

## Chapter 17

The anger that had brought Grace to Nate's apartment earlier felt like it belonged to someone else entirely now, a memory she could examine without the heat that had fueled her. She still understood the reasons - the way Tuesday had crossed lines she hadn't fully processed, the way Nate seemed to take pleasure in stripping away the control she so carefully maintained in every other aspect of her life. That understanding remained, crisp and clear in her mind, but the sharp edges of indignation had worn smooth.

Grace shifted in Nate's passenger seat, his old Volkswagen creaking complaint. The diner lights blurred past the window as they drove, yellow streaks against the night. Her fingers traced along the seam of her jeans, where earlier she had pushed them down lower than she'd ever intended to. The memory sent a shiver through her, different from the cold of the evening air.

It was the control, she realized. That was always the thing with Nate. Nolan let her lead, let her set the pace, let her be the one in charge. But Nate... Nate challenged her to let go. To surrender that carefully constructed fortress she'd built around herself. And the most frustrating part? The part that made her stomach tighten even now? How quickly she forgot she was supposed to be fighting it.

At first, it was just posing, she told herself. Just helping out. But somewhere between Nate's directions and her own willingness to push further, something had shifted. The studio lights had felt hot, exposing. The concrete floor had seemed vast, empty except for the two of them and that clicking camera that recorded every adjustment, every subtle movement she made. She'd felt vulnerable in a way that should have sent her running.

Instead, she had tilted her chin. She had arched her back. She had let her jeans slide down another inch.

Grace caught her reflection in the car window - her still-tied shirt, the determined set of her jaw. This wasn't the woman who had come here tonight, wasn't the same person who had marched into Nate's apartment ready to end this... whatever this was between them. That woman had been angry, righteous, certain of where the boundaries stood.

The woman in the window? She was starting to wonder if boundaries were part of the problem.

Not that any of that mattered anymore, sitting there in the passenger seat of Nate's car. She'd shown her vulnerable side. And as she watched the streetlights blur past, she felt that perhaps it wasn't so dangerous to be challenged—not when you discounted the obvious physical risks of pushing things too far. That intensity was why Nate was so... alluring, after all. It had been gradual, but Grace had really come around with Nate. He was more than just a challenge.

As Nate pulled away from the diner and started driving, Grace found herself watching him from the passenger seat. He looked... confident, like he was a man who knew exactly what he was doing and where he was going, and how he was going to get there. Even just driving a car, he was... in control. Grace could practically see it. She wondered what that would feel like, being with a guy who could do that.

She felt herself blushing and looked away. She was getting ahead of herself.

It was the photoshoot. That was all. Nate's intensity had rubbed off on her, made her think things she wouldn't normally think.

The silence between them wasn't that awkward silence that lingered earlier. There was no need to fill the space with idle chatter. Not when they were both feeling it. Not when both of them were thinking about what they wanted to happen next.

"Nate," Grace said, looking at him.

"Hm?" Nate looked at her from the driver's seat.

"I didn't hate that," Grace admitted. "It was fun."

Nate glanced over at her, a smirk crossing his face.

"I know."

Grace gave him a playful shove, trying to keep from blushing again. "Oh, shut up," she said. "You're the worst."

Nate laughed. "What did I do? You're the one who's always saying you're not most people. You're the one who..." Nate paused and looked over at her. "Who easily excels at something she's never done before." She didn't need to see his face to hear his smirk.

"Okay, okay," Grace conceded, a smile creeping onto her face.

"You enjoyed it, didn't you?" Nate asked.

Grace paused, then nodded. "I did," she said. "It was... exhilarating, being in front of the camera like that. I wouldn't mind it if you need help in the future."

"I can't wait."

"But you stopped me," Grace said, playfully pouting. "You didn't want me to take off my jeans."

"Next time," Nate chuckled. "Why, eager to get naked for me, princess?"

"Isn't that where we're going now?" Grace retorted.

The tension in the small car seemed to grow, the air between them heavy and expectant. Grace ran her finger over the seam of her jeans again, tracing the line she'd crossed earlier.

She knew what she was doing, knew how to make men want her, but this... this was different. This wasn't a game anymore, wasn't just about getting even, wasn't just about proving a point. This was real. And the thought both thrilled and terrified her.

They were on their way so that Nate could 'get lucky'. So he could cash in. A part of her wondered if she should be insulted by that. Was she just another notch in his belt? Another conquest? Grace knew better, but pondered it regardless. If she were just a notch, which she wasn't, Nate would've discarded her a long time ago. When he first had slept with her, or most certainly when she had ghosted him. It seemed stupid to even think about.

Grace quickly opened up Google Maps, and shared her live location with Nolan. He had been living in the dark for a while now, with a promise of something special for his efforts. Grace had been unsure of how she'd feel about him watching her do what should be the most repulsive act; cheating on him, but this would never have taken place if it wasn't for Nolan. This, Nate, discovering new parts of herself, all the experiences since then.

She still wasn't sure about Nolan witnessing them, but she shared her location anyway.

Grace clicked the screen of her phone off, the light vanishing as suddenly as it had appeared. She looked up, her eyes adjusting to the darkness outside. They weren't heading back to their apartment complex, or even toward that studio where they'd spent the past couple of hours. The old Volkswagen's suspension creaked in protest as Nate turned the wheel, the tires rumbling over something uneven as he veered off the main road. Ahead, a small strip mall came into view, its windows dark and empty.

Grace shifted in her seat, the worn springs groaning beneath her as she watched the storefronts grow closer. She understood what was going on.

"This isn't the way back," she muttered, keeping her voice low, not out of scared nervousness, but out of anticipation.

"Nope," Nate replied. Nate glanced over at her, his eyes glinting in the darkness. "I didn't think you wanted to go home yet."

"What are you up to?" Grace asked, more rhetorical than anything, a hint of both a different type of nerves and excitement.

The engine's low hum filled the silence as Nate continued to slowly drive around the small strip mall, the parking lot that surrounded them desolate and barely lit. No one was here, no one at all, as far as they could tell.

Grace felt her pulse quicken as the old car slowly came to a halt at the far edge of the loading bay area. She stared out the window into the darkness, the streetlights barely penetrating the shadows that surrounded them. There was no one around. Grace felt herself adjusting how she sat.

She knew what he was going to do, and she was ready.

Grace could feel him watching her, his gaze heavy on her skin. She shifted in her seat, the vinyl squeaking beneath her. Again, she traced a line of her jeans' seams. It had almost become a subconscious thing by now. Slowly, she turned more toward Nate. It wasn't often that Grace found herself waiting for a cue for what to do next, yet that was what she was doing now.

"You did well in there," Nate said, breaking the silence, adjusting in his seat, and in doing so, Grace noticed the prominent bulge in his pants. "You didn't hold back. Ready to jump out of your clothes."

Grace didn't say anything, but felt her breath hitch as his warm, strong hand briefly touched her thigh, his thumb rubbing over the seam she'd traced moments before, before retreating.

"So what now?" Grace's voice cut through the car's quiet hum, her eyes meeting Nate's with a challenge that felt both familiar and new. She shifted in her seat just like Nate had, turning more toward him. "You just like taking me somewhere quiet?" Her hand came to rest on her thigh, where she had touched. Nate glanced at her hand before meeting her eyes again.

"I do," he replied simply.

Nate leaned across the console, a small, almost predatory smirk on his face. Grace could feel the heat of him as he moved closer, his scent filling the small space. He hadn't shaved since she had last seen him, and the beard looked more scruffy than ever. It was fitting for the guy he was; an unkempt mess, even if he could pull it off in all the right ways. It was who he was. Grace felt herself leaning in, meeting him halfway. Their lips met in a kiss that was neither gentle nor chaste, and Grace found herself melting against him.

His hand found her thigh again, his fingers digging into her flesh as he deepened the kiss, his tongue sweeping into her mouth. Grace felt a shiver run down her spine at the feeling. This wasn't their first kiss by far, but there was something different about this one. Something more. She kissed him back, her own tongue exploring his mouth, tasting him. She couldn't help the small moan that escaped her when his fingers moved higher up her thigh.

Nate broke the kiss, pulling back just enough to look into her eyes. They were both breathing heavily now, their breaths mingling in the small space between them. His hand moved higher, his fingers tracing the hem of her jeans, teasing her.

Grace swallowed hard, her heart racing in her chest as Nate's fingers inched closer to where she wanted them to be. She shifted slightly, spreading her legs wider, giving him better access. Nate let out a low chuckle, his breath hot against her neck.

"Impatient, aren't we?" he murmured. His fingers brushed against the skin just below her waistband, his touch feather-light.

Grace bit her lip, fighting the urge to arch into his touch. "Maybe I'm just tired of you taking your sweet time," she said, her voice barely more than a whisper.

Nate laughed, his lips ghosting over her neck, sending goosebumps over her skin. "Oh, princess. You should know by now that I always take my time. And you'll enjoy every second of it."

Grace swallowed hard, her heart hammering in her chest. She could feel her body responding to his touch, her skin tingling wherever his fingers brushed against her skin. Nate's fingers slipped underneath her waistband, and he began to trace the edge of her panties.

Grace let out a shaky breath, her hips involuntarily moving against his touch. She could feel her arousal growing, her body aching for more. Nate's fingers slowly moved down, tracing the line of her slit through her panties. Grace moaned softly, her hips moving against his hand, trying to increase the pressure.

Grace let her head fall back against the seat, her eyes fluttering closed as she gave in to the sensations. Nate's fingers continued to trace her slit, teasing her through the thin fabric of her underwear. He placed kisses along her neck and jawline as he slowly pushed his middle and ring fingers under the lace material and moved it aside.

Grace gasped when Nate's finger finally made contact with her bare skin, his touch sending sparks of pleasure through her. She squirmed in her seat, her legs spreading wider.

"Relax," Nate breathed in her ear. "I got you."

Without further ceremony, Nate's fingers found their way inside her, not exactly gentle, not quite rough. He was thick and calloused, and Grace gasped at the sudden intrusion, her body arching off the seat. Heat pooled in her stomach, coiling tight. It was all she could do to keep her hips from bucking against his hand.

Nate chuckled against her skin, his breath hot against her neck. "See? I told you I'd take care of you," he murmured, slowly beginning to pump his fingers in and out of her.

Grace could only nod, her body trembling with each motion of his hand. She gasped again as he added another finger, stretching her walls. Pleasure washed over her, her body aching for release.

Nate curled his fingers inside her, hitting that deliciously rough spot that made her body quiver.

"Like that, don't you?" he said, his voice low and husky. "Look at you, Princess."

"Oh... Nate!"

"God, I love the way you say that," he growled, his fingers moving faster inside her. Grace moaned, her hips rocking against his hand. She could feel her orgasm approaching, her body coiling tighter with each movement.

"Fuck," Grace breathed, her breath hitching in her throat. Her thighs were tensing, squeezing his fingers as her orgasm neared.

Her senses were assaulted with sensations, and she could only bite her lip, hold onto him tightly and succumb to it all. She could feel the waves of pleasure starting to crest within her, her body trembling as Nate worked her closer and closer to the edge. Her toes curled, her fingers digging into his arm.

Nate's free hand snuck down, and unzipped himself, freeing his cock, stroking his fat shaft as he fingered Grace. She couldn't see, couldn't focus. Not with her world shaking around her as Nate worked his fingers inside of her.

"I..." she whimpered.

Nate leaned forward, pressing his lips to hers in a passionate, hungry kiss, effectively swallowing the cry. She writhed, trying desperately to find her balance. Pleasure surged within her like an incoming tide, rising with each curl of Nate's thick, insistent digits. Her mouth hung open in a silent scream.

It hit, like a crashing wave, sending sparks of ecstasy through her body. Grace felt her inner walls clenching around his fingers as she came, her hips jerking against his hand. Her orgasm tore through her, making her body tremble. She rode out her pleasure as Nate relentlessly worked her, sending her into orbit as the world fell away. It was just the two of them. Just this feeling.

