. If I moved my head a bit, I'd see past the corner of the garage and up at the mansion where Josh was. Fuck me, this was so wrong. Letting a douchebag and asshole like Zach use me to feel like he was superior to anyone. To Josh. And why? Why was I doing this? I was a good girl…

I felt Zach's hot breath on my ear. "Josh doesn't fuck you like this, does he?" he grunted, and I shook my head, shame washing over me. I felt his dick press against my slit, and my body shivered, a mixture of disgust and eagerness.

"He needs a real man to teach him how to do it," Zach continued, his words almost intoxicating. He pressed himself into me, and I gasped, his cock stretching me.
"That's it," I breathed, my eyes closing in pleasure.

Zach grunted and started fucking me, hard and fast, not giving me any chance to adjust. The first few thrusts were painful, but as he picked up a steady pace, I could feel my pussy adjusting, getting wetter. I couldn't deny how good it felt to be fucked like this by someone who had no regard for my needs. I felt his hand push down between my shoulders, bending me over further. His other hand moved up my body, grabbing my hair, pulling on it, making my scalp tingle.

"Zach," I moaned, his rough thrusts sending ripples of pain and pleasure through my body. "Harder!"

Zach groaned and complied, pounding me hard, his hand leaving my shoulder to move to my ass, and the sound of him spanking me made me flinch in pain, the sharp slap radiating out. I grunted, his thrusting sending spikes of pleasure mixed in with that pain. His hand gripped my ass hard. I loved the rough way his calloused palms felt on my skin. He had a way of making me feel dirty and used. God, how that contrasted with Josh... I'd feel like such a failure to him…

The image made me moan, a strange mix of pain and ecstasy building in my belly, threatening to make me cum already.

Zach was groaning, fucking me harder, his dick pulsating and throbbing inside me.

"Are you gonna cum inside me, Zach?" I teased, grinding against him.

Zach groaned again and grabbed a fistful of hair again, his hips jerking roughly, his hips slamming hard and fast against me. I could feel the way his cock slid in and out of me. The wet squelching noises coming from our union turned me on even more, the sound obscene and perverse, not what was expected of me at all.

My hands slid up and down the wall of the garage as if to keep myself steady. The feeling of his dick inside of me made my thighs quiver and clench, my stomach knot up. My hips rolled, urging him to move faster and harder, until his groans of exertion echoed mine.

"Cum in me," I gasped, pushing back against him. "Cum inside me, Zach!"

Zach let out a guttural groan that seemed to come from deep in his chest. His body went rigid, the muscles in his back tensing as his cock throbbed inside me. But right before he reached his peak, he pulled out with an abrupt motion, shoving me down to my knees on the rough asphalt. "Open your mouth," he grunted, not that I had much choice in the matter.

Before I could even process what was happening, hot streams of cum splattered across my face. The first rope hit my cheek, making me flinch instinctively. Another followed, thick and sticky, landing on my nose and dripping down toward my lips. I gasped, surprised by the sheer amount, my eyes clamping shut as some managed to get there too.

My lips parted of their own accord, a small moan escaping as the warmth spread across my skin. I could feel it trickling down my jawline, some dripping onto my dress. Zach's harsh breathing was the only sound now, and I stayed on my knees, face pointed upward, coated in his release. The party noise felt miles away now, muffled by this moment of utter degradation that I had somehow craved.

I heard Zach's satisfied grunts as I sat there, cum dripping down my face, coating my chin and chest, no doubt finding it amusing to cover Josh's wife in his very essence, marking me as his. "Thanks for the fuck," Zach chuckled, zipping up his pants. "You're a good girl."

With that, he left me on my knees.

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Afterwards, I rounded the house, heading to the pool house out back. I half wanted to walk into the party with Zach's genes dripping from my face, but... well... I wasn't sure what that would do exactly.

