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Grace cursed herself as her tractor had gotten stuck in the mud. She had thought a wet ditch wasn't that wet... apparently she was wrong. She looked up at the sky, at the sun still beating down on her. Sun was a rare commodity this time of year, but it was beating down on her today. She could have waited for a tow truck, but that would be both a pain and expensive. So she did what she could with her jack and a pair of wooden planks she luckily had in the back. A bit of muscle and a bit of clever technique, and an entire dictionary worth of chosen glosses, and she had managed to get her tractor free. Sighing in relief, Grace wiped sweat from her brow and wondered how on earth she managed to pull this off.

But the wet ground meant that her tractor was useless. Wheelbarrow it was... Grace sighed, shook her head, and donned her rain pants.

It wasn't even Monday. Monday had swept by like nothing at all, like nothing entirely out of the ordinary had happened. And Tuesday morning, just like on Monday, she had woken up like any other day. Next to Nolan. Coffee and breakfast ready by the time she was finished in the bathroom. Both today and yesterday, they both had gone to work, meandering through their life like they normally did.

There was something almost absurd about how ordinary everything felt after Saturday.

But it was good.

Really good.

Wading through, Grace felt frustrated. But instead of having this nagging sensation of doing something that she felt was wrong, or indulging in something she knew was selfish, she felt little of that sort of frustration. It was pure mud-based frustration that sent her steaming ahead.

Thighs, hips, ass, arms, shoulders, the whole shabang, was all a concoction of aching muscles complaining by lunch. And by the time lunch was over, rain poured like a bastard. Feeling the remnants of Saturday's exhaustion didn't help either...

By the time work for the day was done, Grace felt like she had been run over by the tractor she had rescued from the mud earlier. Every movement was a chore, her body protesting with a dull

ache that seemed to radiate from her very bones. The thought of making dinner when she got home made her almost want to sink back to the mud...

When she got home, however, Nolan beat her to it.

"I saw the weather and figured I'd get a head start," Nolan said when she walked through the door, wet and dirty.

"You have no idea what a lifesaver you are right now," Grace groaned, tearing her jacket off.

Nolan shrugged, heading back to cut sausages.

One thing that Grace wasn't sure was out of the ordinary or not was how charged she felt. She'd always enjoyed sex, but she felt even more aware of this. She couldn't help but to think Nate had a major part to play in that. That was to say, her appetite wasn't just for Nate. She loved and adored Nolan still, and wanted him just as much as before, if not more.

So after a relaxing bath and a tasty dinner, while Nolan was trying to read something on his tablet, dressed in only a red lacy thong and an easy t-shirt of Nolan's, it didn't take long before she sauntered over to him. With a knowing smile, Grace took his tablet out of his hands and tossed it aside on the sofa, and shoved him back so she could straddle him.

"You know what would make this evening even more relaxing?" Grace asked, a mischievous glint in her steel-blue eyes.

Nolan raised an eyebrow, a slow smile spreading across his face. "You're giving me ideas."

"Shush, that mouth has other business," Grace said, leaning in to kiss him.

She pressed her lips against his, her tongue flicking out to taste him. His hands came up to tangle in her hair, holding her close as he deepened the kiss, his tongue slipping between her parted lips. Grace moaned, grinding against him, feeling the hard length of him pressing against her through the thin fabric of his pants.

Her hands slid up under his shirt, pushing it up so she could rake her nails over the smooth skin of his chest. He hissed at the sensation, his fingers digging into her hips as he pulled her closer, desperate for friction.

"Fuck me," Grace whispered, her voice rough with need.

"You don't want me to send you over to Nate?" Nolan teased.

"No. I want you," Grace said, her hand grabbing his buckle to work those pesky pants off. "Who gave you permission looking this good?"

"Jesus, Grace," Nolan said, moving his hand to assist her. But Grace slapped it away.

"You let me," she said, her eyes locking with his, a challenge in them. "You've seen me with him. You know what we've done."

"I do," Nolan replied, his breath coming faster.

Grace leaned in to kiss him again, her fingers still working at the buckle of his belt. Finally, she managed to free it, tugging on his pants until they were halfway down his thighs. He lifted his hips, allowing her to pull them down, and she tossed them aside, leaving him completely exposed.

Nolan's cock stood proudly, hard and ready, and Grace wrapped her hand around it, stroking it slowly. He groaned, his eyes fluttering closed as he surrendered to the sensation. She pumped her hand up and down his shaft, teasing him, feeling him grow even harder in her grasp.

"How do I compare?" Nolan asked, surprising Grace a little. Perhaps she shouldn't be. Did he really want the truth?

"You're not as long," Grace said, stroking him again. "And not quite as thick."

"But I can still make you sing," Nolan said, a challenge in his voice.

Grace smiled, her lips curling in a wicked grin. "Then you better prove it," she said, lifting herself up onto her knees so she could guide him to her entrance.

She sank down onto him, his cock sliding into her in one smooth motion, filling her completely. She moaned, her head falling back as pleasure washed over her, the feeling of him inside her so familiar and yet still so new. She rocked her hips, taking him deeper, her breath hitching as he bottomed out inside her.

"Oh fuck," she moaned, her fingers digging into his shoulders as she rode him. "Fuck, you feel so good."

Nolan growled, his hands gripping her hips as he guided her, thrusting up into her, driving himself deeper. He kissed her neck, sucking on the tender flesh, his teeth scraping over her skin.

"Is that all?" Nolan asked, his voice a low rumble.

"No," Grace moaned, her nails raking over his chest.

He thrust into her harder, faster, his fingers digging into her hips as he took control.

"Then tell me," Nolan urged.

"It's different," she said, grinding on Nolan, mewling. "He can be so rough. Impatient and demanding. You're that too, but in a more gentle way."

"Yeah?"

"You put me on this kind of pedestal," Grace murmured, her voice thick as she continued rocking on his cock. Her words came in breathy fragments, punctuated by soft moans. "I can let go completely because I know you worship me."

Her hands braced against his chest as she arched her back, changing the angle just enough to make her gasp. "With Nate... God." She squeezed her eyes shut, her movements momentarily faltering as she searched for the right words. "I feel so fucking used with him. I notice every single thing he's doing, how he's taking what he wants."

"Does it feel good?" Nolan asked. He knew the answer.

"So good," Grace moaned.

Grace's thoughts drifted to Nate as she moved, to the way he'd stretched her, filled her in ways Nolan couldn't. But Nolan's cock, while different, was hers. The one she'd chosen, the one she loved. And feeling that familiar heat inside her now, with Nolan's hands on her hips, his breath warm against her skin...

She leaned forward, pressing her breasts against Nolan's chest, her lips finding his ear.

"You're the one I come home to," she whispered, the words a hot puff of air that made him shudder. "The one I want to hold me after someone else has wrecked me."

Nolan's response was a strangled moan, his hips bucking up into her, driving himself impossibly deep. She could feel him swelling inside her, knew he was close.

"Tell me," he gasped. "Would you go over there tonight? If you wanted to? Or would I hold you back?"

Grace stilled her movements, her body tensing slightly. The question hung in the air between them, heavy with implication. She could feel the heat rising to her cheeks, her thoughts racing as she considered her answer. The truth was, she wasn't sure. Part of her wanted to say no, to reassure him, but that was how she'd thought before. She'd absolutely go to Nate tonight if the impulse arose. And she suspected Nolan wanted to hear her say that.

She slowly pulled back, her steel-blue eyes locking with his.

"You're not holding me back," she said, her voice steady despite the rapid beating of her own heart. "I'm exactly where I want to be right now."

It wasn't a direct answer, but Nolan seemed to understand. He nodded, a small, uncertain smile touching his lips, and then he was pulling her down for another kiss, his tongue delving into her mouth with a desperation that mirrored her own.

"I'm thinking of his big dick in me right now," Grace said.

"Oh Jesus," Nolan exclaimed, the words muffled against her lips.

"I can't believe he fucked me raw," Grace said. She felt him pulse inside her at her words, and a shiver of delight ran through her. It was one thing to talk about having sex with Nate, but another to feel how much it turned Nolan on.

"Fuck, Grace," Nolan groaned, his fingers digging into her hips as he thrust into her, harder this time. "You like that, don't you? Telling me about him."

"I do," she admitted. "You're hard as a rock listening about me taking another man's bare cock inside me."

Nolan flipped them over then, a surprising display of strength that had Grace crying out in surprise and delight. He was on top of her now, his body covering hers, his cock still buried deep inside her. He hooked her legs over his arms, spreading her wide, and began to move with a fierce, almost brutal rhythm that stole her breath.

Grace's response was a strangled cry, her hands fisting in the sheets as she surrendered to the pleasure. And it didn't take long before Nolan was emptying himself inside of her with a loud, guttural groan, collapsing onto her with a shuddering gasp. He stayed there for a long moment, his face buried in the crook of her neck, his breath ragged against her skin. She held him, her hands stroking his back, her body humming with a quiet contentment.

Eventually, he rolled off her, sprawling onto his back beside her, and pulled her into his arms. They lay there in comfortable silence for a while, the only sounds their mingled breathing and the distant rumble of thunder outside.

"I love you," Nolan said.

"I love you too," Grace replied, her head resting on his chest, her ear pressed against the steady, reassuring beat of his heart.

They laid there for a while, trying to regain strength to get a move on.

"Remember how you didn't tell me about Nate's... size? Being scared I'd pull the plug on this whole operation?" Nolan chuckled.

"I do," Grace said. "I remember thinking he had stuffed his pants... boy was I wrong. I don't know if I'm a size queen, but there's something about being filled like that."

Grace turned on his chest, resting her chin on her elbows to look up at him.

"I want a date. A date that is just us. No Nate, no nonsense," she said.

"Does Saturday sound good? Pick you up at seven?" Nolan joked.
"Silly boy," she said, getting up. Still wearing her red laced thong, but nothing else, her shapely ass moving side to side as she walked toward the bathroom.

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The next few days passed in a blur of work and domesticity. Grace found that there was a newfound ease between them, a comfort that hadn't been there before. Grace found herself feeling as though much of the unspoken tension that had been simmering beneath the surface for weeks was gone, replaced by a deeper understanding, a more profound intimacy. They were more open with each other now, more honest about their desires, their fears, and their needs.
On Thursday, Grace went over to Nate's after work again, alone this time. She felt a little guilty at the thought of Nolan being left out again, but this was the new rhythm of their lives. She would have her moments with Nate, and then she would come home to Nolan, to the steady, unwavering love that anchored her.
But it didn't really feel out of place either. Nolan said it. Would she visit Nate if she felt like it? Yes. She would. Not only for sex, Nate had plenty of sides to him that made her go visit. She wanted to know how the photoshoot had gone.
Nate was already home when she arrived, a beer in hand, a familiar smirk playing on his lips. He looked her up and down, his eyes lingering on her hips, her thighs, the curve of her breasts beneath her thin sweater.
"Someone looks like she's been working hard," he said, setting his beer down on the counter and moving toward her. "And also like someone's been getting a good workout in other ways."
Grace rolled her eyes, but she couldn't suppress the small smile that tugged at her lips. "Good day to you too. You're ridiculous," she said, but she didn't protest when he backed her against the counter, his hands finding her ass, pulling her flush against him. She could feel the hard length of

him pressing against her, and she had to admit, it was nice to be wanted like this, with no pretense, no hesitation.