After what felt like hours, the storm subsided and she went limp against the seat, breathing hard and trying to collect her scattered senses. Her pussy twitched as Nate pulled away from her.

"Oh," Grace whimpered, her cheeks reddening even more as his gaze pierced through her.

"Like music to the ears," Nate rumbled, his hand retreating from her crotch to the hem of her jeans again, trying to push them down.

"Wait," Grace said. Nate didn't. "Stop."

"What? Why?" Nate said, fighting to hide his annoyance.

"Because your shitty old car is way too small," Grace said, her voice still shaky. Nate looked around at where they were parked, the small space between the loading dock and the wall.

"Fair enough," he conceded. "Let's get in the back, then."

He opened the car door, stepping out into the night air. He quickly tucked himself back in, before opening the back door.

Grace pushed the passenger door open, her whole body still humming from the last of the euphoria that had washed over her moments before. Her legs felt unsteady as she climbed out of the car, the night air doing little to cool the heat on her skin. The worn-out suspension

of Nate's Volkswagen creaked as she shifted her weight, and for a moment, Grace had to grip the doorframe to steady herself. The concrete of the loading dock felt rough under her boots as she straightened up, pulling at her jeans where they'd slid down earlier. She could feel Nate watching her as he opened the back door, his gaze heavy on her body. Grace turned toward him, a slight smirk playing at her lips despite the lingering tremor in her hands. The cool air did little to dampen the heat still pooling low in her belly.

She reached out, her fingers trailing down the front of Nate's shirt. He inhaled sharply at the contact, his eyes darkening with desire. Grace bit her lip, feeling the warmth of him through the thin fabric, the steady rise and fall of his chest under her hand. Slowly, she slid her hand down lower, until her fingertips brushed the bulge of his cock. Even through the layers of khaki and cotton, she could feel him growing hard again under her touch.

Nate groaned as she palmed him through his pants, his hips rocking into her touch. His hand found its way to her hip, his fingers digging into her skin through her jeans as he pulled her closer.

"Careful," he murmured, his voice rough with need. "Keep this up, princess, and we won't make it inside."

Grace couldn't help but grin. The thought of being fucked right there on the loading dock, in plain view of anyone who happened to be passing by, was equal parts terrifying and thrilling. She stroked Nate's cock again, savoring the way it made him shudder against her.

"Oh, we're definitely making it inside," Grace replied, her voice low and husky. "But that doesn't mean we have to be quick about it."

Nate's gaze flicked to her lips, then back to her eyes. There was a hunger in his expression now, a raw need that made her pulse quicken.

"Is that so?" he growled. He reached around her, cupping her ass roughly, squeezing it before pushing her forward into the car.

"Oh!" Grace gasped as she stumbled into the back seat, her hands gripping the leather to steady herself. The air was thick with the smell of stale cigarettes, but she barely noticed it as Nate climbed in after her.

Before she could even catch her breath, Nate was on top of her, his mouth crashing into hers. Grace moaned into the kiss, her hands moving to tangle in his hair. His cock pressed against her thigh, hot and hard through the layers of fabric separating them. He kissed her hungrily, his hands roaming over her body, pulling at her clothes, desperate to touch her skin.

Nate trailed kisses along her jaw, her throat, her collarbone. His teeth grazed her sensitive skin, sending shivers of anticipation through her body. He tugged at her shirt, and she sat up to allow him to pull it over her head. Her bra soon joined it, landing somewhere on the floor

of the car. His fingers deftly unbuttoned her jeans, and his palm slid under the waistband of her panties, pushing them down.

Grace squirmed against him, the warm leather seat sticking to her back. Her breath came in sharp gasps as Nate's lips worked their way down her exposed chest, his tongue dancing across her hardened nipples.

"God damnit, Nate," she groaned, arching against him.

"So needy," Nate muttered, his hand working to push her jeans down over her ass. "Let's see if we can't get these pants off of you after all, shall we?"

He shifted his weight, and Grace lifted her hips to allow him to slide her jeans and panties down her legs. The air felt cool on her skin as he exposed her to the night, but the heat of his body pressed against her more than made up for it. Her boots were discarded somewhere in the darkness, and she kicked her jeans off the rest of the way, her heart pounding in her chest.

Nate leaned back, taking in the sight of her naked body spread out before him.

"You're a damn vision," Nate breathed, his voice rough.

Grace blushed at the compliment, but couldn't help feeling proud of herself. She'd never had anyone look at her the way Nate was looking at her now - like he wanted to devour her whole. She reached for him, pulling him down into another heated kiss. His cock rubbed against her thigh, hard and insistent. She wrapped her legs around him, drawing him closer.

"I need you," she murmured against his lips.

Nate didn't need to be told twice. He shifted his weight, and Grace felt his cock press against her wet opening. She gasped as he slowly pushed himself inside her, stretching her walls. He filled her inch by delicious inch, the pressure almost too much to bear.

She let out a low moan as he buried himself in her to the hilt, their bodies pressed together, skin against skin. Nate began to thrust, slow and steady at first, then faster, deeper, as they fell into a rhythm.

The sound of the Volkswagen's worn-out suspension squeaking with each thrust echoed through the parking lot, but they were both far beyond caring. Each time he pushed in, he hit the perfect spot. Grace felt like she was burning alive, her pleasure mounting higher and higher as Nate's relentless thrusts drove her wild.

Grace's back arched off the leather seat, her hands gripping at Nate's broad shoulders as she writhed beneath him. His lips were everywhere, on her mouth, her jaw, her neck, her breasts, as he pounded into her over and over again. That strong, steady rhythm that made the whole car jolt in tact with each thrust. His breath came in sharp pants against her skin, and Grace could tell by his ragged grunts that he wasn't too far from losing it completely.

Neither was she. Grace couldn't stop moving against him, couldn't hold back the small, needy sounds escaping from her lips each time he drove into her.

"Nate!" Grace's voice rose as Nate slammed into her harder, her fingers digging into his skin.

"Fuck," Nate grunted in her ear. He sounded desperate, overwhelmed, his voice tight and rough.

"Oh fuck, Nate. Fuck me. Fuck me, Nate," she groaned, barely able to get her breath to form words as he slammed into her, shaking her to the core.

Nate didn't respond in kind, at least, not vocally. His only answer came from the way he sped up even more, his hips jerking forward at a higher pace, but with the same rhythm that made the car move and shudder with them. The springs creaked, the tires spun, and the entire thing bounced and shook like they were in a carnival ride.

"Nate," Grace groaned, her feet kicking into the open air above her, curling and tensing.

"Grace," Nate said, his voice a low rumble that vibrated through her entire body.

Naked in the back of this sleazeball's car, Grace came like the devil. Hard and heavy, deep and long. Her whole body tensed, while Nate didn't let up, not for a moment. He kept going, his relentless thrusts driving her over the edge again and again. It was all she could do to hang on, her fingers digging into his skin giving him scars that only one other man would have from her, her body writhing beneath his unforgivingly. It wasn't gentle, but it was exactly what she needed, the intensity and power of it washing over her, taking her away from everything else. It began as a silent scream, but the second she managed to draw a breath, she let it out in a long, desperate moan, her back arching off the leather seat as she shuddered.

And finally, her voice cracking, her body shaking, she let out one final cry.

"Nate! Oh, oh Nate! God damnit, Nate."

Her toes curled and her body clenched, a wave of white-hot ecstasy crashing through her. The world seemed to spin around her, and the only thing keeping her anchored was the feeling of Nate's body against hers, her hands clinging onto him in almost sheer desperation, the sensation of his cock sliding in and out of her, the sound of his ragged breaths filling the car.

As the last shudders of her pleasure subsided, Grace felt Nate's rhythm shift. His movements grew erratic, losing their deliberate pace as something primal took over. His hips stuttered against hers, a frantic energy replacing the steady rhythm that had been building her orgasm. His face buried deep in the crook of her neck, his stubble scratching against her sensitive skin, and she could feel his breath coming in harsh, ragged gasps against her throat. He was close—she could feel it in the way his body tensed, the way his muscles grew taut under her hands, like a bowstring drawn to its breaking point.

With a final, deep thrust that seemed to split her in two, Nate let out a low, guttural groan that vibrated through her entire body. His cock swelled inside her, pulsing once, twice, and then she felt it—a flood of warmth unloading inside of her, coating her walls, filling her so completely that she felt it in her very core. The sensation was intense, overwhelming, a testament to his release that made her own spent body shudder in response. His hips jerked forward once more, twice, several times, final, involuntary spasms as he emptied himself into her, a low moan escaping his lips as he did so.

They stayed there for a moment, locked together, their bodies slick with sweat and trembling with aftershocks. The air around them was thick with the smell of their exertion, the musky scent of sex mingling with the stale odor of Nate's car. Grace could feel Nate's heartbeat pounding against her chest, a rapid, heavy rhythm that slowly began to even out. She wrapped her arms around him, holding him close as he came down from his high, his body growing heavy with exhaustion as he collapsed against her, his weight pressing her into the worn leather of the backseat. They lay there, breathing hard, their bodies tangled together in the aftermath, the silence between them broken only by the sound of their own breathing and the distant hum of the city.

Finally, Nate pulled back, sitting up and letting out a deep sigh. Grace watched him through half-lidded eyes, her limbs heavy and sated.

"That was..." he started, but trailed off, seemingly lost for words.

"Fuck, do you think anyone heard us?" Grace said, suddenly worried. Then her second thought hit her. There was one person she should've hoped had heard them.

"Pff, I think you like putting on a show," Nate said. "Ow!" Nate's hand flew to his lower back. "Old football injury."

"Maybe you could drop a few," Grace teased, poking his beer belly. "All that weight must wreck your back."

Nate groaned as he tried to maneuver himself off of her without spilling out of the car in a heap of fleshy limbs.

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The silence would be pressing if it weren't for that steady squeaking rhythm coming from the old car. Nolan watched in a mix of awe and terrible excitement, his throat so dry he could barely swallow. His jaw hung slack, breathing too ragged to bother closing his mouth. Frozen in place, back pressed against the cold brick wall, he couldn't move or even remember how to breathe properly. His eyes were glued to that Volkswagen, to the fogged-up windows that hid everything and told so much at the same time. His ears strained, desperate for any little clue, any hint as to what was happening inside. Not that he needed to listen hard—he could hear Grace groan as if in pain, but he knew better. That was a different kind of groan.

The squeaking grew more erratic, more frantic. It had been a slow, rhythmic affair at first—methodical, even—now came in fits and starts. Each squeak of the Volkswagen's worn suspension grew more desperate, more urgent, until they blurred together into a frantic staccato that made Nolan's teeth ache. He could picture it now with sickening clarity: Grace's back arching off the leather seat, her feet kicking toward the ceiling as Nate drove into her with a new urgency. The sounds coming through the fogged windows changed too—Grace's groans rising in pitch, growing ragged as Nate's own breathing came in harsh pants. Each frantic squeak of the car seemed to punctuate another desperate thrust, the old vehicle shuddering under their combined weight as they neared their end. Nolan watched, transfixed, as the steady rhythm he'd been memorizing disintegrated into chaos, each sound tearing through him like glass.

And that squeaking... the sound of it would be burned into his mind forever.

Nolan was rooted to the spot, his heart racing, his palms sweating. He'd never felt so aroused and terrified at the same time. It was surreal.

The squeaking grew more erratic, a frantic rhythm losing all sense of control. Each squeak bled into the next, a high-pitched desperate noise that made Nolan's teeth ache. And then there it was. The unmistakable sound of Nate finishing, a long groan. Nolan imagined him pulling out to unload on Grace's perfect belly, painting her taut, flat stomach with thick ropes of white. Or worse, pumping his seed inside Grace. The thought sent a shiver down his spine and Nolan's stomach twisted into a knot, his blood pounding in his ears.

And then—nothing. A sudden, jarring silence that seemed to suck all the air from the parking lot. One beat. Two. Three. The quiet stretched, thick as molasses, heavy enough to feel in Nolan's chest. The silence was deafening.

Nolan could only hear his own heart pump away.