I took a quick shower after that, not really wanting to be covered in Zach's cum anymore. The sensation of being so defiled was nice for a bit, but it quickly turned to just being... icky. Zach had fucked me hard, and I had loved every second of it. And yet, here I was, washing that away,

almost disappointed in myself for doing so. It hadn't really done what I hoped it would do. He couldn't even make me cum properly. No wonder Amanda dumped him.

I wanted to fix something, to prove something, but as I had cleaned myself up, Amanda's voice was still there, and Josh's eyes weren't. Her words and his back remained still.

'where r u,' I wrote in a frustrated message to Toby. But instead of waiting for that fat fuck to get a move on, I made my way out to the pool area.

It was desolate, except for the small group I had talked to earlier that still lingered near the hot tub. A few feet away from them, a bit for himself, I saw an older guy, sleazy-looking, with a big gut, smoking a cigarette. I recognized him, but I wasn't sure from where. I made my way over to him, trying to put on my most sultry look.

"Hey there," I purred, looking at him like he was the most interesting person in the world. I leaned against the railing next to him. "You having fun?"

The man looked at me and smiled, his gaze raking over my body. I could see the interest in his eyes, his hand holding the cigarette twitching slightly, as if he was thinking about groping me. "I'm enjoying the view," he said, his voice low and gravelly.

"I can see that," I said, giving him a playful smile, tilting my head slightly to expose the side of my neck. "You like what you see?"

His gaze moved to the house. "Your husband must be a lucky man," he said, licking his lips. "Bet he couldn't handle you."

I smirked. "He could try, but I bet he wouldn't know how," I replied, leaning in close to him, my hand moving to his leg. I could feel the warmth of his body, the smell of his cologne mixed with smoke. It was intoxicating. "But you look like you would."

"Oh, I'd make you scream," he said, his hand moving to my thigh, giving it a squeeze. His fingers were rough, and I could feel them digging into my flesh, almost painfully so.

"Let me show you something," I said, taking his hand and guiding him toward the pool house. My heart was pounding in my chest, my pulse racing. This felt wrong, so incredibly wrong, but that only seemed to fuel me.

We made it behind the pool house, shielded from the view of the party. I could hear the muffled noises of the music, the chatter, but it felt like they were miles away. I pushed the man up against the wall, my hands moving to his belt, unbuckling it with practiced ease.

"Eager, are we?" he chuckled, his hand moving to my breast, squeezing it through my dress.

"I'm always eager," I replied, feeling the bulge in his pants grow as I unzipped his fly, pulling down his underwear just enough to release his cock. It was already hard, pulsating slightly with anticipation. I wrapped my fingers around the shaft, pumping it slowly, feeling the weight of it in my hand. God, he was thick. I felt a shiver run down my spine, my pussy throbbing with desire.

I took a moment to admire his manhood, the way it twitched in my hand, the veins running along its length. I could feel him pulse against my palm, his breathing quickening as I stroked him. It was intoxicating.

"Damn," I muttered. "Do I know you?"

The man laughed, his hand moving down to my ass, squeezing it firmly.

"I doubt it. But you're gonna know me soon enough," he said, his voice low and husky, sending a jolt of electricity through my body. "Now let's get that mouth working."

With that, he guided me down to my knees, his hand tangling in my hair. I felt the soft grass under my legs, the cool air against my bare skin. My pulse was racing, my heart pounding in my chest. I looked up at him, his cock inches away from my face, and I licked my lips.

"You're gonna make me feel good, aren't you?" he growled, pushing my head closer to him. "Like a good girl."

I nodded, my lips parting, taking the head of his cock into my mouth. I could taste him, the salty, musky flavor filling my mouth. I swirled my tongue around the tip, teasing him, feeling him twitch against my lips. It was much larger than Zach, for sure. And he tasted better too.

His grip on my hair tightened, and he pushed himself further into my mouth, his cock sliding across my tongue, hitting the back of my throat. I gagged slightly, trying to accommodate him, the pressure making my eyes water. He didn't give me time to adjust, instead thrusting his hips, forcing himself deeper into my mouth, my throat stretching to accommodate him.