"So how's my little princess doing?" he asked. Grace swatted his hand away.

"Not bad," she said. "Nolan and I are heading on a small date on Saturday, so looking forward to that."

"How about I find the ol' handcuffs, eh?" he asked, not really paying any mind to 'how his princess was doing'.

Grace felt a little jolt at the mention of the handcuffs, remembering the cool metal clicking around her wrists the first time. And even better, the second time.

"We're celebrating something?" Grace teased, though she could already feel heat pooling between her thighs at the memory of their last encounter with those cuffs.

"Well, just that the limited budget for the extended pilot got approved. The paperwork came through, and if we do well, we'd go into a proper production," Nate said. "We're doing another shoot."

"Hey, that's great," Grace said, genuinely happy for him. That must be a great relief and a great milestone.

"It is. It also means we're going to be busy," Nate said.

"I'm sure you can handle it."

"With the new budget, we're getting two additional shoots and some proper modelling compensation," Nate said. Grace liked the word 'we'. It was like they shared the accomplishment! "And that means you're getting a contract too. It's going to be much more professional."

Grace took a few moments to process that. She was, in fact, doing this. It wasn't just helping out anymore. It was actually kind of exciting. And much more than just 'kind of', to be honest.

"That's great news," she said, her mind racing.

"Maybe you can help me celebrate?"

It didn't take long before she was on her knees on Nate's floor, her hands cuffed behind her back, his hands tangled in her hair, guiding her as she took him into her mouth. He was hard and ready, his breath coming fast, his hands tightening in her hair as she moved up and down the length of his shaft. Her mouth was stretched around him, his cock bumping the back of her throat with

each stroke, her cheeks hollowing as she sucked him. The sounds of her sucking him echoed off the walls of his apartment, a wet, obscene sound that only served to arouse her even more.

The metallic clink of her restraints sent a rush of arousal through Grace's veins, reminding her of her helplessness. But more than that, it reminded her that she chose to be here. Chose to surrender her power to Nate, her desire.

"Look at me," Nate commanded, his voice rough with desire.

Grace looked up, her eyes meeting his as she continued to work him with her mouth, her tongue swirling around the sensitive head, her lips stretched tight around his girth. She could see the raw hunger in his gaze, the satisfaction of having her like this, completely at his mercy. The thrill was so immense. Just sitting like this... with only her mouth free to please him.

"You're so beautiful like this, princess," he said. "On your knees. On my floor... fuck, that feels so good. Like that cock in your mouth?"

His words were crude, but they sent a fresh wave of heat through her, making her moan around him. She could feel him twitch in her mouth, knew he was close, and she doubled her efforts, her head bobbing faster, her hands clenched into fists behind her back as she fought for purchase.

And just as she felt him begin to swell, heard the ragged quality of his breathing, he pulled her away, leaving her gasping for breath, a string of saliva connecting her lips to the tip of his cock. She looked up at him, her eyes wide with need, her body trembling with unfulfilled desire.

"Not yet," he said, a cruel smile playing on his lips. "I'm not done with you yet."

He pulled her to her feet, leading her to the bedroom, her movements awkward with her hands still bound behind her back. He pushed her onto the bed, her face landing in the soft sheets, her ass raised in the air, completely exposed and vulnerable.

She heard the soft rustle of clothing, the sound of him undressing, and then the weight of him on the bed behind her. His hands were on her again, rough and demanding.

"I need you on that shoot," he murmured, his fingertips leaving goose bumps as they trailed down her spine.

"Need or want?" Grace teased, despite her precarious situation.

His only answer was a chuckle. The mattress shifted as he moved, positioning himself behind her.

Grace held her breath, her entire body thrumming with anticipation. He grabbed her hip, his thumb pressing into her flesh as he steadied himself, his cock pressing against her. With one hard thrust, he buried himself deep inside her, eliciting a sharp cry from her.

Her fingers twisted in the sheets as he pounded into her, each stroke driving him deeper inside her, filling her completely, his grip on her hips leaving bruises that would no doubt mark her for days to come. She bucked and writhed beneath him, her body instinctively seeking release even as her hands were bound.

Grace cried out in frustrated, desperate pleasure as Nate drove into her again and again, his movements hard, fast, punishing. He brought her right to the edge, a few hard thrusts away from the sweet oblivion she craved, then slowed, holding himself still inside her, allowing the ache of unsatisfied need to build again.

Suddenly, Nate pulled out of her entirely. Grace whimpered at the sudden emptiness, the absence of him leaving her feeling more bereft than she would have thought possible.

"Please," she begged, her voice raw with need. "Don't stop."

Nate didn't answer. Instead, Grace heard the distinctive sound of a bottle cap popping open, followed by the slick, rhythmic noise of liquid being worked onto something. Then the mattress shifted behind her as he moved into position again, the bed creaking softly under his weight. A moment later, she felt the warm, smooth tip of him pressing against her asshole, and she realized what he wanted. Grace flinched instinctively, her entire body tensing as he tested her rim with gentle, deliberate pressure.

"Nate?"

"Relax," he commanded. "We're okay?"

Grace hesitated for a moment. The last time they had done this, it had been... intense. But this time Nate was checking in on her, and they had experimented a bit with just the cuffs. And it wasn't like she was tied to a post or had been left here for hours. The trust was there.

Grace nodded.

He moved slowly, working the tip of his cock into her with a gentleness that surprised her. The stretch was intense, a sharp, burning ache that was almost too much, but underneath it was a current of dark, forbidden pleasure that made her arch her back, inviting him deeper.

He obliged, sinking into her inch by inch, until he was buried to the hilt, his balls resting against her wet folds. He stayed there for a moment, letting her adjust to the fullness, the weight of him,

the raw intimacy of the act. Then he began to move, slow, deliberate strokes that sent shivers of pleasure-pain racing through her. He reached around, his fingers finding her clit, rubbing it in tight circles that matched the rhythm of his thrusts.

The dual stimulation was almost too much, a sensory overload that sent her spiraling toward the edge faster than she would have thought possible. She could feel the orgasm building, a slow, delicious wave that promised to shatter her into a million pieces.

"I'm going to cum," she gasped, her body trembling with the force of her impending release. "Oh fuck, I'm going to cum."

"Cum for me, princess," he growled, driving into her harder, faster, each stroke a deliberate act of possession. "Cum all over my cock."

The command was all it took to push her over the edge. The orgasm hit her like a freight train, shattering her into a million pieces, leaving her breathless and trembling in its wake. She cried out, the sound raw and uninhibited, her body convulsing around him as wave after wave of pleasure washed over her, continuously clenching her fists behind her back.

Nate kept up his relentless pace through her orgasm, driving into her harder, each deep thrust prolonging the waves of pleasure crashing through her body. Grace felt completely owned, unable to move with her hands cuffed behind her back as he used her ass for his pleasure. He leaned over her, his chest pressing against her back, his breath hot against her ear.

"Such a tight fucking ass," he growled, his voice thick with lust as he continued to piston into her. "Made just for taking my cock."

She could hear his breathing growing ragged, feel the tension building in his body as he approached his own release. His fingers dug into her hips, holding her steady as he drove into her with increasing urgency, chasing his own climax while she trembled beneath him, lost in the overwhelming sensations of being so thoroughly used.

With a final, guttural groan, Nate pulled out abruptly. Grace felt the sudden emptiness as he wrapped his slick hand around his throbbing cock. His fingers worked furiously as he aimed, pumping himself to completion. A hot stream of cum shot across her lower back, followed by another that painted the curve of her ass, marking her with his release. The warm, viscous fluid trickled down her skin, evidence of their raw coupling. Nate collapsed beside her on the bed, both of them panting heavily, their bodies slick with sweat and the lingering scent of their passion.

Grace lay there, her body still humming from the aftershocks of her climax. She could feel his release sliding down her spine, warm and sticky, a filthy reminder of how he'd just claimed her. Every muscle in her body felt like jelly, and her hands were still bound behind her back, the metal digging into her wrists. She shifted slightly, the movement causing his cum to smear across her lower back, and she shuddered at the sensation.

Grace felt herself trembling from the sheer intensity of it all, the roughness of the encounter, the way he had taken what he wanted without apology, without reservation. It was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time, a potent cocktail of sensations that left her breathless and wanting more.

"Good girl," he murmured, running a hand over her ass. "You did good."

The praise made her glow inside, and she couldn't help but smile, despite the fact that he had just wrecked her in so many ways. He unlocked her cuffs, tossing them aside, then helped her to sit up. She winced at the movement, her body sore and aching in new places, but he was already there with a glass of water.

"Better than the first time, eh?" he said, setting the water on the nightstand.

"Some celebration," she said. "But don't make a habit of it... I don't really let Nolan near my ass unless it's his birthday or he's eating me out."

"I'm not Nolan," Nate said with a shrug, heading out toward the living room.

"... you're certainly not," Grace sighed.

After spending a bit of time to recover, and then some in the bathroom tidying up, she was a bit surprised to see Nate on his laptop at his kitchen table, seemingly back to work. It was probably a lot of work to manage all this on his own. She had seen Nolan work at home too, so why wouldn't Nate?

But it was a funny sight; Nate sitting over a small laptop like that.

"I'm working with this guy down at Marshall's Street. Trustworthy, talented, but most importantly; cheap. I'm trying to stretch this thing a bit to make the most out of it," Nate explained, moving straight into the logistics and practicalities of the upcoming production.

Grace felt herself drawn into the conversation almost from the get-go. This was a huge opportunity for her, should it go the right way. Maybe a small-time modeling side gig wasn't too bad? Who knew where it might lead? And besides, Nate was legitimately good at the creative work. She had seen it at their little shoot last weekend, and she saw it now.

"So first an extended, more targeted pilot, then if that goes well, we're onto a real, proper production?"
"You got it. And that just leaves you up. Saturday's your big date, right?" Nate asked, casual as can be, but you never knew with this guy.
"It is. Don't even think about it," Grace shot back.
"Jesus, Harris. I'm asking when you're available, not proposing marriage," Nate quipped, earning a laugh from Grace.
"Harris? You make me sound like an old hag," Grace snorted.
Nate shrugged, then gave Grace a knowing smirk, which yielded a shove of her foot.
"Well, my business comes first. Saturday is obviously out of the question," Grace began.
"No problem. You and Nolan have your nice weekend," Nate said. No argument. No sulking.

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"Well, the studio is available Saturday afternoon, or most of Sunday from around lunchtime," Jason said, the assistant that Nate was working with.
Nate nodded. It was Friday afternoon, and Nate was making the final scheduling for the next photoshoot. Grace had insisted. Insisted that her Saturday belonged to Nolan.
"I have my model available Saturday," Nate said. "Let's lock that in."
Jason, oblivious, nodded and typed away, confirming the schedule. Nate allowed himself a small, private smile.