The two of them seemed to be chatting idly inside the car, their voices a little muffled through the window, but still audible. A small laugh from both of them, a chuckle really, then Nolan's heart threatened to kill him as the back door started to open.

Nolan bolted away before anyone noticed him, before he even could make a conscious thought about whether it was the right call even. He hurried around the corner and found his Equinox humming its more calm, methodical rhythm. He got in the car and tried to catch his breath. His chest heaved, his lungs burning. He couldn't tell if it was from running or the adrenaline coursing through his veins.

Nolan leaned back against the seat, his eyes wide. He couldn't believe what he'd just witnessed, what he'd just heard. The image was seared into his brain, playing on a loop in his mind. The metallic sound of that old piece of shit car jolting and jerking, and why that old car was jolting and jerking... the squeak of its old springs, the muffled groans, the thumping, the panting, the frantic, almost panicked squeaks as the two of them came together, it all was so incredibly vivid.

He sat there for several minutes replaying it in his head, from how he found the car, the slow reveal, the slow realization of what he had walked in on, where Grace had guided her, to how Grace had sounded even through a car window. Nolan was in desperation to finish himself off, and had a mind to think to hell with it and deal with the mess afterwards, but ultimately fought the urge.

The hollow pit in his stomach grew. That familiar, gnawing dread crept up from his toes, clawing its way into his chest and wrapping its icy fingers around his heart. That burn that both hurt but also made him feel so alive at the same time. He hated this feeling, he loathed it, but he craved it. The conflict of emotion left him dizzy, light-headed.

Fuck, what an amazing gift this had been from Grace. She had promised to include him, and boy, did she deliver. He hadn't seen exactly what had been going on, but that hardly mattered. He had heard it, he knew what was happening. And that was all he needed. The mental gymnastics his brain had to do to fill the gaps in what he didn't see... it was incredible.

Nolan's gaze drifted to his phone, face down on the passenger seat. The silence in his car felt heavier now, pressing in on him from all sides. Would a text come? A call? Grace telling him he could pick her up? Or were they still there, still tangled together in that backseat? His thumb twitched, desperate to snatch up the phone, but he held back. The waiting was part of it, wasn't it? The not knowing. His heart hammered against his ribs as his eyes remained fixed on the dark screen. Just another minute, he told himself. He'd give it one more minute before giving in. Before checking to see if this gift had truly ended, or if there was more to come.

The screen lit up as Nolan snatched his phone from the passenger seat. He folded. Folded like a cheap suit in the high wind. Just like that, all his resolve crumbled like a house of cards. He had to check. What if something had changed? What if she needed him after all? The thought of her waiting, wondering where he was, twisted something in his gut. Especially if that would be why Grace chose to go with Nate.

No messages from Grace.

Nolan swallowed hard, the lump in his throat feeling like a golf ball he couldn't quite wash down. Nothing. His thumb hovered over Grace's contact, the urge to call warring with everything he knew about their arrangement. One part of his brain screamed that it was perfectly reasonable to check in. The other—the quiet part that remembered how Grace had squirmed when they'd first discussed this, how she'd ultimately embraced something that made her uncomfortable just to satisfy him—that part knew better.

Calling felt like it would shatter something. That invisible fourth wall Grace had so carefully constructed, the delicate balance between his fantasy and their reality. It would tell her he didn't trust her, not really. Not after everything. And he did trust her, damnit. It was himself he couldn't trust to be patient, to sit in this goddamn car and wait while the aftershocks of what he'd just witnessed rippled through him.

Grace wouldn't make him wait if she didn't want him to. That was the thought that anchored him, the one truth in all this madness. She'd given him what he wanted, what he'd begged for, even though it cost her something. Even though he'd seen how upset she'd been that first time they talked about it, how she'd needed to go for a ride before continuing. He owed her this at least—this silence, this space to process. To trust her, even when every cell in his body was screaming for more.

He found the Google Maps icon and opened it up, eager to see if he could still track her location. To his surprise, the little dot that represented Grace's location was still available to him. What made his heart skip a beat, however, was that it was moving and was nowhere near where he was. When had they left? How long had he sat here wallowing?

Nolan started his car, put it in gear, and followed the map to wherever Grace had decided to go. It took him a second glance to realize that they weren't heading home.

"What are you doing, Grace?" Nolan muttered under his breath, his brow furrowed.

Regardless, Nolan followed, pushing the speed limits to make up for lost time. The last thing he wanted was to lose sight of Grace now. Why weren't they heading home?

"Fuck," Nolan grunted, making an abrupt turn as he had been staring at the phone too much and almost missed a turn. The car veered, tires squealing, before righting itself and continuing.

After several minutes of frantic driving, he finally caught up with them. He slowed down to keep a safe distance, staying a few cars back. What was odd was how he only saw the back of Nate's head. Had Grace not joined him after all? Had Nolan missed something? He quickly checked his phone and saw that she was indeed ahead of him, and most likely inside that old beatdown car. Nolan's throat tightened, but he persevered.

The red brake lights of that familiar Volkswagen flashed as Nate turned into a parking lot. Nolan squinted at the illuminated sign above the entrance, recognition dawning slowly. The Starlight Inn. God, he remembered it well. One of his first ad campaigns after being hired—those cheesy "Your home away from home" taglines he'd worked on until his eyes burned, trying to make that rundown dump sound like luxury accommodation. He'd even driven through this same parking lot once, taking photos for mock-ups, never imagining... never imagining Grace would be checking in. With him.

But he followed suit, keeping a few rows back and watching as Nate's car parked near the far edge of the lot. He watched as the two of them got out of the car, both seemingly unhurried and casual. She didn't even bother looking back to see if he was there. Or maybe she did and he had missed it. Nolan's breath caught in his throat as the two of them headed inside without a glance back.

Nolan's throat felt thick as he stared at the entrance, the bright neon sign buzzing overhead.

"The night is not over yet," Nate chuckled, running a hand over her thigh as they drove.

"What, you haven't had enough, cowboy?" Grace chuckled.

"I'm not some two-pump chump," Nate replied, squeezing her thigh while steadily keeping the vehicle on the right track, not letting her delicious thighs distract them from keeping them on the road.

"That you are not," Grace chuckled, glancing over at her rugged neighbor.

Grace ran a hand through her hair, shaking out the tangles with her fingers as best as she could. She was sure she looked like a mess after what had happened in the car, and the thought made her smirk. Nate had done a number on her, that was for sure. Not that she was complaining. It had been fun.

She glanced over at him again, studying his profile as he drove. His jaw was set, his eyes focused on the road ahead. He seemed lost in thought. Grace wondered what he was thinking about, where he'd take them next.

"So what's the plan, cowboy?" she asked. "I should really get back home to Nolan."

"He had you most of last week," Nate said. It could've sounded like he was pouting, but it was more of a statement of fact. Like he was the one who was owed.

"You don't own me," Grace pointed out.

"Oh, I know," Nate chuckled, turning the steering wheel, the worn springs squeaking. "I'm just saying."

"And besides, he's my boyfriend." Grace moved her hand to shove his away. But his returned, a playful little game of possession. "You're just..."

"The guy who fucks you the best," Nate finished, his hand sliding higher up her thigh. "Plus, you don't look too upset with the idea."

The two sat in silence for a moment, the hum of the engine filling the air between them. The road stretched ahead, endless and dark, the glow of the headlights casting strange shadows along the asphalt.

"I'm not," Grace finally admitted. "Not really..."

"I think you need to be treated how you deserve, and I think you like that it's me and my... antics. And perhaps that is something that is hard to come to terms with," Nate said, sounding almost sagely. He kept his eyes on the road as he spoke. "I think that's why you keep coming back."

Grace shifted in her seat, crossing her legs, and inadvertently pushing his hand further up her thigh.

"Maybe," she said softly. "Or maybe I just like having a good time."

Nate laughed, a deep, throaty sound that seemed to reverberate through the car. "Oh, princess. You know what they say, you can't hide forever. You'll have to face the music sometime."

Grace turned her head toward him, shooting him a glare.

"It's just fun, Nate," she said, her voice hardening. "And I don't appreciate you acting like you're my therapist or something. And don't think I don't notice your little snide remarks either."

"Fair enough," Nate said, his tone changing, a little less amused, a little more serious. "I apologize."

They fell into silence again, the tension in the car thick. Nate's hand stayed firmly planted on Grace's thigh, and she found herself not pushing it away this time. It was warm and heavy and comforting.

"Well," Grace broke the silence, her voice softening. "I do want to thank you for tonight. For everything."

"The pleasure is all mine, princess," Nate chuckled. "But like I said, our evening has just begun."

"Yeah?" Grace asked, perking up. "Where are we headed then?"

"Just up ahead," Nate replied, pointing to a sign ahead. "There's a hotel I've been meaning to check out."

Grace arched an eyebrow. "A hotel?"

"What, Nolan can take you out on a small trip, and I can't?" Nate laughed. "It's the Starlight Inn. Heard of it?"

Grace had. She looked out the window, as if the name of the hotel represented more than a motel with an H instead of an M.

"It was Nolan's first job, actually," Grace said. "He worked on a campaign for them."

"Only fitting then," Nate said, an almost sly smile on his face. "We'll make sure to give them some good word of mouth."

"I don't think they have that kind of service," Grace chuckled. "But I do like the way you think."

"What can I say, I'm a man of culture," Nate replied with a shrug. "Plus, I thought it'd be nice to get out of the house for a bit."

"That's fair," Grace said. "And I think we both need to blow off some steam after tonight."

"Oh, that we do," Nate agreed, his hand squeezing her thigh. "I think it's a nice way of rounding out an exciting evening of sexy photos and posing."

Grace looked down at his hand, her thighs tingling where he touched her. She could still feel the phantom touch of his fingers inside of her, the memory of his rough, calloused skin against her soft folds making her shiver. His grip on her leg tightened, and she couldn't help but imagine him spreading her legs apart, his thick cock pushing deep inside of her. She shifted in her seat, biting her lip as she felt a fresh wave of arousal wash over her.

"You alright over there?" Nate's deep voice broke through Grace's thoughts, and she blushed as she realized she'd been zoning out.

"I'm fine," Grace said, her voice a little higher than she would've liked.

She unbuckled herself, making Nate shoot her a look, but Grace just smirked back.

"What are you doing?"

"Don't worry about it," she giggled, reaching down to unzip Nate's pants. It was difficult, given her positioning and how they bounced on the uneven road. Not to mention Nate's size. Grace managed though.

She fished his cock out, and was taken aback at how it felt against the cold night air as the wind came through the cracks in Nate's beatdown car.

Grace pumped his fat cock in her hand, working him until his cock was nice and thick and hard.

Grace gave Nate's cock a slow stroke before she bent forward and lowered her mouth to his engorged tip. She heard Nate groan from above as his cock slid deeper into her mouth.

Nate's cock twitched in her mouth as Grace took him in deeper. It filled her completely, and Grace loved how Nate seemed so lost in the feeling that he barely kept the car steady. It made her feel in charge in a way.

She began bobbing her head, slowly taking him in and out of her mouth, savoring the taste of him. Her lips stretched around him and the feel of his velvety skin on her tongue sent shockwaves of desire coursing through her body. Grace's moans filled the air, and Nate's hand found her head, and his hips pushed forward to match her pace, his breathing getting louder, his groans getting harder to conceal. His fingers threaded through Grace's long hair, keeping her in place while she pleased him. She could tell by the way his hand gripped her hair that she was giving him a lot of pleasure. It wasn't gentle. His hand was tight and demanding in her blonde locks. This rougher treatment was her own doing, but she was willing to see it through.

Nate's hips bucked forward again and she took him in even deeper, his hard shaft pushing to the back of her throat. The sensation of it all, her gagging slightly and the way his body seemed desperate for even the smallest relief was all part of Grace's pleasure.