My fingers dug into his thighs, trying to find purchase as he drove deeper, but it was useless. He knew exactly who he was facefucking—Josh's perfect wife—playing hostess with a mouthful of stranger's cock. The thought made my stomach flip and my thighs ache. He wasn't holding back because he knew I couldn't stop him, wouldn't stop him. That's what got my blood pumping so hard I could feel it thumping between my legs.

He grunted as he pulled out, his cock leaving a trail of saliva from my mouth. My eyes watered as I gasped for breath, my knees aching. He let go of my hair and helped me to my feet, shoving me against the wall. Zach had done the same, but this was a real man—older, impatient, taking no bullshit. He seized the opportunity instantly, knowing I wouldn't resist. Zach thought himself a man, but... yeah, I don't think I'd fuck him again. He wasn't worth that much of my time.

The stranger pulled my panties down, pushing my dress up, and his fingers dug into the flesh of my thighs as he kicked my legs apart. He held his massive cock against me, teasing me, his breath hot against my skin, the pressure making me squirm.

"You want this?" he grunted, nipping at my ear. "You're Josh's little wife, aren't you? How would he like to see you like this? Bent over and begging for my cock?"

I let out a soft moan, and I could feel him smile against my skin. I closed my eyes, savoring the words. I needed this. I needed to be put in my place, for someone to call me out on what I was doing and still want me anyway.

My breath hitched as I felt him move, positioning himself, the tip of his cock nudging its way inside me, pushing himself into me, his hips pressing against me. He felt so big, filling me up completely, and I couldn't help but moan, the sound escaping my lips, my nails digging into the wall. He grabbed a fistful of my hair, pulling my head back, forcing me to arch my back, his other hand wrapping around my waist, pulling me closer.

"Is this what you wanted?" he grunted, his thrusts becoming harder, faster. "To be fucked like a dirty little slut?"

I could only moan in response, my body trembling, my mind a blur of pleasure and pain.

His movements were rough, unapologetic, and I could feel my orgasm building, my thighs shaking, my stomach clenching. He was taking what he wanted, using me for his pleasure, and I loved it. Whatever tension he had was being taken out on my pussy and it was glorious.

I was so close. The way his cock rubbed against my g-spot sent shockwaves of pleasure through my body, each thrust bringing me closer and closer to the edge. My breathing became erratic, my moans louder, my body writhing.

"That's right, you fucking slut, cum for me," he growled, his fingers digging into my skin, his cock throbbing inside me.

I couldn't hold it back any longer. The pressure was too much. My vision blurred, and I cried out, my body trembling as the waves of pleasure washed over me, taking over my senses.

As the aftershocks faded, I slumped against the wall, the stranger's cock still inside me, his breathing heavy.

"Good girl," he said. "You're gonna be a good girl for me, aren't you?"

"Y-yes," I murmured, feeling a strange sense of pride wash over me. "Yes, I'll be a good girl. Just... remember to pull out, I'm not on the pill."

The sharp intake of breath was just the reaction I wanted. Fuck, I knew he would love to cum inside me. And that's what I wanted too, really. That's why I said it. It drove some men mad hearing that they were inside a fertile woman, not wanting to pull out. They'd be so tempted. So close. This big man would get to plant his seed in Josh's wife.

The thought sent a fresh wave of arousal through me.

He grunted in frustration, his hips still moving, his cock sliding in and out of me. "Don't say that," he said, his voice low and dangerous. "Don't fucking say that to me. I'm trying to be a gentleman."

I laughed.

"You're a gentleman who's fucking some guy's wife behind a shed?" I teased. "Doesn't seem very gentlemanly."

His grip on my hair tightened, his body pressed harder against mine.

"Shut the fuck up and be a good girl," he growled.

His hips were still moving, but slower now, his cock pulsating inside me. His voice was low and dangerous.