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'So, I need your help with a small logistics issue. The shoot is scheduled for Saturday afternoon.'
Grace read Nate's message while the coffee was brewing. Her shoulders tightened almost instantly, and she felt a small surge of annoyance rise in her chest. She had explicitly told Nate Saturday was off-limits.
"It's in the afternoon, though," Nolan chimed in. "We can just push our thing back a bit."
"I guess. It's just annoying. I really hoped to spend our Saturday just the two of us. But it's a big opportunity, and I guess these things can't be helped."
Grace did want the work to go well, and to do a good job. But she didn't like her personal life becoming an 'inconvenience'. But as Nolan said, it was in the afternoon. Perhaps she'd be done in time to get a decent evening with Nolan.
"You're a model, now, this is how this works," Nolan chirped. He had been pretty excited about Grace being a model. He always let her know she looked like one, but actually dating one made him pretty thrilled. Grace had to smile. "Just save a few pics for me."
"It's a soap ad. As far as I know, people don't use their soap with clothes on," Grace teased, getting the desired effect from Nolan.

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The next day, the bathroom mirror was already beginning to steam when Nolan padded in, leaning against the doorframe as Grace rinsed conditioner from her neon blonde hair. He watched her in that unselfconscious way he'd developed lately, his brown eyes tracing the water droplets as they raced down the curve of her spine, over the dimples just above her perfect ass.
"You're staring," Grace said, her voice echoing slightly in the tiled room.
"Can't help it," Nolan replied with a crooked grin. "Just thinking about my girlfriend the professional model."

Grace laughed, turning to face him through the glass shower door, her steel-blue eyes dancing. "You're ridiculous. It's just one ad shoot."

"It's your big break," he countered. "Make sure they capture that natural glow you have. That's what'll sell it."

Grace rolled her eyes but couldn't suppress the smile that tugged at her lips. She felt Nolan's gaze on her as she moved through their apartment afterward, gathering what she needed for the shoot. The studio, as it turned out, was a bit of a drive, which was annoying. It was a different place from the last time when it was just Nate and her, and that sort of spoke to the evolution of the project. It was growing. Somewhere else, somewhere bigger.

Nolan, meanwhile, seemed almost as excited as she was. Maybe it was indeed the prospect of her being on camera, being a model. Or maybe, maybe it was Nate. He'd already made coffee, humming softly as he moved around the kitchen in that easy way of his. When she emerged from the bedroom in simple jeans and a soft t-shirt, bag slung over her shoulder, he was there with a travel mug in hand.

"Caffeine for my star," he said, leaning in for a kiss that tasted of mint toothpaste and fresh coffee.

Grace accepted both, her fingers brushing against his. There was something thrilling about his enthusiasm, this pride he took in her modeling pursuits. It made the hassle of rearranging their date feel worthwhile, somehow.

"You're not mad about me taking your Saturday?" Grace asked, tying her hair up in a messy bun.

"Are you kidding?" Nolan's brown eyes lit up. "The restaurant is rescheduled, so that's not an issue at all. I'm just thinking of all the ways we can celebrate when we get home. Maybe you'll even let me see some of the outtakes."

Grace laughed, pulling him in for another kiss. "We'll see about that."

As she headed toward the door, Nolan called after her: "Break a leg. Or rather, I don't know, lather it up or something!"

After a bit of a drive, Grace arrived at the new studio, a large, industrial-looking space with high ceilings and concrete floors. The faint, clean scent of professional photography products hung in the air. Nate was outside smoking when she walked up to the building, a half-smoked cigarette dangling from his fingers. He took a final drag before grinding it out under the heel of his worn boot.

"There you are. Good to see you," Nate said. He gestured toward the studio door with a jerk of his head.

"Here I am," Grace said, mildly annoyed, having been dragged all the way out here today of all days.

Nate led the way inside, introducing her to the rest of the crew as she followed. Grace tried to keep up with the introductions, but they all blurred together into a mishmash of names and faces. They were all dressed in comfortable casualwear, the camera equipment was set up, and they were ready to go.

It was a different dynamic from Nate's little photo shoot last time. This felt more like a proper production, and Jason, the guy Nate was working with, was more organized. But the mood was still light and casual, with an air of easy professionalism.

Nate seemed also more focused, more... locked in. He was still Nate, but when Grace expected him to join her in her changing room to tease or ogle her, he disappeared to fix something somewhere else. He was all business.

The makeup artist, a friendly woman named Chloe with bright pink hair and a nose ring, got to work on Grace, applying foundation and contouring with practiced ease.

"So this is your second shoot with Nate, then?" Chloe asked, her fingers dusting powder across Grace's cheeks.

"Something like that," Grace said, trying to keep her answers vague.

"He's a bit of a character, isn't he?" Chloe continued, oblivious to Grace's discomfort. "But he knows what he's doing. You're in good hands."

Grace nodded, a small, tight smile on her lips. She didn't want to talk about Nate, not here, not with this stranger. She wanted to get through the shoot, collect her paycheck, and go home to Nolan. But that was not the truth in its entirety. No. She felt nervous, a sort of fight-or-flight mechanism brewing, but also nervous excitement. She wanted to do a good job. And given the circumstances, and her own pride in such an environment: to prove to them she could be a professional.

As Chloe finished up, Nate reappeared, a look of intense concentration on his face. He looked Grace over, his eyes scanning her from head to toe, a slow, deliberate appraisal that made her skin tingle.

"Alright, let's get you into your outfit," he said, gesturing toward the changing room.

"And what would that be?" Grace asked. She had worn jeans and a shirt last time. But this was surely more targeted? Turning toward the rack, she saw a sortiment of bikinis. Modest for the most part, but she was very aware that her ass and legs were going to be on full display, but that was the job, wasn't it?

She suddenly became of all the people who'd be watching her. Not just Nate and a camera guy. The photographer, the lighting guy, Chloe.

Grace stepped into the changing room, a small, curtained-off area in the corner of the studio. The bikini was a simple white number, the fabric thin and unforgiving. She looked at her reflection, at the familiar lines of her body, the muscles in her thighs and stomach that she'd worked so hard for. And as predicted, her booty looked fantastic in them. She had that.

Grace took a deep breath and slipped into the white bikini. The fabric was thin, clinging to every curve and dip of her body. She caught her reflection in the small mirror. Steel-blue eyes wide, neon blonde hair already falling from its messy bun, skin glowing under the harsh lights. Her ass looked fantastic, that much she had to admit. The thin strips of fabric barely contained her, leaving little to the imagination.

A robe was hanging nearby, but she hesitated. 'Let them look,' she thought, a new kind of thrill surging through her. Not the dark, forbidden thrill of being with Nate while Nolan waited at home, but something else entirely. Something about being the center of attention, about knowing every eye in the room would be on her.

She grabbed the robe but didn't tie it closed, letting it hang open as she stepped out onto the set. The sudden brightness of the studio lights made her blink. A handful of people turned to look, their eyes raking over her exposed body. There was Nate, of course, his gaze intense as ever. Jason, the assistant, with his polite but appreciative smile. The lighting guy, the photographer. Strangers, all of them, seeing her like this.

The air in the studio seemed to crackle with an unspoken energy. Grace could feel it against her skin, raising goosebumps along her arms. She wasn't Grace, Nolan's girlfriend, or even Grace, Nate's occasional lover. She was the model, the centerpiece of this production, and damn if that didn't make her spine straighten just a little. She was the reason why everyone was here.

"This is going to be easy work," Nate chuckled, turning away from a light to glance at her up and down.

"I'd buy that soap," Chloe chirped, giving Grace's shoulder a friendly squeeze.

"Where do you want me?" Grace asked, her voice steady as she walked toward the backdrop, a simple, seamless white that seemed to stretch into infinity.

Nate pointed. "Right there. Turn to the left, just slightly." He moved toward her, adjusting her posture with firm, impersonal hands. "Chin up a bit. Shoulders back." His touch was professional, all business, but it still sent a jolt through her.

The camera clicked. Click. Click. The photographer, a wiry man named Sam with a perpetually bored expression, moved around her, capturing her from every angle.

"Good, good," Nate murmured. "Now, give me a look. Like last time."

"I don't need a bathtub or some soap?" Grace asked.

"Not yet. First we're just seeing a few angles, seeing a few looks, then we're getting into the meat of things," Nate said.

Grace nodded, looking directly into the lens, her gaze challenging. She thought about Nate, about Nolan, about how this was her moment. This was her space, her arena, and they could look all they wanted, but she was calling the shots.

Nate's eyes narrowed, his lips curling into a slight smirk. "Yeah, just like that."

They continued like this for a while, with Grace shifting her pose slightly, varying the ways she looked back at the lens, while the camera clicked away. Over her shoulder, slightly turned, her robe in various states of openness and closedness, looking seductive. And barely with any direction. The photographer took pictures while Grace more or less freestyled her way through the session. She was surprised at herself, how she was moving, how she was posing. The confidence she had in her own body was something she knew she had, but she wasn't always sure about it. Today, however, she was sure. And she was going to use it.

"Alright, that's a good start. Let's go over some paperwork while the others set up the next scene," Nate said, walking away toward the tables with equipment.

The small break was welcome. Grace had been on her feet for a while, and the bright lights were starting to get to her a bit. She wrapped the robe tighter around her, suddenly feeling a chill.

Nate returned a few moments later with a clipboard in hand. He held it out to her. Right. Paperwork. This was professional. He didn't say anything, just watched as she signed her name on the dotted line. The contract was simple, a standard modeling agreement, but seeing her name on it, seeing the professional nature of it all, made her heart pound with a mixture of excitement and trepidation.

"Alright, let's get you wet," Nate said, finally allowing a smirk to play on his lips. And it was honestly welcome.

"I'm always wet for you, daddy," Grace said in her most bimbo voice, earning a cringe from Nate.

"Jesus. Just stick to looking pretty," he said, but the smile on his face told her he liked it.

A large, white tub sat in the center of the studio now, filled with steaming water and mountains of soap bubbles that glowed under the bright lights. Jason and the lighting guy shifted equipment around, their movements efficient as they adjusted the setup for the next scene. The photographer checked his camera, making subtle adjustments while Nate stood back, arms crossed, surveying the arrangement with a critical eye.

"Alright, Grace," Nate said, his voice cutting through the low buzz of activity. "Time to get wet."

Grace let the robe fall from her shoulders this time, the movement more natural, more practiced than before. She felt the collective gaze of the room on her body again as she stepped toward the tub, the white bikini clinging to her curves. Several conversations paused mid-sentence, the silence stretching just long enough for her to notice before people remembered themselves and resumed their hushed discussions.