Grace's jaw ached, stretched to its limit around Nate's thick shaft. She'd never manage to take all of him, not really—his cock was too big, too thick for her small mouth, especially hunched over like this in his beatdown Volkswagen. But Nate had never uttered a complaint. Grace knew that most of his sensitive spots were right there at the tip, that fat, flared head of his, and she knew just how to work it with her tongue, swirling around the ridge, pressing into the sensitive underside. His groans told her everything she needed to know as she hollowed her cheeks, creating that tight, wet suction that made his hips jerk against her. She could feel him pulsing against her tongue, hot and alive, as she focused on what she could manage—taking him as deep as she could without gagging too much, using every trick she'd learned with him to drive him wild.

"Fuck," he growled. The sound was low, rumbling in his chest like distant thunder.

"Mhm," Grace agreed, pulling off of his cock with a wet, messy sound. A string of saliva connected her bottom lip and his crown as she panted heavily. It was hot in the cab of the car despite the cold autumn wind, her body hot with arousal.

"You're too good at that, Princess," Nate continued, letting go of her hair long enough for her to switch back over and plant herself properly in the seat, even though she didn't buckle up right away. "It's a goddamn superpower."

"Nah, just good old-fashioned practice," she said, wiping her mouth, reaching over to grab his dick again, pumping him slowly, her hand slick from her own spit and Nate's precum. "And I do love to practice."

Grace smiled, biting her bottom lip. She gave his cock another pump, her grip firm but gentle.

"Well, don't let me stop you," Nate replied, his voice a low rumble, his eyes never leaving the road. He shifted in his seat, spreading his legs a bit wider as Grace continued to stroke him. "We're soon there, by the way."

Grace shrugged, leaning over and guiding him back into her mouth. She licked the throbbing veins that ran down the underside of his cock, all the way up to the glans, which she wrapped her lips around and suckled gently. Her cheeks hollowed out, the tip of her tongue flicking at the slit. She tasted the salty precum oozing out of him, and she swallowed it eagerly.

Nate groaned, his cock pulsing in her mouth. Grace could feel the car turning, slowing down, and she knew they were at the hotel already. The fact that they were gliding through the small parking lot while she gave Nate head didn't make it any less thrilling though. In fact, it only made it better. She knew they could be caught at any moment, and the thought sent a shiver of excitement and anticipation through her spine.

The car came to a stop, and Grace felt Nate's hand on the back of her head again. He held her in place as he started fucking her mouth, thrusting his hips upward, pushing his cock as

deep as he could go. The tip bumped against the back of her throat, making her gag. She pulled away from him, coughing and gasping for air.

"You okay?" Nate asked.

"It's fine," Grace said, smiling up at him. "I like it when you get a little rough with me. I usually like to guide, but sometimes it's nice to... let go."

"So I've learned," Nate agreed. "Let's head up to the hotel."

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Nolan kept his steps light as he moved along the cracked pavement toward the hotel lobby, the soles of his shoes barely making a sound against the concrete. From the corner of his eye, he caught sight of them approaching, their figures cutting through the shadows. The bright fluorescent lights of the lobby spilled onto the sidewalk ahead, but Nolan managed to stay just outside their reach, his body angled away from the entrance.

They weren't looking for him, and thus not at him—Grace was lost in laughter, her face illuminated with an expression that spoke of comfort. Pure, unguarded amusement, head tilted back a touch as she listened to whatever Nate was saying. Nate stood close beside her, his hand resting possessively on the small of her back, guiding her toward the entrance with a casual intimacy that made Nolan's stomach clench.

Nolan slipped behind a cluster of overgrown bushes that lined the walkway, the rough leaves brushing against his jacket. Through the gaps, he watched as Nate leaned closer to whisper something in Grace's ear, causing her to swat playfully at his arm. Even from this distance, Nolan could see it—the ease between them, the natural rhythm of their interaction. It was something familiar in the way Grace tilted her head toward Nate, the way Nate's fingers spread across her back, as if he'd touched her there a hundred times before.

It was odd seeing for the first time how the two interacted when they didn't think they were being watched.

Nolan couldn't help but feel a little bit jealous seeing them like that. Jealous of their closeness. But also jealous of the fact that he wasn't there with Grace. That it was Nate, of all people, who had been with her tonight. Nolan found himself wondering what they had been doing all evening. She had been in such a rush when she left, he couldn't wait to ask Grace when she got home later.

The two quickly disappeared into the hotel, and Nolan wasn't far behind. He wasn't sure why he was trying to be so secretive, but it sort of added to the excitement. Besides, Grace had led him here.

As he entered, Nolan tried to stall his pace, giving them just enough space to check in, and for Grace to then send him the number or whatever the plan was. Did she want him in the

room? Stand at the door and listen? Or... lurking in the bushes outside? He took a deep breath and walked into the lobby.

The first thing Nolan noticed was that the place smelled like cigarettes. Old, stale smoke clung to everything like a thick, gray fog, coating the air in a hazy film that made his eyes water. He wrinkled his nose in disgust as he looked around at the drab, worn-down décor of the hotel lobby. The carpet was stained and threadbare in places, and the wallpaper was peeling in the corners. There was a faint buzzing coming from somewhere—the old fluorescent lights that flickered overhead. So much for working several days of overtime to write their damn ads.

He spotted Grace and Nate near the front desk, checking in. Nate was doing the heavy lifting, while Grace looked around, obviously not impressed. Compared to their Chicago trip before the weekend, this was a pig sty.

Grace's hair fell loosely around her shoulders, and she looked tired, but beautiful as ever. Even if she looked a bit worse for wear, her makeup smudged and her clothes wrinkled. It suited her. Her T-shirt was tied up to show that flawless belly that Nolan loved to kiss and sniff. Yes sniff. Her scent was divine.

It wasn't often Nolan was able to watch his girlfriend from afar, but god damn, how striking she was, even tired and casually just standing there. She had a presence that seemed to fill the room, and it was impossible not to notice her. She was the kind of woman who commanded attention wherever she went—and Nolan felt lucky to have her.

The clerk obviously noticed too, because he kept stealing glances at her, his gaze lingering a little too long on her perfect curves. It was subtle, but Nolan caught it. He knew that look of appreciation. It was the same look he had given Grace when they first met. Nolan hadn't been able to be so subtle, however. And he wasn't now either.

"Here's your room key," the clerk finally said, handing Nate a small card. "You're in room—"

Grace turned away from the front desk, her eyes scanning the lobby. Nolan quickly ducked behind an old vending machine, out of view. His heart raced, and his palms were sweaty. He couldn't believe he was actually doing this. Being such a bitch. She'd probably be happy to see him there, wanting them to share her excitement.

Nolan held his breath as he waited for Grace to pass, his pulse pounding in his ears. He slowly counted to ten. Three times. Then peeked around the corner, getting an eyebrow-raised look from the clerk.

"I, ugh, fell," Nolan mumbled, blushing as he got up from the floor. "I tripped over the... uh... carpet."

"Right," the clerk said, obviously not believing him, but didn't care enough to ask any further questions.

Nolan glanced around, trying to spot Grace, but she was gone. Had he missed her? God damn it. And he missed the room too.

He walked over to an old sofa, one he had insisted them throwing out when he was working on their campaign, and sat down. He pulled his phone out and started pretending to play some game, hoping nobody would question what he was doing here. The last thing he needed was someone asking if he was lost or if he was waiting for someone. He had no idea how to answer. He wasn't lost, but he was waiting for someone. For two people, actually. But he couldn't exactly say that.

There were no messages from Grace. It had been less than two minutes since they went, so they probably had barely gotten to their room yet.

To give them time, Nolan looked around a bit. The hotel lights, people coming and going. He gave a snort between a laugh and a tired sigh as he saw customers at all. At least his ad had done something, he presumed. It was almost completely out of business before the campaign. They didn't have the best score online, but money in the bank was more important, he figured. Maybe they simply hadn't had the funds yet to improve the ways Nolan had suggested.

Nolan shrugged and checked his phone. Nope, nothing yet.

Well, Grace had been pretty disheveled. She probably hit the shower or something, or maybe just lay down for a second to rest. Nolan nodded to himself, deciding that had to be it. She looked exhausted after all, so she probably just needed to recharge before updating him. He just needed to give it a minute. Patience had paid off so well so far.

Nolan's gaze drifted back to the lobby, his eyes scanning the stained carpet and flickering lights as if searching for something to distract him from the thoughts bouncing around his head.

His attention snagged on a pair entering through the glass doors—a man in his late twenties, looking like he'd just finished a double shift, and a perky brunette bouncing at his side who couldn't have been a day over twenty. Something about them struck Nolan as odd, even more mismatched than Grace and Nate despite their smaller age gap. Their French drifted across the lobby like exotic birdsong, the man's words slow and weary while the girl's chirped with the boundless energy of someone who'd downed three espressos before crawling out of bed that morning. Nolan wondered if anyone else noticed the way she practically vibrated beside him, how he seemed to be physically leaning away from her energy even as he kept their hands linked. Probably not. Probably everyone was too wrapped up in their own desperate quests to notice anything at all.

Maybe there wasn't anything to notice. They talked French; maybe they had been on a long flight, and this was their humble abode for the night. Nolan chuckled. Why would two Europeans come to Courtington, a small college town in Indiana, of all places? Good for them, he presumed. At least they saw the *real* America. Nolan had hated the small town

when they moved to their little apartment, but work and Grace had made him grow oak-like roots.

Nolan's eyes drifted from the couple to the worn front desk, to the clerk who was busy helping the next customer in line. A young buck. Red-head with loads of pimples, and some lanky limbs. The guy looked exhausted, probably having spent what was left of his energy dealing with the couple from France, and Nolan felt a pang of sympathy for the guy. He knew how demanding some customers could be. Especially those who weren't familiar with the country. And judging by the way the guy was speaking to the clerk, it was a tiresome nuisance for them as well. His English sounded almost American, though, which was impressive.

As if jolted awake by a defibrillator, Nolan found his phone again. He realized he hadn't checked for a bit. Surely Grace had sent him something now. He pulled it out and checked if he had missed anything. Nothing.

He leaned back, trying to relax. There was still no message from Grace. It had been about ten minutes now. She had to be done with her shower, right?

"Fucking hell," he grumbled under his breath, feeling more than a little impatient. His eyes darted around, but unable to take more in from the small lobby.

His mind still managed to drift, not really entirely present. A small numbness had taken over him as he sat there, no longer entirely waiting for a message anymore. Grace was probably too preoccupied.

Nolan thought about his 'Nuevo Camino' campaign. He had leaned more towards 'Masa & Co', as it was more diverse if they wanted to branch out to a rum and whatever their ideas had been, but the Tex-Mex folks liked Nuevo Camino better. And he'd oblige.

He shifted a bit uncomfortably in his seat, feeling a bit uneasy.

The new name had grown on him anyway, and his artist had done a great job with the concept art for a lot of good logos. It was a bit of a slow process with these folks, but it was a longer project, so it was alright. And they didn't mind spending a bit of money either, so it was just good business as long as they were happy with what Nolan was producing.

Nolan's gaze drifted again, catching on the stained upholstery of the lobby sofas—exactly the ones he'd argued to have replaced during his campaign. They'd insisted on keeping them, something about "retro appeal." Now the springs were surely shot, the stuffing probably oozing from tears in the fabric. His eyes slid to the old vending machine he'd ducked behind earlier, its glass still smudged with his fingerprints. Then to the hotel entrance, where more tired-looking souls trudged in and out. The janitor's closet door hung slightly ajar, revealing a glimpse of yellow mop handles leaning against each other. The front desk looked newer than he remembered—sleek, faux marble replacing the cheap laminate from before, though the glow of their ad campaign still flickered on a screen behind the clerk.

His eyes finally fell to his phone in his hand, its screen still dark and silent when he tapped it awake. Just as empty and unforgiving as it had been five minutes ago, the last message from Grace still hours old.

He glanced over to the front desk clerk, who was busy with a new customer, and slowly got up and walked over to the elevator, keeping an eye on the clerk who was occupied with something of no importance.

The elevator doors slid open with a quiet ding, and Nolan stepped inside, pressing the button for... That was the thing. He didn't really know what floor he was looking for. Nolan clicked the button for the first floor and waited for the doors to close.