"Maybe I'll do it. Maybe I won't," he whispered in my ear. I smirked. He had all the power, he was in control. He got to decide. It made me excited.

I gasped at the thought of being pregnant by him while Josh remained oblivious. The powerlessness of submitting to this scenario sent a shiver of arousal through me. God, it was thrilling—his employee taking his wife, and Josh being forced to accept his cuck status, caring for the bastard child. It would serve him right.

And I didn't even know who *this* bastard was...
"I'm... getting close..." the guy groaned. He grabbed my wrists and pinned them above my head, stretching me out, giving himself more room to push himself into me, and his hips snapped back and forth as he fucked me. "I can feel you tightening around me."

I bit my lower lip, holding my moans back.

"He'd be mad if I got knocked up by you," I whispered, trying to sound innocent.
The stranger didn't answer; instead, he just grunted in response as his thrusts grew more aggressive, more wild. He held my wrists tight, not letting go as I struggled against him, trying to free myself. But it was useless. He was too strong, too much for me. And that's what I was hoping for.

"Fuck," he groaned, his cock throbbing inside me. And then I felt a sharp stab of pain as his teeth sank into my neck.

I let out a cry, my body stiffening as the shock coursed through me. And I lost any ability to suppress my pleasure anymore. I was crying out in a full-throated scream, loud and long, my voice hoarse and throaty. A plea of primal hunger, urging him to finish the job.

And as he continued to fuck me, the stranger moved my wrists into one of his large hands, letting his other wander. His fingertips slid over my skin, tracing the contours of my body, finding my breasts and cupping them firmly. His mouth was hot against my neck as he left a trail of kisses down my throat, biting gently into the soft flesh.

Then it happened. I felt it before I could process—something familiar, warm, wet, thick flooding my insides. Oh god, he'd done it. The realization hit like lightning as he held my wrists, pinning me. A whimper escaped my lips, my body trembling as waves of my orgasm faded. His hips didn't pause or slow as he climaxed; he kept fucking me, pumping load after load deep inside me. Each spurt was a fresh, hot deposit against my cervix, the knowledge of what it meant making me dizzy with perverse pleasure.

When the final spasm subsided, he didn't just stop. The stranger collapsed against me, pinning me to the wall, catching his breath. I could feel the sticky evidence of what he'd done seeping out, sliding down my thighs as I trembled, aftershocks still wracking my body.

And despite everything, I didn't feel that fulfillment I sought.

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I spotted that jock from earlier, the one who'd called the drinks 'pristine'. He was leaning against the kitchen counter, nursing a beer, watching me with that hungry look guys like him always had. But I honestly felt bored by him once again. I let him feel me up a bit with the intention to drop to my knees right there and show him what this 'good hostess' could really do, but as he opened his zipper, I couldn't help but snort and walk away. The jock's eyes widened, his hand freezing mid-zip, probably dumbfounded.

By the time I returned to the party, it was pretty much over. I saw Luna chat drunkenly with someone, a few other folks waiting around for their ubers or whatever, but other than that, the party had died in my absence. Checking the clock, I had actually been away for a good while. Not that the time had fulfilled what I needed. Neither Zach or the random guy had done the job. Sure, it was good, but it wasn't what I needed. Maybe that was the problem. I kept finding men who would look at me, when the only person I wanted to look had walked right past me. I didn't want another man, not really.

I spotted Josh coming in from escorting some of our guests to their rides. Linda was nowhere to be seen, and Amanda had probably left a while ago. Nobody had any idea what I had been up to, a thought that made me feel so devious and naughty.

Looking at him, I felt a small desperation of wanting him to look my way. The others this evening had looked, wanted, and used. But Josh hadn't yet.

"I'm beat," he said, moving towards me, a weak smile on his face. He was obviously tired. "This was a great party, Kim, I have to say." Before I had a chance to tell him it was all my pleasure, he turned to Luna. "The Wall is yours."