The water was perfect. Warm enough to relax her muscles but not so hot that it would make her flushed under the harsh studio lights. She sank into the tub with a soft sigh, the bubbles tickling her skin as they rose around her. The water level rose, lapping at the edges of the tub as she settled in, the scent of soap filling the air around her. The water felt good, a welcome respite from the bright lights and the intensity of the shoot. She leaned back, letting the bubbles cover her, her hair fanning out around her. The camera clicked away, capturing her in this vulnerable, intimate moment. She could feel Nate's eyes on her, could feel the heat of his gaze even from across the room.

"Alright, let's get this show on the road," Nate called out, breaking the silence.

The crew snapped into action, moving around her with practiced efficiency. Jason adjusted the lights while the photographer checked his equipment one last time. The assistant brought over a tray of fresh towels and a bottle of water. It was all so professional, so efficient.

She tried her best to look good underneath the layer of soap, but it wasn't that easy. It was slippery and wet, but she still managed a few takes. A few where she leaned her elbows on the

edge of the tub, staring lazily into the lens. One where she looked over her shoulder again, something that seemed to be popular. Sam at least wanted her to hold several of those poses. Grace let the camera do most of the work. And the truth was, perhaps she had always been a bit of a performer. Ballet, now this?

"Hold up," Nate said, moving to the camera guy. Sam was it? "The exposure is too high with these white bubbles. Everything is too bright."

Whatever that meant. But what that resulted in was a few redos. Grace tried to recreate the few poses to the best of her abilities. The camera guy was pleased until she leaned on the rim again. Apparently, the lighting wasn't right for this.

"Sorry about this," he muttered. "Light doesn't always wanna cooperate."

The photographer kept fiddling with his equipment until Nate finally stomped over, his patience clearly wearing thin. After some muttered technical exchanges with Sam, they realized one of the bulbs had burned out. Jason scrambled to find a replacement as the rest of the crew stood around, the momentum clearly lost. By the time someone had managed to replace the bulb and adjust the settings, Grace noticed the mountain of bubbles had already dissolved into a thin, pathetic layer on the water's surface.

"Looks like we're losing our sudsy appeal," Chloe said.

"Yeah, hold on," Nate grumbled, waving toward Jason. "Let's get fresh water in here."

As Jason and one of the assistants worked to drain and refill the tub, Nate approached with her phone in hand.

"We're running a bit late. You might wanna give Nolan a heads up. These things happen," Nate explained. No apology. Just a statement of fact. But she was grateful Nate at least stayed on top of it so she could alert Nolan. "You can head out if you want, but we're almost done."

Grace stepped out of the tub, her body dripping with water as she took the phone and wrapped herself in a towel. She dried off quickly, grabbed her robe, and headed to the changing room.

"Hiya," Grace said, hearing the slightly apologetic tone in her own voice. She was calling because she was late, and late to something she wanted to do with Nolan no less, and that sucked.

"Hey, model! How's it going over there? Are they treating you right?" Nolan's cheerful, supportive voice came through the line, instantly easing her frustration.

"A little technical hiccup. I'm running a bit behind," Grace explained, looking over at Nate who stuck his head in. "Just wanted to give you a heads up."
"It's all good. Take your time," Nolan said, without missing a beat. "It's more important that you get the shots right. I'm proud of you."
"I'll try to hurry. I don't want to leave you hanging all night."
"Don't worry about me. I've got a game on, so I'm set. Just kill it over there. I'll be waiting when you get back."
"Alright, gotta go. Love you," Grace said.
"Love you too. Can't wait to see you."
She hung up and stepped out of the changing room. The tub was filled again with fresh, steaming water and a fresh mountain of bubbles. Nate was already directing the crew to set up a new shot.
"Alright, we're back in business," he said, turning to face her. "Ready to get dirty?"
"I'm not sure 'dirty' is the look you're going for," Grace quipped as she slipped back into the tub.
The shoot resumed, and Grace quickly fell back into her role, the camera clicking away as she posed and preened in the tub. Nate circled the set, his gaze intense as he surveyed the scene, and Grace couldn't help but notice the approving looks from several of the crew members. She thought she'd feel exposed, but instead she felt seen like never before. Some of these were probably experienced in the modeling world, and for them to approve did plenty for her confidence.
The eager clicks as she shifted, as she lifted a leg toward the ceiling while gazing lazily upwards, gave her a rush she hadn't expected.
"That's it, Grace, hold that," Nate's voice would call out, followed by some other instruction, or some appraisal from either him or Sam.
"Maybe I could do some pictures of me behind the tub? Like, running my hand through the soap or to check the water temperature?" Grace suggested.
"Go for it," Nate said without hesitation.
Grace stood up in the tub, her body glistening with water and soap. She placed her hands on the rim of the tub to get out, leaning over slightly, her ass pushing out behind her. She looked over her shoulder at the camera, a seductive smile playing on her lips. It wasn't the pose she had in mind, but the camera clicked away, capturing the perfect shot of her curves, the water dripping

down her back, the steam rising around her. She suspected those pictures weren't making the cut, but she didn't rush out either.

Jason especially seemed very focused as she stepped out of the tub, her body dripping with water. His eyes lingered a bit too long on her breasts before quickly looking away, perhaps wondering if the white bikini was transparent.

"Great work," Jason said, his cheeks flushed.

"Thanks," Grace replied, moving around behind the tub.

Her idea was simple. She squatted down on the far side of the bathtub and rested her arms on the edge. But soap was in the way, so without thinking, Grace blew hard to clear the way. A sharp intake of breath let her know that she had inadvertently made quite the picture.

A few more photos along the same lines, with her drizzling soap over her arms and chest while maintaining eye contact with the camera, and finally, Nate called it.

"That's a wrap, folks. Great job, everyone," Nate announced, clapping his hands together.

A collective sigh of relief rippled through the studio, the tension that had been building throughout the day finally dissipating. People started packing up their equipment, the low hum of conversation filling the space as they discussed their plans for the evening. Chloe was already packing up her makeup kit, offering Grace a warm smile and a friendly wave as she headed for the door.

Grace slid the robe back on. She felt a sense of pride, of accomplishment, as she watched the crew work. She had done it. She had faced a side of herself that she had barely started to discover, pushed her boundaries, and come out on top. She had been a professional model and done a good job. It surprised her how easily it came to her too. She had been directed, but never did it seem like she was doing something outright wrong.

Nolan's voice echoed in her head. 'I'm proud of you.' And suddenly, she felt it too. She was proud of herself. She had given it her all, and it paid off.

Grace hurried back to the changing room, a wide smile on her face. It didn't take long before Nate knocked on the door. He stepped inside as she dried off, his eyes raking over her almost naked body. The sight of him standing there, taking in her every curve and dip, sent a shiver down her spine.

"Great work out there," he said. "You've really got a knack for this."

Grace blushed, heat rising in her cheeks. "Thanks. I couldn't have done it without your direction."

Nate smiled. "The material we got today? Pff, we've knocked it out the park."

Again with the 'we'. But that was what this was. They did this together.

"Or I should say you. I couldn't do this without you," Nate said. Grace didn't have a reply to that. It wasn't often he laid it on this thick with such genuine compliments.

"I sure hope it works out. It was fun," Grace said instead, shifting focus, tossing the towel over the back of a chair.

Without another word, Nate closed the distance between them. His hands were on her hips, rough and insistent. His lips found hers, claiming her mouth in a hungry kiss. She melted against him, her body yielding to his touch, a small moan escaping her lips.

His hands roamed over her body, exploring every curve, every inch of skin as if he were mapping it out. His fingers dug into her ass, pulling her against him. She could feel the hard length of him pressing against her, a clear indication of his arousal.

He broke the kiss, his breath hot on her neck. "I can't wait to fuck you."

Grace looked at the phone on the desk. "Tempting, but seriously, I have to go. I promised Nolan," she said, swallowing slightly as she found herself out of breath. She checked the time. "Oh fuck. I gotta go. Like, for real."

*

"Better late than never," Nolan said. He wasn't even annoyed, though Grace thought perhaps he should've at least been a bit more urgent. She had been late, but the extra photos and the long drive made him have to call in advance for another small rescheduling. But that wasn't Nolan.

"But now, it's just us. It's our night," Grace said, pulling Nolan closer, kissing him deeply.

"You taste like soap," Nolan murmured as they parted.

"You taste like beer," Grace chuckled, letting Nolan take her hand and lead her up to their apartment. Nolan looked a bit guilty. He had had some bad episodes with alcohol before. But she cupped his cheek and kissed him again, lighter, gentler. "It's okay."

"Go shower. I already had mine. I had plenty of time to shower waiting for our local superstar," Nolan teased.

Grace grinned at him, then disappeared to get ready.

Nolan's pick of restaurant was one of familiarity. It wasn't the place they had first gone out when they first started dating, but it was one they had been at quite a few times by now. They knew the menu by heart, and the waiters recognized them, and probably knew their order too. The dinner was almost at the table at the same time as they were.

Nolan was eagerly taking in her newfound interest in modelling, and Grace talked about it at length, keeping the Nate-part of it to a minimum. Instead, she talked about what she liked and didn't like, what it was like being on camera, and what it was like being directed. And what it was like to have to hold a pose while the camera clicked away.

"I'm not sure if I'd make a career out of it, but I don't think I'd mind doing it every now and then," Grace said.

"Well, from PR, I can only say it's a sort of career you need to maintain," Nolan replied.

"That's why I'll hire you as my PR guy," Grace teased.

"My my, you want me to become your pimp?" Nolan joked. "And here I started to think that you were getting too famous for me!"

Grace smiled daringly, stealing an olive from his plate. She rolled her shoulders, feeling the ache of the shoot in her body. At least her hands weren't raisins anymore. The waiter even made a small joke about Grace working too hard when she was caught massaging her neck.

"We come here too often," Nolan chuckled.

"Oh no, I'm just that recognizable now," Grace teased.

The conversation trailed over into Nolan's take on branding and the recent development with Nuevo Camino. He had apparently found a great way to loop in the classic car, an old Mexican fellow with a huge mustache and a giant hat, and tacos. It sounded fun and sort of wholesome when Nolan explained it. Grace could definitely tell why the Tex-Mex folks liked his campaign. Though he joked that perhaps Grace would be better now that she was famous.

"Hey, I like the old Mexican guy. It has charm!" Grace pouted.