The hallway stretched out before Nolan, narrow and suffocating. Worn-out carpeting, the same drab brown they'd refused to replace during his campaign days, absorbed the sound of his footsteps as he crept forward. Room after room passed in a blur of identical doors, numbers tarnished with age. Behind them, muffled television sets murmured indistinctly, their tinny voices mixing with the hum of the cheap air conditioning units bolted beneath each window.

Nolan paused, his hand hovering near his throat. His heartbeat increased until it thundered in his ears, drowning out the distant sounds from the rooms. What the hell was he doing? What was he expecting to find out here, wandering the halls like some lost ghost? As if Grace would broadcast their activities for any random passerby to overhear. Still, he found himself listening anyway, straining to catch something—anything—that might break the stale air of anonymity. A muffled laugh? The rhythmic creaks of bed springs? The thought made his stomach clench and his blood run hot all at once. He wanted to know and he didn't want to know, caught in that familiar tug-of-war that had brought him to this wretched hotel in the first place.

Nolan took another step forward, the thick carpet silencing even his shallow breaths. His fingers trailed along the wall, tracing the cracks in the paint, the rough edges of faded water damage. He'd been here before, he realized. Back when he was working on the campaign, he'd done a photo shoot for one of the rooms—something about how comfortable and clean they were. He remembered the beds, how stiff they'd felt, the sheets had smelled like cigarettes and bleach, as if they'd been hastily washed before his arrival.

The memory made his throat tighten as he thought of Grace in those sheets.

"Sir, are you staying here?"

Nolan whirled around to see a middle-aged woman in a maid's uniform standing behind him, her dark hair pulled back in a tight bun. She wore a look of suspicion on her face as she eyed him up and down, taking in his disheveled appearance.

"I..." Nolan began, suddenly aware of what he was doing. How long had he been wandering around? "I'm sorry," Nolan said, forcing a smile. "I must have gotten lost. I'll leave."

"Do you need help finding your room?" she asked.

"No, no, I'm fine," Nolan said. "Thank you. I'm just going to head back to the lobby."

Without waiting for her response, Nolan hurried away, his cheeks burning with embarrassment. What was he thinking, creeping around like that? And for what? There was no way Grace would make it easy for him to stumble upon them. Hell, he didn't even know what room they were in. It had been an idiotic plan from the start, if you could even call it a plan.

He checked his phone one last time. Nothing. Nolan slid it down into his pocket again.

Ten minutes later, Nolan was on his way home.

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The room wasn't impressive, but it hardly mattered. Grace carried her energy from the photoshoot, from their little date, and the car, and all the way into their modest hotel room. She felt almost giddy. She was ready to explore. To see what the night had in store.

She wanted to lead him over to the bed, push him down on it, and then straddle his lap. He looked up at her with a hungry look in his eyes. But instead, Grace stretched her hands up above her head, her strong back almost giving a small crack, as she damn near paraded through the room toward the window, letting that old creep watch the body she had sculptured move with confidence and purpose.

The hotel room itself was nothing special, a cramped, sparsely decorated space with peeling wallpaper and stale air. The only saving grace was the large window that looked out over the parking lot, where they had parked a few cars over from Nate's own beat-up Volkswagen.

Grace walked over to the window, her hips swaying as she moved. She peered out into the night, the orange glow of the streetlamps casting long shadows across the pavement. Her gaze lingered on Nate's car for a moment before moving on to the rows of parked vehicles.

Meanwhile, she could feel the intense stare still linger on her. Nate always brought that little element of danger, that she wasn't always entirely safe around him. Sure, he had never hurt her, but he had also never fully stopped being a bit rough. A bit unpredictable. And the idea of this rough man wanting to possess her, claim her, have her... it was a turn-on she had never truly understood until Nate came along. It made her want to be naughty.

Grace smiled as she turned back to him, her eyes meeting his. "So," she said, crossing her arms over her chest. "What do you want to do first?"

Nate's gaze burned with intensity, his eyes dark with desire as they swept over her body. His lips curled into a smirk as he stood up and walked over to her. Grace shivered as she felt his warm breath against her skin, sending tingles down her spine. She bit her lower lip as his hands moved to rest on her waist, squeezing her curves possessively.

"Well," Nate said, his voice low and husky, "I think you should finish what you started in the car."

Grace giggled, biting her lower lip.

"Oh yeah?" she asked, tilting her head to the side.

Without waiting for a reply, Grace slowly, right in front of the window, sank to her knees in front of him. The carpet underneath was threadbare in places, worn thin by the passage of hundreds of feet, the ghosts of past patrons, their own stories woven into its faded threads.

Her heart raced, excited. She bit her lip as she looked up at Nate.

She could feel the weight of his gaze on her as she reached for the buckle of his jeans, her delicate fingers making quick work of the leather strap. With a slow, deliberate movement, she unbuttoned the fly and tugged at his jeans, exposing the straining bulge of his boxer briefs underneath. His eyes roamed over her as she leaned forward and pressed her mouth against his hard cock, kissing and nuzzling him through the fabric. The musky scent of his arousal filled her nostrils and she inhaled deeply, savoring the masculine scent.

Grace's own body throbbed with excitement and anticipation as she hooked her fingers in the waistband of his briefs and slid them down his strong thighs. His cock sprang free, hard and thick, jutting out proudly in front of him. A bead of pre-cum glistened at the tip and Grace licked her lips, eager to taste him once more.

Her hand wrapped around his thick shaft, feeling the smooth skin against her palm, she started to stroke him, slowly at first but quickly picking up speed as his moans filled her ears. Grace ran her tongue across her top teeth, savoring the taste of his precum that still lingered from their drive.

She started by lightly kissing the tip, teasing him with gentle, feather-light touches. Her small, soft hand continued to pump up and down his rigid shaft, while her lips slowly pressed down, creating a small vacuum for her to suckle on.

Grace could feel Nate tense as her hot mouth closed around the head of his cock. Her tongue began exploring the ridge that connected his wide crown to the thick column, following it back until the back of his cock met the softness of her tongue, before sliding it forward to tease the sensitive frenulum on the other side.

"Damn," Nate breathed. His cock twitched in Grace's hand. "You are really, really good at that."

"Mhmm," Grace chuckled as she licked him up and down his length, one hand slowly stroking his thick base and the other gently rubbing his balls. Her tongue traced a vein, the texture rough against the soft slickness of her tongue, and a groan escaped Nate. Grace's eyes flickered upward, meeting Nate's gaze as his head tipped backwards, a low groan escaping from his throat.

"Mmmmmhmmm..." Grace hummed playfully, the sound vibrating around Nate's thick crown. Her eyes locked onto him, twinkling mischievously as she sucked him deep, letting the wide flare of his head glide across the velvet softness of her tongue. Nate was too big for her to take him down her throat, but she'd give him what she could, sucking hard and bobbing her head quickly, drooling down his shaft.

The noises of the wet mouth enveloping and sucking him were audible and lewd, especially in that room. Grace's cheeks were burning and tingling as her body was reacting. Her arousal was growing rapidly.

Grace kept her gaze firmly on Nate, and she watched his jaw go slack, his eyes fixed on the way her mouth was stretched wide around his thick cock. The way just the very ridges of his head escaped her lips any time she withdrew teased so many nerves in his sensitive crown, making him throb. She flickered her tongue on that spot, and the way his expression changed let her know it was his weakness. So she teased it again. And then again. And again. Grace would flick her tongue over it as if it was her sole purpose to make him squirm. She licked him like an ice cream, sucking on the tip and playing with him like candy, just like how she knew he wanted her to.

"Fucking hell," Nate moaned, his head tipping back again, his hands reaching for her hair. "You're gonna kill me."

Grace couldn't help but smirk. It was always so much fun to drive men wild, especially a man like Nate—the kind who took charge everywhere else in their lives. But Grace had discovered there was nothing Nate loved more than a girl who made him feel powerful, so powerful that a confident, assertive young woman like Grace would happily get on her knees for him, put his cock in her mouth, and do everything she could to please him.

With a loud, lewd slurp, Grace let Nate slip free of her mouth, giggling at the way it slapped back against his body, thick and hard.

"Is that so?" Grace teased. She leaned in and started licking his balls. "You think I'm dangerous?" she giggled, kissing each one of them before sliding her tongue back up the center of his shaft. "A killer?" Her tongue twirled around his head and she pumped him eagerly with her hand. "Well, how's this for dangerous, Mister Bertsch," she purred.

Leaning back on her heels, Grace lifted his rigid pole up out of the way and brought her face to his low-hanging balls, her mouth opening and engulfing them with her heat, sucking at them gently while she tickled his taint with the tip of her tongue, the texture of the wrinkled flesh a strange sensation.

Nate moaned. She was getting a little carried away with it, but she couldn't help it.

She let Nate's testicles fall from her hungry lips and they slapped back against his thigh as Grace licked her way up to the tip of Nate's cock, looking into his eyes as she lapped at his tip again.

"Oh, that's real fucking dangerous," Nate replied with a growl.

Nate took his thick, twitching shaft in hand, aiming the wide head towards Grace's mouth. Her tongue was out, ready to receive him. A flicker of amusement shone in Grace's eyes, and then, without further ado, the swollen crown slid between Grace's thin lips and over her tongue. He could feel her breath catch in her throat, his shaft swelling at the thought of her choking. His grip tightened on her hair as she swirled her hot, soft, wet tongue around the head of his cock.

"Ooh yeah, that's good. Just a more... mmmm, fuck that feels good," he muttered, as the wide rim of his glans pushed past the entrance of her throat, making her gag, her mouth flooding with spit as she tried to swallow it back.

"Aaaahhh fuuuck!" Nate groaned, pulling back as the sensation grew too intense.

Grace felt him swell even bigger in her mouth, a small trickle of salty fluid spilling into her mouth as she struggled to catch her breath.

Nate looked down at his conquest and smiled, a sense of satisfaction coursing through him as he saw the way she stared back at him, her cheeks flushed red and her chest heaving.

He released his cock for her to take over, and Grace eagerly slurped it back into her mouth, her eyes closing blissfully at his taste. The soft moans she let out sent shivers down Nate's spine and straight to his balls, which were already aching with the need to empty themselves. Grace's own pussy throbbed with excitement, and she could feel wetness growing between her thighs, spurring on her own eagerness to make him fill her mouth.

Nate reached for her head and grabbed hold of her long, blonde hair again, gently at first, then harder as she picked up the pace and started sucking him faster and more vigorously. He could see the determination in her eyes and feel the hunger of her mouth around him.

"Oh, fuck yes," he sighed. "Just like that. Get ready..."

"Mhmph!" Grace mumbled around his cock, nodding slightly.

"Unh, unh, unh! Fuck yes!"

Grace felt his thick meat jerk between her tight-pressed lips, the thickest pulse of salty fluid yet splattering onto her tongue and filling her mouth with his masculine essence. She was sucking him down as far as possible, feeling his thick head and bulbous ridge sliding back and forth across her lips. With every pull of her hungry mouth on his throbbing dick, another spurt of sticky, viscous cum spilled into her mouth. She couldn't get enough.

"Mmhh!" Grace moaned, sucking him faster, swallowing another shot of his warm seed.

"Mmmmh!"

Nate gritted his teeth and growled through the intense, near-unbearable pleasure as Grace bobbed her head, sucking down his cum without a care for her surroundings.

She pulled back and opened her mouth for a deep gasp of air, catching her breath while his shaft kept pumping out shot after shot of thick semen onto her outstretched, waiting tongue. The sight of his thick cum lurching from his tip was incredible and made her feel more wanton and needy than anything had before. Grace couldn't explain the intensity with which the need hit her. How all her other problems and thoughts and feelings disappeared when her lips closed around his pulsing cockhead, her mouth and cheeks bulging as Nate pumped rope after rope of hot jizz into her. It didn't make sense. And right then, in that moment, she didn't care.