Luna gave a thumbs up, and up to our bedroom we went.

Once the door was shut behind us, he didn't say a word, just started unbuttoning his shirt. He was so tired, fiddling unusually with his top button, realizing the tie was in the way. He could probably feel me watching him, because he turned and gave me a small smile.

"You okay?" he asked.

How I resented that gentleness right now. He wasn't angry, not suspicious. He was being kind. And somehow, that felt like an accusation.

Not because he knew. He didn't. That was the worstpart. He stood there with his half-open shirt and his soft eyes, and his stupid, exhausted concern, offering me kindness as if kindness was still the language we were speaking.

I wanted him to be angry. I wanted him to grab my wrists and ask where I'd been. I wanted him to smell the night on me, see through me, punish me with the truth. Anything would have been better than that little gentle question.

Because if he was kind, then I was just cruel.

And I couldn't be cruel. Not tonight. Not after being useful. Not after being good.

"Why wouldn't I be?" I asked, my voice with an edge.

Josh, the ever-trusting, ever-wonderful man, didn't hear it. His guard was down. Why wouldn't it be? In his world, everything was as it should.

He stood up from the bed, untied his tie in a way that was just simply sexy. He had that tired swagger of a man who had been focused for so long and was now ready to relax, who deserved peace.

I wasn't ready to relax, nor did I bring peace. I found myself wanting him to accuse me, to notice the wrongness, to give me the energy I deserved. It was going unnoticed, however, with Josh just seeing his wife tense from a night of partying. I had been good for a while, and promised to make changes to how I behaved. And that is what he saw.

"The party was a great idea. I had no idea how much I needed to just... unwind. The guests seemed to get along great, too, despite the different backgrounds. And that new game you got? It was a winner for sure," he said. "You did a wonderful job. Thank you."

He was thanking me for snacks, music, and games. I wanted him to look at me like I had dragged the moon into the room and placed it at his feet. He meant what he said. That was the awful part. Josh wasn't being dismissive. He wasn't humoring me for the sake of it. He truly thought he was giving me something beautiful by noticing the party, by thanking me for all the little things I had done.

But I didn't want little things.

I didn't want to be the woman who remembered the ice and vegetarian pizza and which playlist kept people dancing. I wanted him to look at me like I was the reason the whole room had existed at all.

I didn't want gratitude.

"You took good care of Amanda."

Josh, tired and honest, said the simple answer. "She needed help."

I took a step toward him before I knew it. Before he did. He was so tall compared to me; stepping into his space was something I had grown accustomed to. I raised a hand to rest at his chest, looking up at him. Josh closed his eyes and relaxed at my touch. No, Josh. Look. As my husband, I guess he obeyed. Call it a sixth sense.

Josh opened his eyes, and concern flashed over his face. His eyes had grown soft, a bit more aware, and as his eyes scanned my face, he seemed to wake up.

"Kim, what's going on?" he asked.

I smiled. Stiffly at first, but I smoothed it out quickly. "I just want you."

The thought and action appeared at the same time. I pushed him back, but instead of following him, I went to a drawer where I kept some of my secrets. If he wasn't going to look at what I'd done, I'd give him something he couldn't ignore.

I remembered how Linda guided him, how she'd shown him patience and gentleness. But I wasn't Linda. I didn't want patience. I wanted to break something.

I pulled out the strap-on harness, the one I'd hidden for special occasions. The black leather felt cool against my fingers as I stepped into it, and it was surprisingly snug. It fitted me perfectly. I then retrieved my specially molded dildo from a small box and secured it into the harness. The pink-ish dildo was thick, as long and thick as the real thing, with an intricate ribbed texture, a slight curve upward to hit that g-spot.

It felt so empowering to see Josh's eyes widen in surprise, to see his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed hard.