"Sorry, I've been rambling."
"No, no. Keep going," Grace encouraged. "So they're no longer dragging their feet?"
"Oh, they definitely are. But it works out well, I have all these other guys I have to watch over anyway. Luckily Nate is more or less self-reliant. These other guys are perhaps a bit more on the lazy side. But I haven't gotten any complaints yet. And hey, I actually like that they're slow at Nuevo. I get to know them, them me, and we get along well."
"As long as they pay the invoice?"
"Something like that," Nolan laughed. "But we have a logo at last. Now I just have to explain the concept of influencers a few more times and perhaps we can get some adverts going. They've started to finalize production hubs at least. But this influencer thing, I swear, it's like they don't think you need to adapt. They're interested, but they don't seem to get it."
"Maybe they just like listening to you talk," Grace teased. It was half a joke. She loved his voice, and the way he talked. If these folks were of the older generation, perhaps they liked talking to him. He was very easy like that. Just as he was talking now he was all enthusiasm. She sure loved to see how he cared.
Grace saw her phone light up. She offered it just a quick glance before she shoved it down into her purse.
"Pff, get outta here," Nolan said, then went into another story about his work. But this didn't drag. She loved listening to him. The passion for his work, the way he got animated, his hands gesticulating as he painted a picture of the marketing world with words. She could have listened to him all night, and she almost did. The conversation was as much a part of their date as the food, the wine, the soft jazz playing in the background.
Yes. This. This was Nolan and her, and no one else.
Grace reached across the table and took Nolan's hand. Nolan didn't even look surprised. He just gave her a gentle squeeze before setting off into a new ramble, somehow managing to order dessert for them both in the middle of it.

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One autumn month to another, there isn't much of a difference. The air grew crisper, biting at her cheeks on morning walks. Darkness came earlier each evening, creeping in while they were still at work. Grace's days lengthened with landscaping tasks. She'd spent hours raking the vibrant reds and golds from clients' lawns, carefully bagging the colorful debris. Her truck bed filled with leaves collected from across town, destined for the compost pile behind her own shed. The rhythmic sweep of her rake against pavement and the crunch of leaves under her boots became the soundtrack to her days.

By late October, Grace had stopped thinking of Thursdays as anything unusual.

"Eating here tonight?" Nolan asked.

"Probably not. Nate wanted me over around seven," Grace said. She was already in her bedroom, getting ready for the evening. Her closet door was open, her hands hovering over the various options. "I assumed it would okay." The question was supposed to be there, but it had faded.

Nolan lingered in the doorway, watching her. She could feel his presence behind her, warm and familiar. "Should I be worried?" he asked, a small, devious grin on his face.

"You should be jealous," Grace said, a slight smirk playing on her lips as she selected a simple, dark green dress. Short but not too short. "He's been working me so hard lately. I think he's trying to get his money's worth after the campaign got greenlit. I'm starting to think he enjoys spending time with me."

Nolan chuckled. "Yeah, you've been coming home exhausted lately."

"It's a good exhaustion," Grace said, slipping out of her jeans. She paused for a moment, considering something, then turned to face him. "Hey, what if I didn't come home tonight?"

Nolan's breath hitched, a barely perceptible sound in the quiet room. She watched as a slow, easy smile spread across his face, a mixture of surprise and something else, something dark and thrilling that mirrored her own sudden desire. He didn't look hurt. He didn't look worried. He looked like a man who'd just been handed the keys to a torturous chamber that he had been in many times already, and happily so, with all the agony that came with it.

"You asking for permission?" Nolan asked, his voice a low murmur.

"I'm informing you," Grace replied, her tone casual, but her steel-blue eyes locked with his, watching his reaction closely. "It might happen."

The silence stretched between them, thick with unspoken words and desires. Nolan's smile widened, a genuine, happy grin that reached his brown eyes.

"I'd like that," Nolan said.

Grace nodded, a satisfied smile touching her lips. She turned back to the closet, her movements unhurried as she finished getting ready. She could feel Nolan's eyes on her, a warm, possessive gaze that sent a shiver of pleasure down her spine. She chose her lingerie carefully: the matching set of black lace that she knew he loved, a gift for him, even as she was preparing to leave for another man.

"Wasn't Tuesday's Nate too?" he asked, knowing the answer.

"That was the shoot. This is just us," Grace explained.

"I know. You don't have to justify yourself to me," Nolan said, his eyes lingering on Grace's ass.

Grace smirked. While Tuesday had been the shoot, when she came back that evening, while Nolan was taking her from behind, he had noticed a certain crust on her ass. Nate enjoyed leaving little marks like that, it seemed. He had slapped his cock, wet with his and her juices, all over her ass. She had felt so filthy, and she had loved bringing the remnants back to Nolan afterwards. Nolan suspected; Grace knew. A silent confirmation, a hint of what had happened. And it drove them both wild.

When Grace stepped out of the bedroom, Nolan was standing by the kitchen counter, one of her 8x10 prints from the soap campaign spread between his fingers. The paper curled slightly where he held it, his thumb brushing over the glossy surface. It was one of the more risqué shots, her lips puckered against the curve of a soap bottle, her eyes half-lidded in an almost arrogant, lazy fashion; her expression was all promise.

Nolan looked up as her heels clicked against the floor, a slow smile spreading across his face. He didn't say anything, just watched as Grace smoothed down her dress, the green silk clinging to her curves in the dim light of the apartment, hiding the tasty lace lingerie underneath. His eyes flickered between her and the photograph, a silent acknowledgment passing between them.

"Found something interesting?" Grace asked, leaning against the doorframe.

"Interesting is one word for it," Nolan said, turning the photo slightly. "Can't say I've ever looked at soap the same way."

"You should see the outtakes," Grace replied with a smirk.

Nate was ever the professional on set, but he did enjoy taking some more... suggestive photos too. Some that Grace showed Nolan... some that she didn't. He knew of those, of course, but it was so fun to see how desperate he had become when she told him about them. And to reward him once in a while, she'd indulge him in her secret stack too.

"You've seen a lot of Mr. Cowboy this week," Nolan said.

"Are you keeping attendance?" Grace asked, a place between light and flirtatious.

"No, no. Just noticed, is all," Nolan said. "I really wanted to watch that movie is all."

"Yeah, of course. Maybe Friday, or Saturday perhaps?"

"Cool. I know what you said, but could you be home before midnight?"

"Sure thing."

*

The lock on Nate's door turned with that familiar click, the sound now as commonplace as her own key in their apartment door. Grace pushed inside, dropping her keys in the ceramic bowl by his entrance. Her boots came off next, kicked beside her work boots that had somehow migrated here over the past weeks without any real discussion. Just one day they'd appeared, like the spare toothbrush that now lived in his bathroom cup holder or the couple of t-shirts she'd started keeping in his closet. They'd all just accumulated, a silent testament to how often she found herself ending up here.

"Jesus, you clean up nice," Nate said when Grace came in. He was sitting on the couch with a beer, a remote control in his other hand, some action movie paused on the TV.

"You're looking particularly sweaty yourself. Did you run a marathon?" Grace quipped, though he looked no different than he usually did after a day's work. A bit worn-out, a bit rough, but there was a spark in his eyes.

"Something like that. Had to deal with a lighting issue at the studio. A real pain in the ass," Nate grumbled, setting the beer down on the coffee table.

"Let me guess. A bulb burned out?"
"Something like that," Nate said. "But enough about work. You're not here to talk about my day. Come here."
Grace crossed the room to where he sat on the couch, not missing the way his eyes followed her every move. She stood between his knees, her dress brushing against his jeans. His hands came to rest on her hips, fingers digging into the silk, pulling her closer until she had to brace her hands on his shoulders to steady herself.
"Someone's eager," Grace murmured, a smile playing on her lips as she leaned in.
"Can you blame me?" Nate replied, his voice a low growl as he looked up at her. "I've been thinking about you all day."
"Oh really?" Grace asked, her fingers tracing the line of his jaw. "And what exactly were you thinking about?"
"About how you looked in that green dress. And about how much better you'd look out of it," he said, his hands sliding up her sides, thumbs brushing against the curve of her waist.
"You're not getting any arguments from me," Grace replied, leaning down to kiss him, her lips meeting his in a slow, deliberate kiss that quickly deepened, their tongues tangling together in a familiar, hungry dance.
Nate's hands tightened on her hips, pulling her down until she was straddling him, her dress bunching up around her thighs. She could feel the hard length of him pressing against her, a clear indication of his arousal. It always amazed her how quickly he could go from calm and collected to hard and ready, a switch that flipped almost instantaneously when she was near.
"I like this," Nate murmured against her lips, his fingers tracing the strap of her dress. "Black lace. Very sophisticated."
"I thought you might appreciate it," Grace replied, her breath hitching as he nibbled on her earlobe.
"Oh, I appreciate it alright," Nate said. His hands were on her ass now, kneading the firm flesh through the thin silk of her dress. A middle finger probed her crack from over her panties. "But I'd appreciate it more if it was on my floor."
"Calm down, cowboy. Don't we have a reservation?" Grace asked, pushing herself back just enough to look at him, a challenge in her steel-blue eyes.
Nate raised an eyebrow. "We do. But we have plenty of time before we need to leave."

"So you thought we'd waste our reservation just to fuck around here for a bit?" Grace asked. She found that both odd and very fitting for Nate. For him to want to skip dinner just to have sex with her.

"It's you, princess. I'm not sure it can be classified as 'wasting'," Nate said, his hands moving to her thighs, pushing her dress up higher.

Grace considered it for a moment. She had promised Nolan she'd be home by midnight, but that was hours away. And the thought of Nate's hands on her, of him buried inside her, was too tempting to resist. Almost too tempting.

"Nope. You made a reservation, cowboy. You're feeding me first," Grace said. "One thing to learn from Nolan."

There was a small, almost unrecognizable twitch in Nate's left eye as she said that, and she smirked at him. She'd walk funny after tonight, after that little comment.

"Damn it," Nate said, recovering quickly.

Nate hit the shower to get ready while Grace lingered around the apartment. She had brought some extra plants in here, in addition to those Nate once upon a time had hired her to put up for him, so she spent a bit of time taking care of them. When he was finished washing up, Grace found some heels, and they were on their way.

Grace tossed Nate the keys to her truck without a second thought. His car, that ancient Golf of his, was... "going through some things", as they had jokingly put it. Rust had torn a hole through the outer layer of the passenger door, where Grace would naturally sit, so Nate had asked a while back if they shouldn't just use her car. Nolan never got to drive her truck, per his abysmal driving skills being, well, abysmal, but she figured it wouldn't be a big deal if she let Nate take her car. They could've taken Nolan's Equinox, but it was just more convenient with her truck.

The restaurant Nate had chosen was an elegant little spot on the outskirts of town, the kind of place you had to make reservations weeks in advance. It was the perfect date spot, a romantic getaway nestled amongst the redwoods. Nate had been here once or twice before, and he knew the owner. The waiter showed them to their table, a private booth in the back, tucked away from the rest of the dining room.

The conversation rolled into the ad campaign, as it usually did. Grace's part in it was more or less over by now, as she was just helping out with modelling and they were starting to get all the shots they'd need.