When he finally started to come down, his cock still decently hard, but the pulsing finally abated, Nate slowly pulled free of her clinging lips. His flared crown dragged a trail of saliva and seed out of Grace's glistening, slick mouth as it emerged and slapped against his thigh, and he looked down to admire her handiwork.

Grace opened her mouth even wider and presented him a glimpse of his thick load in her mouth, showing off the white ropes that clung to the roof of her mouth and the milky puddles that had settled between the dips of her tongue. Then, in an almost ritualistic manner, Grace closed her mouth and swallowed loudly.

"Aaahh..." she said, licking her lips clean.

"Damn, where did that come from?" Nate asked, clearly satisfied.

"Just trying new things," Grace said with a shrug, letting Nate pull her to her feet.

"I'm all here for it," Nate chuckled.

"Well, I'm off to brush my teeth and... I guess get ready for bed," Grace said.

"You're not running off this time either?" Nate asked, almost sounding genuine.

Grace laughed. "No, I don't think I am."

Nate nodded. "Good."

"But I'll be right back. Just need to freshen up a bit. You know how it is."

\*

The shower was much needed after a day of work, photoshoot, sex, oral sex, and you name it. Jesus. To think it had all happened in one day. Was this how Nate lived? Grace chuckled to herself at the idea. She imagined that, if she let him, that would be the case.

Grace had always been adventurous in the bedroom, but she'd never quite considered herself a wild person. Now though... she was definitely more into the idea of being wild and crazy.

It was exhilarating. The thought of someone watching her, maybe even taking photos, it really appealed to her. She even hoped that Nate would have more in store for her. It was

putting her work on a pedestal, to be admired, and now... to be consumed.

Grace rinsed the last of the shampoo out of her hair and stepped out of the shower, grabbing a towel to dry herself off.

As she stood there, rubbing the towel over her body, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. A blush crept across her cheeks as she took in her own reflection, her tanned skin glowing from the hot water, her long blonde hair hanging wet down her back, her perky breasts rising and falling with each breath she took. She traced a finger down her stomach and over her pubic mound, feeling a rush of heat between her legs as she did so.

"Damn, I look good," Grace said to herself.

She blushed even just saying that, feeling like such a show-off, but she was glad no one wasn't around to hear it. She was proud, yes, confident, but come on.

\*

Ten minutes later, Grace exited the bathroom and found Nate already under the covers, watching TV.

"You're on my side," Grace joked, moving around to the other side.

"I guess we'll have to stack," Nate quipped.

"Oh, is that so?" Grace replied, throwing aside the duvet.

Nate continued to look at the TV for a few moments before turning it off, wanting to catch the last bit of the segment he was watching.

"Isn't this nice? Getting away a bit?" Nate asked, rolling to his side.

"Yeah," Grace replied. "I mean, the place isn't what I would have wanted, but at least the company is pretty good."

"You're welcome," Nate chuckled, his grin almost infectious.

"You've really grown on me," Grace said, shaking her head. "I have no idea how you do it, but I actually enjoy spending time with you. You're such a creep."

"I've heard worse," Nate shrugged. "And it's not the worst thing to hear."

"I can't believe you're not bothered by people calling you names," Grace said, laughing.

"Eh," Nate said. "What can I say, I have a thick skin."

"Clearly," Grace chuckled.

"If anything, I can say I didn't think I'd ever be in a position where I took you out on dates and such," Nate admitted, his tone sincere.

"Well, I'm glad you did," Grace said. "I don't regret anything we've done."

"Neither do I," Nate said, smiling.

Nate rolled over and kissed her softly on the lips. It was tender and sweet, and Grace melted into it. Her hands moved to his chest as he pulled her closer, his own hands sliding down her back. She sighed against his mouth as she felt him harden against her thigh, his erection pressing insistently into her hip. She wanted to feel him inside her again, and judging from the way he was grinding his hips against her, he wanted it too.

She wrapped her hand around his shaft and began stroking him slowly, making him groan. He pushed her onto her back, and she spread her legs for him eagerly.

"Fuck," he groaned, sliding between her thighs. She moaned as she felt his thick cockhead press against her wet pussy, teasing her entrance.

She gripped his shoulders tightly as he pushed inside, gasping at the sensation of being filled by him. Why did this feel so right? Nate wasn't even handsome. She didn't like him at first either. So then how come she had this feeling in her gut that this was perfect, when all logic said otherwise?

"Oh, fuck yes," Grace gasped. She felt his hands grip her waist and then he was moving, thrusting deep into her with long, sure strokes that left her breathless. She couldn't help but moan out loud, her fingers digging into his shoulder blades. The way he stretched her walls, rubbing against that sensitive spot deep inside with such precision and intent... it was pure heaven.

Her eyes met Nate's as he continued to move, and he held her gaze as he thrust. She could feel her body begin to tense up, her stomach muscles clenching. Was this... was he... making her cum already? How was he able to bring her to the brink like that? Oh god!

"Nate! Fuck, you're gonna... oh god! Oh fff-ughh! Oh fuck! Yes, oh fuuuuh!"

She closed her eyes tightly, unable to think of anything else other than the overwhelming sensations coursing through her entire being.

Nate's hips moved in a steady rhythm, his body tensing with the effort of keeping up with Grace's demands. The bed rocked with every thrust, and Grace could barely focus on anything except for her own pleasure. It seemed to be the same for Nate.

"Oh god, it feels so good," Grace panted. Her hands slid over Nate's back, tracing the lines and ridges that made him uniquely his. The idea that he wasn't her perfect fit didn't really bother Grace, but it did make her pause to consider how strange it all was that this, now, was better than the many nights of great sex with Nolan. She loved her boyfriend deeply, but she couldn't deny the sheer pleasure she felt with Nate. And yet... she also couldn't imagine this feeling lasting, or growing. Not with her. Not after how everything started. They were just too different, weren't they? Even if it seemed more compatible than she'd ever admit.

Grace bucked hard up to meet Nate's heavy work on top of her, her orgasm rushing through her body. She threw her head back against the pillow, a silent cry escaping her lips save for gasps and heavy, frantic pants. She moved one of her hands to the back of his head, tangling her fingers in his dark hair, holding on for dear life as their hips moved together in unison. With a groan, he thrust into her again and again, and she cried out in ecstasy.

As the intensity slowed, Nate didn't. He kept punishing her with deep strokes.

Grace looked up at Nate through half-lidded eyes, heavy with pleasure and exhaustion, wanting to see him clearly. The rough, unrefined man she had dismissed as nothing more than a creep now revealed layers she hadn't expected. It felt strangely natural—too natural, if she was being honest with herself—to let go of her usual control, to let her inhibitions melt away like snow in spring. To trust him. God, she hated that feeling. She never liked feeling weak, or needy, or out of control. But with Nate... something was different. The tightness in her chest loosened just a little each time they were together, the walls she'd so carefully built around herself crumbling bit by bit. The thought terrified her as much as it thrilled her. It felt so right. So good.

"God damn it!" Grace cried out, pulling him into another deep kiss.

His lips captured hers hungrily, and the two shared another moment together where nothing else existed except the intense connection between them. His hands moved up her back as he laid down on top of her, setting a more intimate pace. Her own fingers traced his spine, and she moaned against his mouth.

Nate's cock twitched inside her, and she knew he was close. She could feel him getting harder, his rhythm becoming more erratic as he chased his own climax. She wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him deeper inside her, wanting to feel every inch of him. She kissed him deeply, savoring the taste of his lips, the heat of his breath, the way his tongue felt against her own.

It felt so earned, so deserved, as if they'd both worked hard to get there. It was almost like he'd finally been able to break through all her barriers.

"God damn it! Nate! I'm gonna fucking cum again!" Grace screamed as she felt another orgasm build deep within her core. She clung to him, her fingers digging into his skin, trying to hold on for dear life, as her walls tightened and contracted around his thick girth.

"Grace, Fuck! Fuck!" Nate's face tightened in concentration, his brow furrowing and jaw clenching as the tension mounted in him, ready to explode.

"Just like that!" she exclaimed, "Keep doing that! Fuck, yes! Harder!"

"Grace, I'm gonna fucking... cum...!" he grunted through his clenched jaw, the strain clear on his face.

Nate's balls drew up and exploded as his orgasm roared up from his loins and surged forth. The familiar pulsing and throbbing began, and then... nothing. His mind and body flooded with a most delicious relief, his tense muscles relaxing as the intense climax slowly ebbed from his body. He groaned, his orgasm pulsing deep within her tight depths, as his balls emptied into her womb. She felt amazing, her velvety walls milking every last drop of his seed, her inner muscles massaging him like the world's tightest and hottest vice. The feel of her clutching around him, accepting all that he offered, the warm splash of his sticky fluids against her tender walls, it was a deeply satisfying experience, one that left him with the kind of bliss that usually only came with a truly mind-blowing session.

And right along with him, Grace had her third orgasm, a less intense yet more pleasant release compared to the others. Her thighs quivered around his sides as her pussy milked his spurting shaft. The sensation of Nate cumming, the warmth inside her, the feeling of her womb swelling with his load, feeling his tongue on hers, feeling *Nate* pressed so deeply inside her... it was beyond anything she had felt before. A sort of sense of completion filled her.

\*

The two of them let out a small laughter. Or was it a giggle. Hard to say. Probably something in between. The two exchanged a few kisses before Nate's weight proved too much, and he rolled to his side.

Grace bit her lower lip, the mere act of biting her lower lip showing the slightly mischievous mood she had. Her toes curled and she snuggled closer to Nate, wrapping her legs around his thighs. Her breasts pressed up against his side as she rested her cheek on his shoulder.

"You know, I was supposed to stop this today," Grace muttered after a while.

Nate looked down at her with an unreadable expression. Then he offered a smile. "You did a terrible job, then."

Grace half-laughed, half-settled more comfortably against him. "Well, you're just... I don't know. It's just different. It feels different."

Nate raised a brow at her. "Different?"

"It doesn't make sense," Grace said, shaking her head. "I didn't even want to go out on a date with you, and now look at us. I'm here, in bed with you, having sex. Again."

"You keep acting like this is something that happens to you," Nate said, his voice rough but gentle.

Grace tensed slightly against him, the warmth of his body suddenly feeling too close. "I make my own choices."

Nate propped himself up on an elbow, his dark eyes finding hers in the dim light filtering through the cheap hotel curtains. "You talk about it like it's this force of nature. Like you're

just being swept away by... whatever this is between us."

Grace pulled back slightly, creating space between them on the lumpy mattress. "Because it is. We weren't supposed to happen. You weren't even supposed to be part of my life beyond being some creepy neighbor who couldn't keep his eyes to himself."

A corner of Nate's mouth curved upward, but his eyes remained serious. "And now I'm the guy who fucks you the best."

Color rose to Grace's cheeks, heat spreading across her face and down her neck. It would normally be meant playfully, but it didn't seem like that now. "Don't be crude."

"Am I wrong?" Nate pressed, his fingers tracing patterns on the sheet beside her. "You keep saying this doesn't make sense, but you're the one who keeps coming back. This isn't just happening to you, Grace. You're choosing it."

Grace sat up, pulling the sheet around her naked body. The air in the room suddenly felt suffocating. "You think I don't know that? You think I haven't spent nights wondering what's wrong with me that I keep letting this happen?"

Nate shifted to sit up too, the mattress creaking beneath his weight. "There's nothing wrong with it. There's nothing wrong with wanting something different. Something... raw."

Grace's jaw tightened. "Raw? Is that what you call this? A guy who looks like he hasn't showered in a week getting me to do things I never thought I'd do?"

Nate reached for her, his fingers grazing her arm. She didn't pull away, but she didn't lean into his touch either. "I call it honest. We don't pretend with each other. You don't pretend you don't want me, and I don't pretend I'm not obsessed with you. That's more real than whatever careful dance you do with your quarterback boyfriend."

Grace flinched at the mention of Nolan, guilt flooding her system like cold water. "Don't talk about him."

"Why not?" Nate's voice grew softer, more persuasive. "Because it reminds you that you have a choice here? Every time you come running to me, Grace, that's a choice. Every time you let me undress you, that's a choice. Every time you open your legs for me..."