"That's new," Josh said. He watched from the bed, shirt half-unbuttoned, his exhaustion momentarily pushed aside by confusion. "Kim... what are you doing?" he asked, his voice soft, uncertain. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

I walked over to him, the heavy dildo bobbing with each step, and pushed him back against the mattress. His eyes widened as I straddled his chest, the toy pointing inches from his face.

"You don't like how I play? Linda taught you to be gentle, to take things slow. But I want to see what happens when I use pressure instead," I cooed, my voice laced with venom disguised as sweetness.

I knew this phase too well. This is where his insecurities jump in, and he needs a bit of pushing. He was afraid of wanting this. Linda got him there; I would get him there too.

"Let me take care of it," I whispered, feeling my excitement grow. "You liked it when Linda stopped asking questions."

"Kim," he said again, sharper this time.

I paused. Not because I wanted to. Because some small, annoying part of me still knew the difference between taking and being allowed.

His eyes searched mine. Tired. Concerned. Unsure.

"Say no, then," I whispered, looking down at him.

A beat. Two beats. He didn't.

That was all the permission I needed, and maybe it wasn't enough, but I took it anyway.

I pushed forward, and it didn't take long until I was testing his resistance; he opened his mouth, and I took the opportunity by its hair locks. His hands came up to my hips, holding firmly, applying a bit of pressure. Maybe he was just too tired, too gentle, too kind and complacent, too drunk on the evening's success to fight back. Or maybe I was right. This was what he wanted. He was letting me.

"That's it," I whispered, watching his jaw strain as I applied more pressure. "Open up for mommy."

Something shifted in his eyes then—fear, maybe. Or resignation. His lips parted, and I didn't hesitate, sliding the dildo into his mouth until he gagged, his hands clenching on my thighs.

"Good boy," I murmured, pulling back just enough to let him breathe before pushing in again. "Maybe Linda was wrong about you. Maybe tenderness wasn't what you needed."

I fucked his mouth with slow, deliberate strokes, watching his eyes water, his throat working to accommodate the silicone invasion. He didn't fight anymore, just lay there taking it.

But I wanted him to watch. I wanted him to see what I was doing, what he was letting me do.

"Look at me," I commanded, my hand wrapping around his throat, applying just enough pressure to make him meet my gaze. "I want you to see who's really in charge here."

His eyes finally locked with mine, wide with something I couldn't quite read. Was it submission? Defeat? Whatever it was, it wasn't the satisfaction I craved.

"I could make you take this whole thing," I whispered, my thumb stroking his Adam's apple, watching it bob nervously against my touch. "No lube, no prep. Just bend you over and show you what pressure really feels like."

He flinched then, a subtle but unmistakable reaction. That was better. That was something real. Minor, but there. It stoked the fires.

"I should've done this sooner," I continued, my hand tightening around his throat, my hips rocking faster, the dildo hitting the back of his throat with each stroke. "Maybe this is what you needed."

I held his throat as he struggled to breathe, the sound of his gagging music to my ears. He was a big, strong man who looked so much smaller right now.

When I let go, he gasped for air, his chest rising and falling rapidly as I withdrew the toy completely. I didn't wait for him to fully recover before guiding his hands to the bedposts, tying them there with the soft silk ribbons I'd brought for just this occasion. I could feel his slight unease, and I relished it, savoring this feeling of absolute control. Josh was a powerful man, a good provider. He had my respect and admiration. He should know that this wasn't some petty tantrum.

This was the very opposite of a petty tantrum.

"Shhh, don't fight it," I murmured, caressing his cheek as I straddled him once more, his body now under mine. "This is how I'll take care of you."

I tugged his pants down, freeing his hardening cock and settling over his lap, rubbing the dildo against his cock and balls. The dildo dwarfed him. Of course it did. Its origin was from a certain friend.

"Alright. Roll over."