"You won't need me anymore then," Grace chirped.
"Heh, you wish. But seriously, I think there are plenty of other campaigns that would love to have you as their cover girl," Nate said.
"Nolan joked about pimping me out a while back," Grace said. "What do you say, should I get an agent? I know there is an agency here in town."
Nate raised an eyebrow. He was caught off guard. Grace loved it when she was able to do that. "I mean, if that's what you want to do? We're just getting started here though."
"Sounds like an excuse to keep my potential all to yourself," Grace chirped.
"Can you blame me?" Nate replied with a smirk. Grace shrugged. "Speaking of keeping you all to myself. Friday?"
"Friday is a day in the week," Grace said, playing dumb. "I can't. I promised Nolan. Friday or Saturday."
"Then we say Nolan has Friday *and* Saturday. Sunday, then," Nate said, appearing accommodating, removing some of the uncertainty.
Grace tried to think if she had any plans then. Balancing Nolan, Nate, work, modeling, and whatever else carried some logistical management. There was ballet, and she had been really good at keeping up with that the last few weeks and didn't want to spoil that.
"I can drive you," Nate offered, as if reading her mind. Once, it would've been eerie how much of her routine he knew. It wasn't now.
"I'd have to check. Sunday, I mean," Grace said.
"You got plans?" Nate asked. "If you're busy, you're busy."
"I don't think so," Grace said.
"Then what are you checking?" Nate asked with a shrug.
"I'm not asking for permission," Grace said, tone a bit sharper.
"I didn't say you were," Nate said. Then Nate steered the topic into perhaps getting a new car instead of lingering on it.
The conversation drifted through the motions, lacking any real substance, and a bit into it, Grace found herself checking her phone. Instinctually, she'd text Nolan to tell him or to ask him about Sunday. But why? Instead, she checked her calendar. And the calendar told her that Sunday was indeed free.
"Sunday works," Grace said. "Nolan won't mind."

Nate didn't say anything to that. But he seemed rather pleased that the calendar had been enough.
"Wonderful," he said.
The dinner rolled by, as did the drive back to their apartment building, Nate parking her truck next to his shitty little Golf, the Equinox standing a few cars down. Grace's thoughts started to drift back to Nolan. He was there. Just a wall away. She had told him she'd be back before midnight. Grace had no idea what time it was.
"Time?" Grace asked.
"Just past ten," Nate replied. "We have plenty of time."
Grace had to smile at that. Plenty of time for what? For him to ruin her for Nolan for another night? For him to make her feel used and raw and wonderful? Yes. That was it. Plenty of time for all of that. Like so many times before.
The lock clicked, and they were inside.
Nate's apartment was dark, the only light coming from the streetlamps outside, casting long shadows across the room. The air was heavy with the scent of him: tobacco, musk, and something else, something indefinable but distinctly Nate. It surrounded her, pulling her deeper into his world, into his orbit. His hands were on her hips, fingers digging into the thin fabric of her dress, pulling her close until her back was pressed against his chest.
She could feel the heat radiating off him, the tension in his muscles as he held her, the way his breath turned to a satisfied groan when she pushed back against him. He was already hard, the length of him pressing against her through the layers of clothes separating them. His lips found the sensitive spot just below her ear, a spot that seemed to be only his, sending a shiver of pleasure down her spine.
"You're wearing too much," Nate growled, his hands sliding up her sides, pushing her dress higher.
"I'm not a baby; I can undress myself," Grace said, reaching for the zipper at the back of her neck.
Nate took a step back, letting Grace move further into the apartment. Moving backwards, maintaining eye contact with Nate, she slowly pulled the zipper down, letting the fabric fall away from her body in a whisper of silk. Her heels clicked against the wood floor as she stepped out of the pooled garment, her bare skin glowing in the moonlight streaming in through the window.

The black lace that had been hiding underneath was clinging to her curves, accentuating the swell of her breasts, the curve of her ass, the delicate line of her waist.

Nate's eyes never left her as she turned away from him, her steps confident and sure. Looking over her, she could see the hunger in his gaze, the raw desire that coursed through him as she sensually moved across the small living room in nothing but her lingerie, moving toward the balcony solely illuminated by moonlight.

"That's better," Nate said, almost to himself. Grace heard him, though. He followed her, stalking across the room like a predator. "Much better."

"You're looking pretty overdressed yourself, cowboy," Grace said, a sultry smirk playing on her lips.

Nate's clothes joined hers on the floor, tossed carelessly aside as he crossed the room. His hands were on her hips, rough and demanding, pulling her against him. She could feel the hard length of him pressed against her ass, a silent promise of the pleasure to come. Her breath caught in her throat as he trailed kisses along her neck, his teeth grazing the sensitive skin just below her ear.

"Do you think he'll hear us if we do it up against the window?" Nate asked, his voice a low growl in her ear.

"Careful now, Cowboy," Grace whispered, ever protective of Nolan. But she didn't want to be a buzz killer either. She hesitated for a moment, then, "I think he'll hear me screaming your name," Grace replied, turning her head to meet his gaze.

Nate responded by burying the length of his big shaft harder between her cheeks, earning a soft gasp from Grace. His hand slid around to her front, palming her lace-covered breast. He squeezed gently, her nipple hard against his hand through the thin fabric.

"You like that, don't you?" Grace taunted, rolling her hips, her ass grinding against his cock. "You like the idea of him hearing you fuck me."

"Stop talking," Nate commanded, his fingers finding the hem of her panties.

With one quick, fluid motion, Nate tore her panties away, a thin black scrap fluttering to the ground between them.

"These were expensive," Grace protested.

Nate pushed her up against the large glass doors leading out on the balcony; her palms were pressed against the cold glass, the light of the moon shimmering on it, a beautiful night. He

roughly lifted her right leg up by the knee. Grace gasped at the sudden feeling of his bare, hard cock against the folds of her pussy.

"Too bad."

Grace's eyes widened as he slowly pressed himself in, her pussy clenching around his hard cock as it stretched her. Even after all this time, his size still could catch her off-guard. With every inch he claimed inside her, the urge grew and grew. Nate wasn't gentle either. He was hard, and rough, and she loved it. And he knew it too. He took her, right there, the reflection of her own shocked face staring back at her in the glass.

His hands gripped her hips, holding her steady as he set a punishing rhythm, each thrust driving him deeper, filling her completely. Grace's hands slid against the glass, the surface slick with her own sweat as she struggled to maintain her balance. She could hear her own breathing, ragged and shallow, could feel the muscles in her thighs begin to tremble as the pleasure built within her, a slow, delicious wave that promised to sweep her away.

Her eyes drifted to the wall to her right. That's where Nolan would be, probably. Perhaps sleeping. Perhaps awake. Listening. And that knowledge, that thought, sent a fresh surge of heat through her, making her arch her back, pushing her hips back against him, urging him on.

"Fill me, cowboy," Grace panted, her fingers clawing at the glass door, desperately seeking purchase on the smooth surface.

Grace cried out in pleasure, her back arching, her pussy clenching down on him as he hit just the right spot, sending a wave of pure bliss crashing over her. Her body quivered with ecstasy as she rode out her orgasm, the intensity almost too much to bear. He just knew how to treat her body to the utmost. Nate's prowess wasn't an occasional treat, nor a rare occasion, but something that was always promised.

"Say it, princess," Nate growled, his fingers digging into her hips, his cock slamming deep inside her.

"Nate!" Grace cried out. "Oh, God! Nate! Don't stop!"

But he did. He pulled out, leaving her empty and wanting, a whimper of protest escaping her lips. He turned her around, lifting her effortlessly and setting her down on the edge of the dining table. The wood was cool against her heated skin, a stark contrast to the fire burning inside her. She lay back, and he immediately pushed her legs apart, her heels digging into his back as he drove into her again, harder this time, more demanding.

"Like that, don't you?" Nate grunted, his rhythm never faltering. "Being fucked like this, where he can hear you."

"Yes," she moaned, her nails raking over his back. "You feel so fucking good. He could never make me feel like this."

Nate smirked. "I know."

She could feel another orgasm building, a slow, delicious wave that promised to shatter her into a million pieces. She wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him deeper, her hands fisting in his hair as she urged him on.

"Cum for me, princess," he commanded. "Cum all over my cock."

The command was all it took. The orgasm hit her like a freight train, shattering her into a million pieces, leaving her breathless and trembling in its wake. She cried out, the sound raw and uninhibited, filling the apartment, filling the quiet night. Her body convulsed around him, her muscles spasming as he continued to move inside her, drawing out every last drop of pleasure until she was completely spent, limp and boneless beneath him.

"That's my girl," Nate murmured, pressing a kiss against her forehead.

He slowly pulled out, leaving her feeling empty and bereft. She watched as he stepped back, his eyes raking over her naked body spread out on the table like a feast. His cock was rock-hard, glistening with her juices in the dim light. Grace could only imagine what she looked like, her hair mussed, her skin flushed, her pussy puffy and swollen from being used so thoroughly. She knew he liked it, liked seeing her like this, debauched and wanton. It made her feel powerful, knowing she had this effect on him.

"You're a work of art," Nate said. "I could stare at you forever."

"But then you'd never get to finish," Grace replied, an airy smile on her face. She looked at the clock. 11:20. Plenty of time.

"You're going to tell him?" Nate asked.

"Tell him what?" Grace asked, playing coy. She didn't allow much dirty talk surrounding Nolan, so it made her wary.

"That he can't make you feel like this," Nate asked, his eyes darkening. He wanted it so badly.

"If he asks. I'm always honest," Grace said.

Nate smirked. "Always?"

Grace's breath hitched.

"He doesn't need to know everything," Grace said. Both things true. If he asked, she'd tell. But enough about Nolan. His name was not to be besmirched, especially when there was fucking to do.

Grace stood up from the table, her legs still shaky from the orgasm. She moved towards him, her hand reaching out to wrap around his hard cock, stroking him slowly.

"You've been so good to me tonight," Grace murmured, her fingers tracing the length of his shaft, teasing him. "I think you deserve a reward."

Grace sank to her knees, the hardwood cool against her skin. Her lips brushed against the head of his cock, leaving a faint smear of her lipstick on the glistening skin. She let it glide across her lips, the weight of him making her feel all kinds of dirty. The thick shaft was already slick, coated in their combined juices. Grace could taste herself on him, salty and musky. And that made her feel even dirtier.

He groaned as she took him in her mouth, the tip of her tongue swirling around the sensitive head. She sucked him slowly, taking him deeper, letting his cock hit the back of her throat before pulling back again. Her hands slid up his thighs, gripping his ass, pulling him closer, urging him on. In response, he tangled his fingers in her hair, guiding her movements as he thrust into her mouth, the head of his cock hitting the back of her throat with each stroke.

"Fuck, princess," Nate grunted. "Your mouth feels so fucking good."

Grace smiled around him, taking him deeper, letting him fuck her mouth. Her own arousal was growing again, the feeling of him using her like this making her ache with need. Nothing turned her on more than having a big, powerful cock in her face.

"I'm close," Nate warned, his voice strained.

Grace pulled back, her hand stroking his cock as she looked up at him. "Where do you want to cum?"

"Your face," he said.

Grace moaned softly, the image alone enough to make her shiver with anticipation. She opened her mouth, letting her tongue hang out, offering him her face, her eyes never leaving his. It only took a few strokes before he let out a loud groan, his cock pulsing in her hand as he came, his hot cum spurting over her lips and chin, landing in thick ropes on her cheeks and eyelids. A pearly droplet caught on her lower eyelash, blurring her vision slightly, while another creamy stream painted a glistening stripe from her jawline to her temple. She felt its warmth spread across her

skin, a slick, possessive mark. And it was so much. Another one, and another, covering her face in his hot, sticky release.