Grace squeezed her eyes shut, his words cutting too close to truth she wasn't ready to face.

"Look at me," Nate commanded gently.

Grace opened her eyes slowly, meeting his intense gaze.

"You didn't get pushed into this car," Nate continued, his thumb stroking her arm now. "You didn't get forced into this room. Your mouth wasn't forced open when you took me in your mouth. Your hands weren't guided when you wrapped them around my back. These are choices, Grace. Choices you keep making."

Grace's shoulders slumped, the fight draining out of her. "I know," she whispered, the admission feeling both liberating and terrifying. "I know they are."

"You like what I bring. There's nothing inherently wrong or right about that. It's just what you're drawn to."

Grace mused on his words as she settled down next to him, keeping that little space between them. She let the silence sit for a minute before finally replying to something he had said earlier. "Nolan doesn't pretend to obsess over me. He truly does worship me and our relationship together. You might not be able to tell, but I love him, and he loves me. I can feel it in the way he looks at me and talks to me. This isn't some illusion or act on his part."

"Fair," Nate said, not pushing the issue. Grace had expected him to do so, as that was what men did, right? Compare who's the most man and all that nonsense.

"I should probably text him. He is going to want to know where I am," Grace said, looking up at him.

"Then text him," Nate said.

Grace didn't move. Instead, she continued to look at Nate as the moment stretched. She wasn't sure what she was expecting. A small silence lingered.

After several beats, Nate spoke. "You don't have to decide everything tonight."

Grace nodded, but didn't respond further than that.

"You try to make everything fit in the same room," Nate said.

"What do you mean?" Grace asked.

"Nolan gives you one thing. I give you another. You keep acting like one has to cancel out the other, but that's not true. You're allowed to want more than one thing from your life," Nate said, easy as can be.

"That sounds convenient," Grace resisted.

"Sure. But it doesn't make it wrong, either," Nate said. "Nolan is home. I'm not."

Grace closed her fist around the sheet, rolled more on her side to face Nate. Was that the truth? Could she even admit to that?

"I hate feeling split like this. That both can... be true," Grace said, feeling a lump in her throat. But what was it? Fear? Guilt? Sadness? Excitement, even?

"Then stop treating it like a contradiction," Nate said.

Grace looked up at him now, searching his eyes, a strange mixture of emotions churning within her. She had expected this to be some sort of grand gesture or proclamation on her part, something that would change everything. Instead, it felt strangely simple. Too simple.

"It sounds like you're trying to make this normal, like people can just divide themselves up."

"They can," Nate replied. He made it sound as if it were such an easy answer, and that alone was a red flag for her. Nothing like this was that easy.

"I mean, I don't want Nolan to feel like he's waiting for me to live my life, while all he does is wait for me," Grace said. The thought alone was hard enough to imagine. It tore on her emotions to think of how Nolan would absolutely do that if not protected from himself.

"Then don't leave him waiting. Just don't drag him into every room either."

Once again, Grace fell silent. Her gaze shifted to not really look at anything specific. Nate seemed to have a lot of answers for things, but she wasn't sure if they really could hold true for her situation. What he said wasn't wrong. Of course it wasn't. Grace knew better. It was more that it wasn't enough. Even if he was able to give her something Nolan couldn't, it still wasn't a solution for everything else. It was a good question. But it wasn't a full answer. It was almost too easy. The ease of it almost felt more unnatural than the idea of there being something new she was exploring.

"He is not some piece of furniture," Grace said. "It's not fair to him, what I'm feel— doing..."

"No. But lying about what you want won't be fair to him either," Nate said.

"You're really good at making selfish things sound honest," Grace mused.

Nate offered a smile and a low chuckle. "Only when they are."

And yet again, silence acted as a mediator. This was new for Grace, she would realize, just not in a way that was entirely comfortable or positive. Normally, in any situation, a conflict, or even a normal discussion, she knew where she stood on issues. But lately, she felt more in the middle of everything, trying to understand how to act, what she should or could say, or do. Where others could be certain, Grace had to try to figure out who she even was in her current context. She kept changing her position.

Wasn't she used to knowing who she was? How did it come this far for her to start doubting that, all of a sudden? Was it even doubt? Was it herself that she fought against, and her stubbornness that refused to change, or did Grace really have a lot of things to figure out about herself? In many ways, Grace wasn't used to not knowing. Yet here, that was exactly what was happening to her, and Grace was discovering that the process was deeply uncomfortable.

"Come here," Nate finally said, holding his arm out to her, beckoning for Grace.

She hesitated for a moment. Grace then glanced over at her phone. Briefly. Before sliding over to him. It didn't feel unwelcome, but more unfamiliar. He had a way with her that Grace just didn't really have a word to describe. Just like she found herself unable to put her finger on it. Grace slid closer and felt Nate wrap his arm around her, holding her. She could smell his sweat and musk on him.

Grace's body began to relax. She was still wide awake, but she was more comfortable with the thoughts drifting in an out of focus in her head.

"Are you still angry about Tuesday?" Nate asked.

Grace felt herself tense as she remembered back. It felt like months away, but it was not even a week.

"You went too far."

"Yeah," Nate said. Grace immediately looked up at him, looking at him, taken a little back. Nate saw that and looked right back at her, a small shrug offered. "I shouldn't have left you wondering."

"What?" Grace asked, not amused. "That's one way to put it."

Nate met her eyes more directly, shifting more onto his side as she had. A hand traced over her hip, the side of her body, her shoulder and collar, brushing against the side of her breasts.

"Then maybe don't wonder this time."

"You think I'll let you do that?" Grace asked, her tone more annoyed.

"You won't let me do anything," Nate said. It wasn't a pout. It was a promise. "You'd choose it. No surprises, no waiting alone."

Grace's body drew tight again, muscles tensing where Nate's hand still rested on her hip. His words hung between them in the stale hotel air. She hadn't expected this, nor did she really want this, not after admitting to herself that she kept coming back. But she understood what he was offering. Something different. Something that put the choice entirely in her hands this time, not his. No repetition of old wounds disguised as new excitement.

"I'm not asking you to pretend I didn't push too far. I'm asking if you want to find out what it feels like when I don't," Nate said.

Nate didn't emphasize 'if you want', but it hung there regardless. She remembered the cuffs, the anger, how it had left bruises that made her think of Tuesday and Nate even when she was off with Nolan. But she also felt the pull.

Grace felt her wander across the bed, images of her helplessly tied to a post while Nate had his way with her flashing in her mind. She shivered at the thought, her body reacting to the idea.

But it would be different now.

"If I say stop, you stop," Grace said, that burning excitement in her chest growing.

Nate nodded. "Yes."

"And if I say I don't want this, you stop," she added. "No games."

"No games."

"And the key is within my reach," Grace said, "where I can see it."

"Yes."

Grace studied him. She knew Nate well enough to distrust how easy that all sounded, but she also knew him enough to know he meant it now. He wanted her to want it. He wanted her to make the choice.

"Fine," Grace said, her stomach fluttering at the idea.

The moment it left her mouth, Nate acted. He kissed her hard and pulled her to him, the way he moved more forceful than normal.

It made Grace gasp, wondering for a split second if it was the right call, but then her gasp floated into a moan. It was the kind of thing that would normally piss her off, but with Nate, it somehow felt like something she wanted.

"On your stomach," he said, letting go of her.

Grace looked up at him, confused. "What?"

Nate gave a look and pointed to the mattress. "On your stomach," he said calmly, but clearly with that edge to it.

Grace felt the tension within her grow as she shifted to her stomach, feeling his weight next to her move as he leaned over her side.

"Did you bring your cuffs? Did you plan this?" Grace asked, keeping her tone playful.

"Extend your arms out," Nate said.

Grace did so, and she felt his strong hands wrap around her wrists, and the cool metal tighten around her wrists. She felt her pulse quicken, her heart racing, her breathing becoming shallow, wondering what was next. The click of the other cuff closing around her other wrist made her jump. Looking up, she saw her wrists on either side of a pole on the headboard, a chain link between them, tying her to said pole.

She was bound. She was at his mercy again.

But this was different. She didn't feel what she felt then.

Nate moved, positioning himself to straddle her lower back, and then she felt the key being placed in her palm, closing her fingers around it. Her muscles tensed around the cool metal, her heart rate spiking before slowly calming back down. She had control. Even in this vulnerability, she held the power.

Grace rested her cheek against the cheap pillow, her fingers curled around the key like a lifeline. She could feel Nate's weight shift above her, could hear the rustle of sheets as he settled between her legs. The cool metal of the headboard against her wrists was a constant, grounding presence—a reminder that she had chosen this, that she could end it whenever she wanted.

But until then... she was his.

Grace could feel Nate's hands on her lower back, tracing the curve of her spine, his touch firm but gentle. His thumbs pressed into her muscles, working out knots she hadn't even realized were there. She sighed softly, her body relaxing under his skilled touch. It felt good. It felt right.

Then his hands slid lower, cupping her ass, squeezing firmly. Grace couldn't help but moan as he kneaded her flesh, his fingers digging in just enough to be pleasurable. She arched her back slightly, pushing herself against him, wanting more.

But instead of giving her what she wanted, Nate shifted his weight, moving up her body until he was straddling her thighs. Grace could feel his hard cock pressing against her ass, the heat of him seeping through her skin. She shivered, a mixture of anticipation and excitement coursing through her.

"You still think about it," Nate said, his voice low and rough. "Tuesday."

Grace tensed slightly, her fingers tightening around the key in her palm. She had been trying not to think about it, to push the memory aside, but it kept coming back. The feeling of being helpless, of being at his mercy, of not knowing what was going to happen next.

"I do," Grace admitted, her voice barely a whisper. "But this is different."

Without further warning, Nate's large, calloused palm came down on her exposed ass cheek with a sharp, stinging slap. Grace cried out, more from surprise than pain as the shock of it radiated through her. Her skin tingled where he'd struck her, a warm flush spreading across the area. Another slap followed on the opposite cheek, then another, building a rhythmic pattern of impact that sent waves of sensation through her body.

Grace buried her face in the pillow, muffling her sounds as Nate's hand came down again and again. Each slap sent a jolt through her, a mixture of pain and pleasure that she couldn't quite process. Her body was responding to him, her pussy growing wet with each strike, her clit throbbing with need.

She felt exposed and vulnerable, her ass thrust up in the air, her hands bound to the headboard.

The slaps ceased as suddenly as they began. Grace lay there, panting, her skin tingling, her body humming with anticipation. She could feel Nate's weight shift as he positioned himself behind her, the head of his cock pressing against her wet entrance. There was barely any

resistance as he pushed himself inside, his thickness stretching her walls, filling her completely.

Grace moaned as Nate began to move, thrusting into her with deep, powerful strokes. His hands gripped her hips, holding her steady as he pounded into her, the bed creaking in protest with each movement. He was going hard and heavy, but god could Grace take it. Barely.

Her hands instinctively tried to grip something, but the cuffs held her fast, a reminder that she was at his mercy. But then her fingers brushed against the key in her palm, a small, cold piece of metal that held so much power. She could end this whenever she wanted. But she didn't want to. Not yet.

Nate's hands moved from her hips to her hair, grabbing a handful and pulling her head back gently. The slight pain mixed with the pleasure, sending a tremble down her spine, making her arch her back even further, pushing herself against him, meeting his thrusts with her own desperate movements.

Before letting her settle in this angle, Nate shoved Grace's face down into the pillow. Her cries of delight and moans were muffled, the way his rough and aggressive movements were making the bed rock. It wasn't gentle. Nate's hands gripped her hips tightly, his fingers digging into her skin, sure to leave bruises that would last for days. As if the spanking wouldn't.

"Fuck, Grace," Nate growled, his thrusts becoming more erratic, more desperate. "I think you like it more when I'm rough with you."

Grace couldn't respond. Not with her face pressed against the pillow, her breath stolen by the force of Nate's thrusts, but she didn't need to. Her body was doing all the talking for her. She was pushing back against him, meeting each thrust with one of her own, her pussy clenching around him, milking him for all he was worth.