Josh obeyed, letting himself get manhandled, the act so passive that it made me feel even more powerful. He rolled onto his stomach without protest, his head resting on a pillow, his body ready for my ministrations. I grabbed a jar of lubricant, which Linda left conveniently close-by. Slicking up my dildo, I positioned it against his entrance, pushing gently. His muscles clenched instinctively, and I paused, letting him adjust before pushing again, harder this time.

Josh whimpered as the tip slid past his tight ring of muscle, his hands gripping the bed frame as he fought the natural instinct to escape the pain, to pull away from the intrusion. Fuck, to think I was breaching into my own husband with his rival's cock. Josh was already in a compromised position. What if he knew it was with Toby's dick up his ass?

"That went in easier than I thought," I mused, easing myself further inside him, enjoying the sounds of his discomfort mixed with the unmistakable hums of pleasure. I slid deeper, the lube making my entrance smooth despite the size of my dildo, until I was fully hilted, my hips pressing against him.

I fucked him at a leisurely pace, giving him time to adjust to being taken like a woman. He grunted beneath me, his breath coming in short gasps, his body shuddering every time I hit the right spot inside him. I thought it would be hard, but no, Josh was so receptive. I was right.

"That's it," I whispered, picking up my pace a little.

I leaned forward, draping myself over his back as I continued my assault, my breasts pressing against him, my hips grinding into him. He was so hard, so willing, so... mine. Josh arched his back, pushing himself onto me, inviting me deeper, begging for more without saying a word. I could hear his breathing change as I picked up my pace again, a low moan escaping his lips with each thrust.

I moved one of my hands to his hip, my fingers digging into the flesh, holding him in place as I fucked him harder. The other slid up his back, tracing the line of his spine, my nails leaving faint red marks in their wake.

I pulled back to my feet, the dildo still buried inside him as I positioned myself to hit that perfect angle, like Linda had. I planted one foot on the side of his head, pressing his face into the pillow as I drove into him harder, my hips pistoning with increasing speed and force. His muffled moans vibrated against the fabric of the pillow, but there was no mistaking the sounds of pleasure mixed with his ragged breaths. He was enjoying this. He was enjoying being dominated, being used.

"You like that, don't you?" I growled. "You like being my dirty whore?"

Josh didn't answer, just whimpered, burying his face deeper into the pillow as I continued to drive him to the brink of sanity. The sounds of my hips slapping against his ass filled the room, punctuated by my grunts and his muffled cries of pleasure.

I closed my eyes for a few seconds, imagining the real Toby doing this to him. That would teach him a lesson. That would show him what it felt like to be truly humiliated. Toby, this fat, creepy piece of shit, using Josh like this. I giggled, but kept the pace. The thought made my own arousal spike and I let out a moan.

Amidst those thoughts, I heard Josh's breath hitch as he came with an incoherent grunt. The sounds made me smile wickedly, his cum squirting all over the sheets. I fucked him through it, slowing my pace as his body shuddered beneath me.

I withdrew as slowly as possible, the sensation drawing out a few involuntary moans from him, a couple whimpers. It didn't take a genius to see that the way the thick, heavy silicone dildo had stimulated him and hit his prostate was going to leave him sore and throbbing tomorrow morning.

Satisfied with a job well done, I reached up to untie his bonds. He immediately relaxed, letting go of the tension that had built as he laid there, immobile. He turned onto his side, a look of shame on his face. But a moment later it was gone, replaced with the fatigue I had observed previously.

Maybe this was what he really needed, but didn't even dare admit to himself.

"Are... are you okay?" Josh asked. Again.

He was looking at me now. Really looking at me. Finally.

But still not the way I wanted.

Not with awe, not with fear. Not with the hunger those men outside had given me so cheaply. He looked at me like I was something wounded, something he might still be able to help if only I would tell him where it hurt.

I hated him for that. I hated him because I loved him.

"I'm fine," I said.

Then I turned away before he could see my face and reached for the harness, tucking it back into the drawer where it belonged. He didn't ask where it came from.

That should have relieved me. Instead, I felt the shape of the lie settle in the room with us.