He collapsed back onto the couch, spent and sated.

"Filthy fucking girl," Nate murmured, a satisfied grin spreading across his face.

"You love it," she said, licking her lips, tasting him. She kept her eyes locked with his as she stood, the sticky evidence of their passion cooling on her skin.

"I do," he admitted. "And so do you."

"I do love being filthy," Grace agreed. She turned toward the bathroom, feeling the delicious pull of sore muscles between her thighs.

"You not staying the night?" Nate asked, shifting on the couch to watch her walk away. His voice was casual, but she could hear the underlying question.

"Made a promise to my quarterback," Grace said over her shoulder. "Midnight."

"Big of you," Nate chuckled. "Don't let me keep you."

The bathroom was small, the air warm and thick with steam from the shower she'd briefly taken earlier. Grace leaned against the counter, her hands braced on the cool marble as she regarded her reflection. Her face was a mess of Nate's cum, dried in flaky patches on her cheeks, with fresh, glistening tracks where she'd licked it away. Her lipstick was long gone, smudged and smeared across her face, a testament to how thoroughly he'd used her mouth. But her eyes... her steel-blue eyes were bright, almost electric with a satisfaction she couldn't quite name.

This face, she thought, was one only a few people got to see. Nate, obviously. And Nolan, but never the same way as with Nate. With Nolan, she was sweet, loving, the perfect girlfriend. With Nate... she was something else entirely. Something darker, more primal. Something that made her body hum with a pleasure that bordered on pain. She could feel that with Nolan also, but in a different way.

The truth was, she'd once told Nolan he was the best she'd ever had. And at the time, it had been true. But that crown had changed heads after her first time with Nate. And now, after all these weeks, months, after all these nights, the crown sat firmly in place.

Nolan didn't even seem to mind being reminded of it now, not really. He got off on it as much as she did, in his own twisted way.

"You still have half an hour," Nate said when she emerged from the bathroom in just a towel, her face clean but her skin still flushed from the hot water. He was leaning against the kitchen

counter now, a fresh beer in hand, his jeans still undone, giving her a tantalizing glimpse of what lay beneath.

"Twenty minutes is not half an hour," Grace said, moving over to the sink next to him to get a glass of water.

"Did I go too far?" Nate asked.

"With what?"

"Nolan. I know you don't like when I talk down on him," Nate said.

Grace considered it. Was that the truth? She didn't *like* it, no. But it didn't upset her as much as it used to. And sometimes, perhaps, a small part of her even enjoyed it. The confirmation, perhaps, that she was being thoroughly wrecked by a man who could, in some ways, satisfy her more than her boyfriend could. But while the truth could be cruel, and Nolan wanted that brutal honesty, she still had a line. And Nate had danced right up to it tonight.

"You can be an asshole sometimes," Grace said finally, taking a sip of her water. "But I'm not fragile. And neither is he."

"Maybe," Nate said.

"I don't like it when you're mean to him," Grace said. "Maybe just don't go out of your way to be an asshole."

Nate nodded, taking a sip of his beer. "So what do you think about modeling? For real?"

The question caught her off guard, pulling her out of the post-coital haze she'd been drifting in. She leaned against the counter next to him, the towel wrapped snugly around her body.

"It's... fun," she said. "I like being in front of the camera. More than I thought I would."

"You're a natural," Nate said. "You have the look. The confidence."

"I'm not sure I'm confident enough to make a career out of it," Grace admitted. "I mean, I just hired a kid to help me with my landscaping for the winter. Modeling just doesn't seem that... stable?"

"It doesn't have to be a career," Nate said. "It could be a side hustle. Something you do for fun, for some extra cash."

Grace considered it. A side hustle. That actually sounded... appealing. She loved her job, loved being outdoors, getting her hands dirty. It was an exciting side of her she hadn't known of before Nate introduced it. It had been offered many times, of course, but nothing serious.

Grace felt a hand on her lower back. Nate's fingers tracing her spine.

"It's something I'd have to discuss with Nolan," Grace said.
"Right," Nate said. He didn't press the issue, instead moving in to kiss her.
Nate's lips were warm and soft against hers, and she could taste the beer on his breath. He pulled her close, his hands roaming over her bare skin, leaving a trail of heat in their wake. His touch was intoxicating, and she found herself melting into him, her body pressed against his, her fingers tangling in his hair as she kissed him hungrily.
Nate's hands found the edge of her towel, pulling it away to expose her naked body. She could feel his cock hardening against her again, his desire for her growing with every passing moment. She shivered, anticipation coursing through her body, a sweet ache forming deep inside her.
"I don't have much time," Grace said, even as she arched against him, her body responding to his touch.
"Then we'd better not waste it," Nate murmured, his lips trailing down her neck, his hands cupping her delicious ass.
"He... he probably won't mind," Grace said, her gaze locking onto the 11:48 on the microwave's digital clock.
"Text him," Nate murmured, picking her up and placing her onto the counter. He handed her her phone.
Grace hurriedly typed a quick message. 'Running a little late. Home soon.' Nolan would understand. He was next door and had probably heard them anyway. There was no reason to rush back now. She pushed her phone onto the table next to her.
"Happy now?" Grace asked, a smug grin on her face.
"I'll be happier once I'm inside you again," Nate replied, stepping between her legs.
"Then give it to me, cowboy," Grace purred, wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him in for a searing kiss.
She gasped as his cock brushed against her wet pussy, the thickness of it already sending little waves of pleasure coursing through her. Her nails dug into his shoulders as he guided his cock into her slick entrance, filling her in one, deep thrust that had her seeing stars. She moaned into the kiss as he set a hard and fast pace, her body responding eagerly, her hips rocking to meet every thrust.
It didn't take them long until Grace was on her back on his couch, her legs wrapped around his waist as he drove into her again and again. Hard and steady, punishing her sore pussy.

He pinned her against the worn cushions of the couch, his hands gripping her wrists, holding her in place as he pounded her mercilessly into the furniture. Her nails scraped against the skin on his back as she urged him on, her body thrashing beneath him as her orgasm ripped through her, leaving her breathless and limp in his arms.

Grace's body went limp beneath him, sinking into the worn couch cushions as aftershocks of pleasure rippled through her. Her eyes drifted shut, her breathing ragged as Nate's rhythm faltered. His cock throbbed inside her once, twice, before he buried himself to the hilt with a guttural grunt, his hot cum flooding her, filling every inch of her. She loved this, the feeling of him coating her from the inside out, the raw proof of a man completely and utterly spent inside her. His body shuddered against hers, their sweat mingling between them as they lay tangled together, the only sound in the room their ragged breaths slowly evening out.

The room was still, save for the ticking of Nate's old wall clock and their shared breaths. His weight was a comforting, grounding presence on top of her. She had to smile. He hadn't lasted long that second round, but Grace wasn't complaining. Her own body was humming from the aftershocks of her orgasm, a deep, bone-deep satisfaction settling over her like a warm blanket. She glanced at the clock. 12:17. Six weeks ago, she would have been halfway down the hallway and out the door already. Nolan had asked her to be home before midnight, after all. But Nolan wasn't her father. Seventeen minutes was hardly a betrayal.

"So much for Midnight," Nolan said when she came home.

"I texted you. It's only seventeen minutes," Grace said.

"I'm not angry. I mean, I'm more curious, and I had hopes for that pesky Midnight thing, but I'm mostly glad you're home," Nolan said. "You did say midnight, after all."

"I know. Sorry," Grace said. Nolan nodded, and did indeed not seem angry at all. He was in his jammies, but other than that, he was a tired version of himself from that morning. Perhaps a bit eager... eager to learn why she was 17 minutes past her promise.

*

The weekend went without issue. Nate didn't interfere in any capacity with Grace's days with Nolan. Friday and Saturday were entirely his. Meanwhile, Sunday came around, and Grace was indeed heading for ballet. Nate, who was supposed to give her a ride, suddenly had something he had to do, so Grace somehow ended up having the day to herself. Normally, Grace didn't like it when people cancelled on her that close, but honestly, having a day that was entirely hers was oddly relaxing. Not being reliant on anyone's schedule for once,  other than her ballet, which wasn't anywhere close to a chore anyway.

Ballet class was demanding as usual. The instructor was a stern woman with a sharp tongue and an even sharper eye for detail. She pushed them hard, her corrections echoing in the spacious studio as they moved through their exercises. Grace had been away for a few weeks, so the instructor made an example out of her, making her hold an arabesque for what felt like an eternity.

Afterward, a trip to the sauna and a shower later, Grace felt like a new woman, the stress and tension of the week melting away under the hot water. She lingered in the locker room, taking her time getting dressed. The studio was quiet, most of the other patrons having left already, the only sound the hum of the air conditioner and the distant murmur of conversation from the lobby. She was standing in front of the mirror, smoothing down her shirt, when she heard footsteps approaching. She turned to see a familiar face walking toward her.

"Dora?" Grace said, surprised.

Dora's long black hair was pulled back in a ponytail, her eyes showing the tired boredom she always had, except she was actually tired. Understandably, as she was heavily pregnant.

"Holy shit! Should you even be walking?" Grace asked, hurrying over to offer her friend a hand.

"Well, you were taking forever, and they said you were back here," Dora said, accepting Grace's help happily. "I tried your apartment, but I only found Nolan."

"You should've called," Grace said, supporting Dora as she slowly made her way to the benches.

"And miss seeing the look on your face when I waddle through the door??" Dora said with a weak grin. "Priceless. Anyway, I had to get out of the house, pregnancy be damned."

"I didn't want to be a bother," Grace said.

"You can make it up to me by buying me lunch," Dora said.

Grace laughed, guiding them both through the studio and out to her car.

"God, I feel like a whale," Dora complained as Grace helped her out the door and into the passenger seat of her truck. "Greg's off playing golf in Florida with his buddies while I'm here waddling around like a penguin."

"At least he's having fun," Grace said with a smirk, starting the engine.

"I suppose so," Dora sighed, leaning her head back against the seat. "I can't complain too much. I'd rather have him gone for a weekend than stuck in the house with me, watching me waddle to the bathroom for the tenth time in an hour."

Grace laughed, pulling out of the parking lot. "You look good, though. Pregnancy suits you."

"Bullshit," Dora said, though she was smiling. "I'm huge. I haven't seen my feet in weeks."

"You're glowing," Grace insisted. "And the baby's healthy, right?"

"As far as we know," Dora said. "I'm just so tired all the time. I thought this pregnancy fatigue was supposed to get better in the second trimester, but it's just gotten worse. But I was slowly going insane in there, staying in the house all day. It's either go crazy from boredom or go crazy from exhaustion. I chose the lesser of two evils."

"Well, I'm glad you did," Grace said. "I've missed you. And maybe we can play tennis again once you've delivered."

"Me too. I do miss it. Tennis, having a normal conversation, you," Dora admitted.