Grace could feel her body begin to tense up, her stomach muscles clenching as her orgasm approached. She could feel the familiar tingling sensation start at her toes and work its way up her legs, spreading through her entire body like wildfire. Her walls tightened around Nate's cock, her inner muscles milking him, trying to draw him deeper inside her. She was so close, so very close, and she knew it wouldn't take much to push her over the edge.

Nate must have sensed it too, because he shifted his position slightly, changing the angle of his thrusts. He was hitting that spot deep inside her, the one that made her see stars, the one that made her toes curl and her eyes roll back in her head.

The angle, the cuffs, the keys in her hand, the sheer roughness of it all was all a bit too much, and a little bit too perfect.

She screamed into the pillow as wave after wave of pleasure washed over her, her body convulsing, her pussy spasming around Nate's thick cock. It was an earth-shattering

orgasm, one that left her breathless and trembling, her body spent and sated.

But Nate wasn't done with her yet. He kept pounding into her, his movements relentless as he chased his own climax. He had already climaxed three times this evening, but something about this raw, primal act had him going again.

Grace was so sensitive after her orgasm, each thrust sending jolts of pleasure-pain through her body. She squirmed and writhed beneath him, her bound hands struggling against the cuffs, but she didn't want him to stop. She wanted more. She wanted to feel him cum inside her again, to feel his warmth spread through her, to feel his body tremble as he reached his peak.

Nate leaned forward, his weight pressing her into the mattress, his chest flush against her back. She could feel his hot breath against her neck, could feel the sweat dripping from his body onto hers, could feel the rapid thumping of his heart against her spine.

"Grace," he whispered, his voice ragged with desire.

She turned her head to the side, trying to look at him, but he buried his face in her hair, his hips moving faster now, his thrusts becoming more erratic. She could feel him swelling inside her, could feel the tension building in his body, could hear the ragged gasps escaping his lips.

With a final, deep thrust, Nate let out a guttural groan as he emptied himself into her, his body shuddering with the force of his release. Grace could feel the warmth of his cum spreading through her, a comforting and intimate sensation that made her feel connected to him in a way she had never felt before.

He collapsed on top of her, his full weight pressing her into the mattress, and she could feel his heart racing against her back, could feel the sweat dripping from his body onto hers, could feel the gentle tremors that still ran through him as he came down from his high. The key remained clasped in her palm, a small, cool reminder of the control she had held throughout this encounter.

\*

"Oh shit! Oh, FUCK!" Grace cried out, riding Nate for all he was worth. Her blonde hair was plastered to her forehead with sweat, her cheeks flushed with exertion and pleasure, her body moving in a frantic, desperate rhythm. She was sitting astride him, her hands free to rest on his chest, her perky breasts bouncing with each movement, her head thrown back in ecstasy.

Nate's hands gripped her hips, guiding her movements, helping her find the perfect angle, the perfect rhythm that would send them both spiraling into oblivion. He was watching her, his eyes dark with desire, a smirk playing on his lips as he watched her lose herself to the pleasure.

She could feel his cock deep inside her, his thickness stretching her walls, rubbing against that special spot deep within her with each thrust. The head of his shaft possessively slammed against that place inside her that had her eyes rolling into the back of her head, that made her toes curl and her mouth drop open in a silent scream. She was riding the wave of another intense orgasm, her whole body quivering and trembling, a cacophony of pleasure coursing through her veins, threatening to make her explode from within.

He was taking her rough, and it was doing all the right things to her, making her both see heaven and stars alike.

With a few last, frantic thrusts, Nate's climax joined Grace's, the pair clinging to each other in the heat of the moment, their bodies moving together as one in the height of passion. She could feel the pulsing of his cock, could feel each burst of cum as it shot deep inside her, her tightness drawing it out, milking him for everything he was worth.

\*

Nate sat on the edge of bed, once again with Grace on her knees in front of him, giving him the kind of service his cock deserved. Grace was happily blowing him again, her tongue tracing every inch of his shaft, her lips wrapped tightly around his thickness.

"Fuck, you're good at that," Nate groaned, his hands tangling in her blonde hair, guiding her movements. He was still a bit spent from their latest love-making session, but he couldn't resist the temptation of Grace's mouth.

Grace moaned around his shaft, the vibrations sending shivers of pleasure through his body. Her hands were on his thighs, her fingers digging into his flesh, holding him in place as she worked her magic on him. Her head bobbed up and down, her tongue swirling over the sensitive head of his cock, her lips sliding along his length.

The sight of her on her knees before him, her mouth full of his cock, was almost enough to make him cum again.

\*

Pressed up against the wall, Nate was hammering into Grace's pussy, his hips moving with a frenzied intensity, his hands gripping her ass, holding her in place. Her legs were wrapped around his waist, her arms draped over his shoulders, her head thrown back in ecstasy.

"Fuck yeah, you like looking at that juicy booty while you fuck the shit out of me?" Grace asked.

"You fucking bet," Nate grunted, slapping said ass for good measure, almost losing his grip on her. "Almost as much as I liked doing *this*!" Nate then shoved into her in just the right way.

"Oh god, yes!" Grace cried out, her nails digging into his back. "Just like that! Don't stop! You fuck me so good, N-NATE!"

"I have no plans of stopping, princess," Nate grunted, his hips moving faster, his thrusts becoming more powerful. He could feel her walls tightening around him, could feel her body tensing as her orgasm approached.

"You're going to make me cum! I'm gonna cum!" Grace screamed, her body convulsing, her pussy spasming around his cock. "Oh god, yes! I'm cumming! I'm cumming!"

With a final, deep thrust, Nate let out a guttural groan, his own release joining hers, the two of them collapsing against the wall in a heap of sweat and satisfaction.

\*

The bedside clock's red digits mocked her in the darkness: 3:17 AM. An early morning, or a very late night depending on how you looked at it. Grace lay curled on her side, the cheap sheet pulled up to her chin, watching the steady rise and fall of Nate's chest as he slept beside her. His face looked different in sleep—softer, somehow, the harsh lines smoothed out, the perpetual frown gone. Almost peaceful. She could see the faint scar above his eyebrow, one she hadn't really noticed before. She wondered how he'd gotten it. A fight? A clumsy accident? The thought struck her that there was so much she didn't know about this man she'd invited into her bed, into her life.

Grace rolled over to face the other side of the bed. The key to the handcuffs was on the nightstand, its metallic surface catching the faint glow from the parking lot lights filtering through the cheap curtains. She had never actually used it. Nate had uncuffed her himself, his fingers gentle as they released her wrists. She hadn't needed the key then. But it was a comfort.

\*

Some time later, Grace awoke on her side again, this time with something hard and strong pistoning into her from behind. Nate's hands gripped her hips, his body spooning hers as he moved inside her with slow, deliberate strokes. His breath was warm against her neck, his chest pressed against her back.

"Morning, princess," he whispered, his voice rough with sleep and desire.

Grace moaned softly, her body still heavy with exhaustion but responding eagerly to his invasion. She reached back, her fingers tangling in his hair as he continued to move, his thrusts becoming faster, more demanding.

"You're insatiable," she murmured, her voice a sleepy murmur.

"Only for you," he replied, his hips moving faster, his thrusts becoming more urgent.

They moved together, their bodies finding a perfect rhythm, a harmony that seemed impossible given their circumstances. Nate's hands roamed over her body, caressing and

exploring, his touch a mix of possessive desire and gentle affection that made her head spin. His words from the night before echoed in her mind.

Nate held her close as his climax drew close. His thrusts became shorter, but somehow deeper still. Grace's hand was wrapped around his thigh, her nails digging into his flesh.

"Fuck," he groaned, and Grace could feel his cock twitch inside her, could feel his hot breath against her skin, and she couldn't help but gasp at the sheer force of him.

\*

The stale hotel air still lingered in the room, yet it somehow felt warm and comfortable. The sheets were tangled, and faint daylight shone through bad curtains. It was a gray morning, but it didn't feel like it, even if Grace laid with the duvet only covering half her body.

Grace's body felt heavy. Sore in all the right places. She could hear Nate breathing nearby. The sound of whatever was going on outside. A cart rolled down the hallway outside their room.

The smell of sex, sleep, sweat, and cheap soap mixed in the air. And somehow, it didn't repulse her as much as she would've thought it should.

A buzz.

Grace heard a buzz. She stirred, waited, her sleepy mind thinking the sound somehow belonged elsewhere. The AC, something in the hallway perhaps. The buzzing stopped, and Grace let herself drift into slumber again.

The buzzing returned, drawing her right out of her slumber. Grace blindly tried to reach for her phone, which had to be somewhere on the nightstand. She found it, her fumbling fingers closing around the familiar smooth surface. She blinked her eyes open, annoyingly rubbing sleep from her eyes and the screen came into focus, a series of notifications lighting up the display.

Her stomach dropped. The buzzing stopped just as realization hit her. Nolan's name was on the display. What time was it? How many missed calls were there? Did she even text him last night? Grace looked around. Where were her clothes?"

A sickening pit formed in her stomach. The guilt she had managed to keep at bay during their raw, passionate encounter now flooded her system with an intensity that made her feel nauseous. She quickly swiped through the notifications, her heart racing. Six missed calls. A string of increasingly worried texts.

*'Everything okay?'* from 10:47 PM.

*'Hope you're having fun but let me know you're safe'* from 11:52 PM.

God, had she slept that long?

"That him?" Nate rumbled.

Grace didn't reply; she was busy staring at her phone, her thumb hovering over the screen.

*'Im okay, ill be home soon,'* she wrote quickly and pressed send before she could think better of it.

The air in the room seemed to have changed. No longer warm and comfortable, but stifling. Suffocating. Grace put the phone face-down, as if that could somehow shield her from the reality waiting for her on the other side of these thin, faded walls.

The bed beside her shifted and groaned.

"Come back here, princess," Nate rumbled, and soon his arm was around her in the next moment. He pulled her close, her head resting on his chest. She wanted to melt into him, to let his warmth and solidity ground her. But she couldn't shake the feeling that she didn't deserve that comfort—not with the weight of her guilt pressing down on her like an invisible burden. Not while the consequences of her actions were laid out starkly on her phone, demanding her attention.

But then there was that scent. Nate's scent. It was so primal, so raw, that it made it almost impossible to pull away from. It was the smell of sweat, of sex, of something undeniably male that made her stomach twist in a way that was both thrilling and terrifying. She knew she should get up, should get dressed, should face the morning and the mess she had made, but she couldn't bring herself to move just yet. Instead, she lay there, her head on his chest, listening to the steady rhythm of his heart, trying to ignore the gnawing guilt that was eating away at her.

"You okay?" he asked.

Grace almost said yes. Almost said no. Almost said it was time for her to go.

Instead, she looked back at him. Nate didn't smile, didn't smirk or offer a chuckle. He ran a hand down her shoulder, down her arm, slow, and she could move away at any moment.

But she didn't.

In a matter of moments, Grace was on her back again, her legs wrapped around Nate as he thrust into her again with a deep, satisfying groan. She could feel him everywhere, inside her, around her, his scent filling her lungs, his body covering hers like a blanket.

She closed her eyes, focusing on the sensation, letting it wash over her, washing away the guilt, the fear, the uncertainty. For a little while longer, at least.

\*

Finally, an hour later, after a shower and a quick fix-up, Grace was rapidly making her way down the open corridor to her apartment. She didn't know what to expect when she walked

through that door. Awkwardness, for sure. She honestly had no idea how Nolan would react to her disappearing like this.

Grace gently pushed the door open, as if not wanting to wake anyone up, sneaking into her own apartment, as if it wasn't already midday. But it was. She looked at the clock on the wall. God, it was almost 1 PM.

Inside, the apartment was still. Not calm. Not spacious. Still.

Grace hiked her purse up a bit and walked down their little hallway.

And there he sat. Nolan.

He turned as he heard her enter. He had clearly been awake. Probably for a long while.

"I waited for you."