"Hermit life doesn't suit you," Grace joked. "Now excuse me, I'll get us some milk for this coffee."

Grace rose from her chair and left their booth at the local coffee shop. She didn't miss how Dora seemed to trail her as she rose, and once again as she returned. Not in a Nate or Nolan way, but a measured glance, noticing things only she would notice. It was a familiarity Grace had missed, but also felt a bit awkward. She was practically staring. But that was Dora.

Dora leaned forward, lowering her voice as Grace sat down. "You're walking a little funny today."

"What?" Grace asked. She hadn't noticed that her gait had changed.

"You look suspiciously pleased with yourself. What gives?" Dora asked. Grace shrugged coyly.

"For fucks sake, Grace. Tell me what has happened while I've been dying."

"You know how I've been asked to model over the years?" Grace asked.

"Bitch, how could I not? I've stood next to you for more than five seconds," Dora replied dryly.

"What, someone finally offered you more than a free lunch for looking hot?"

"They did," Grace said, a proud little smirk on her face.
"And..."
"It was for a soap ad. For some small, new brand, but hey, it was a real gig," Grace explained. "We've done two pilot shoots, and we're wrapping up the actual shooting for the campaign, and it's been fun."
"Holy shit, Grace. That's amazing," Dora said. "So you're like, a model now?"
Grace laughed and shrugged. "I'm a model for a small brand, maybe. It's fun, though. And I'm actually considering pursuing it a bit more, maybe as a side hustle. But I can't talk about it with Nolan too much. He'll want to put me on a billboard on Times Square within the week."
"So how did it happen?" Dora asked. "Do you have pics? I've been dying to see you model for... for forever!"
"Well, Nate--"
"You're still involved with that guy?" Dora interrupted. "Grace, seriously? That guy is a fucking problem."
"Do you want me to tell you or not?" Grace teased. "Yes, he's involved. Very much so. He's the one who got me the gig. So he needed a bit of help for a pilot, then he liked how I was doing and hired me for the campaign. With a professional contract and everything."
"I bet he fucking loved having you pose all over for him, you skank," Dora said. "Because I met Nolan undumped in your apartment, I guess he doesn't know all that much?"
"Oh no, it's all above board. Everything has been great, to be honest. And Nolan knows. I told him about the groping and... well, a lot has happened since then," Grace told, recounting it in her head. To think how much everything had developed, to think how her view had changed since Nolan first told her his darkest fantasy. From being scared by Nate's intensity in a way she'd never felt before. "Nolan and I are doing well, actually. Better than that. Especially after Nolan watched me with Nate. It's been weirdly easy."
"Wait, wait, wait. You're jumping miles ahead," Dora said, visibly shocked. "You fucked Nate? In front of Nolan?"
"Well... yes. Yes, I did," Grace said, smiling shyly.
"Jesus, Grace," Dora said. "You're such a skank! I guess I shouldn't be surprised. How did it happen? When?"

"It was a slow process, to be honest. A bit after the groping, we decided to tell Nate what was going on. We made a deal that we would enjoy our little fantasy at his expense; then he'd get a date with me after four weeks if he was able to keep his hands to himself," Grace said. "There were a lot of close calls, but there was an implication that Nate and I might... hook up. And that tension and anticipation for all three of us was... it was fucking intense."

"Sure sounds like it. Fuck, that's so hot," Dora said.

"Well, that was months ago. We went on our date, things happened, then more happened, and we had a few rough moments, but here we are."

"That's not how storytelling goes," Dora said. "That was months ago? So, you slept with him? More than once?"

"A lot," Grace said, almost a whisper. "It... I may have stayed overnight and pushed Nolan a bit too far at places, but we managed to find a way where we could do this thing and make it work."

Dora sat there for a moment, digesting the information. Her expression was a mixture of shock, curiosity, and utter intrigue. Dora had her own little stint with Nate, obviously, and now her best friend was seemingly getting it regularly.

"Wanna share notes?" Dora asked, a sly smile spreading across her face.

Grace burst out laughing, a genuine, uninhibited laugh that made her whole body shake. "Oh, my god, Dora."

"Come on," Dora said, leaning forward again, her hands cradling her belly. "I'm pregnant, I'm bored, and my best friend is living out a porno plotline. We're practically eskimo sisters."

"Shut up," Grace said, looking around, seeing an old couple minding their own business. What on earth would they think if they knew what Dora and her were talking about? Not that it mattered.

"He's so demanding, right? Just takes what he wants," Dora said, her eyes glinting with the memory.

Grace found herself nodding, a small, knowing smile playing on her lips. "Yeah, he is. And it doesn't hurt that he's kind of... big," Grace said, feeling a bit self-conscious suddenly.

"Size queen, much?" Dora teased. "And 'doesn't hurt' isn't the phrase I'd use, but hey, maybe I'm not the biggest slut sitting at this table after all."

Grace shoved a foot at her friend under the table, earning a snicker from her friend.

"So, is Nate bigger than your boyfriend? He has to be, right?" Dora asked.

"Dora!" Grace said, a laugh bubbling up from her chest as she felt the heat creep up her neck. "Jesus." It was pure Dora, really, to cut right to the chase. Grace wasn't a prude, not by a long shot, but discussing the relative merits of her boyfriend's dick size in the middle of a coffee shop felt... weird. Especially with Dora, who'd never exactly been Nolan's biggest fan.

"Come on," Dora pressed, leaning forward as far as her belly would allow. Her voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper, her dark eyes dancing with mischief. "I need to know. It's important research for my thesis on 'Why Grace Harris is a Massive Skank'."

"Fuck you," Grace said, laughing and giving her friend a playful glare. But she could feel her resolve crumbling under Dora's relentless curiosity. They'd shared everything since they were fifteen—crushes, heartbreaks, embarrassing drunken stories. This was just another chapter, albeit a particularly fucked-up one.

Grace leaned back in her seat, crossing her arms and trying to look disapproving, but she couldn't stop the smile from tugging at her lips. She glanced around again, but the old couple were deep in conversation about their grandkids, oblivious to the scandalous discussion happening in the next booth. The coast was clear.

"Okay, fine," she finally relented, her voice barely a whisper. "You win."

Dora's face lit up like a kid on Christmas morning. "Tell me everything."

"He's... fine," Grace said finally, a non-answer if she'd ever heard one.

"Fine?" Dora scoffed, rolling her eyes so hard Grace was worried they might get stuck. "Honey, 'fine' is what you say about the weather or a mediocre movie. We're talking about dick here. There are degrees."

"He's good," Grace amended, feeling her cheeks burn.

She thought of the way Nolan filled her, the familiar stretch of him, the comfortable rhythm they'd fallen into after all these years. It was good. It was home.

"Nolan is... perfect for me. He knows my body. He knows what I like," Grace said, feeling a strange need to defend him, even as she was about to betray him in the most intimate way. "But Nate... Nate is in a different league entirely."

"Different league how?" Dora prompted.

"Dora..." Grace sighed. Then: "Okay, okay. It's not even close. He's bigger. Both longer and definitely thicker. He's just... built differently. He fills me up in a way that..." Grace trailed off,

searching for the right words, her cheeks flushing as she remembered the feeling. "...it's just different."

"Thicker is always better," Dora said sagely, taking a sip of her coffee. "Greg's okay, but nothing to write home about. You have to work for it."

"I don't have to work for it with Nate," Grace said, a small, secret smile playing on her lips. "He just... takes. There's no hesitation."

"So that's a definite yes, then," Dora said, a smug little smirk playing on her lips as she leaned back against the booth. The worn vinyl creaked under her weight. She propped her swollen feet up on the empty bench across from them, a gesture of pure comfort and familiarity that only years of friendship could afford. "God, Grace. I knew you had it in you."

She paused, taking a deliberate sip of her now-cold coffee. Her eyes, dark and sharp as ever, never left Grace's face. She was dissecting her, piece by piece, just like she'd done since they were teens. Dora always had a way of cutting through the bullshit.

"But okay, okay," Dora continued, setting her cup down with a soft clink. "We've established that Nate's packing a fucking python. Fantastic. But what about your quarterback? What does Mr. All-American himself think about all this? How does Nolan handle being... well, you know. Outmatched?"

Grace's smile faltered slightly. This was the part she still struggled to articulate, the dark, twisted heart of it all.

"He likes it," Grace said. It sounded so simple, so absurdly straightforward. "He more than likes it, actually. It's... complicated. It hurts him, a lot. But it also turns him on in a way I don't think he could ever explain," Grace explained.

"Jesus, Grace," Dora said, her playful demeanor giving way to genuine astonishment. "You're not kidding."

"Would I joke about something like this?" Grace asked, though she knew Dora knew she was serious.

"So he just... sits there and watches? While Nate rails you into next week?" Dora asked, her voice a mixture of disbelief and morbid fascination.

"He did. Once. He left early, but he watched for a while," Grace said.

"Wait, he left?" Dora asked, suddenly a bit more serious. Grace raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah," she replied.

"And you stayed?"
"He told me to. We agreed on it beforehand."
"He told you to stay?"
Grace had to laugh. "Are you going to repeat everything I say?"
"Am I going to repeat everything you say..." Dora said, though it was more just to say something as she leaned back to process the information again. This time with a different facial expression.
"He wanted it. Don't turn it into something pathetic," Grace said. "I thought it was very strong of him to know where his limits were."
"You know I think Bickle has the self-preservation instincts of a moth near a porch light."
"Knock it off," Grace said.
"So you see Nate quite often, then?" Dora asked.
"Well, we work together, but other than that I see him occasionally. Tuesday was the shoot, then I went to a restaurant with him on Thursday. I was supposed to meet him today, but I guess he had plans," Grace said.
"So you planned to see him three times this week?" Dora asked. Grace knew how it sounded.
"Tuesday was work," she said.
"Sure," Dora said, but Grace heard something in that 'sure'. "You still spent Tuesday with him."
"That doesn't count."
"Why doesn't it count? Did he fuck you afterwards?" Dora asked, being direct as ever. "Do you have a toothbrush at his place? Clothes?"
"... Maybe," Grace replied.
Dora just looked at her.
"Jesus, are you taking attendance?" Grace said. Dora shrugged. "I tell you what, though, it can sometimes be a real hassle to manage. At least every week I have to reschedule this, take Nate up on one thing, then lock another thing with Nolan."
"Sounds like a real hassle indeed," Dora said.
"Like, a month ago, I even had to move a date I had with Nolan, one with just him and me, because of the photoshoot," Grace said, hearing how it looked.
"So you moved it? When it was a day for just the two of you?"
"Yeah, but it was just because the studio was only available then," Grace said. "Nolan wasn't angry or anything; he works in PR too, so he knows how these things work."

"Convenient," Dora replied.
"Oh, don't start. It was work," Grace said.
Dora held up her hands. "Fine. Studios sometimes may do that, what do I know," Dora said.
"Nolan simply moved the reservation half an hour," Grace said.
"Of course he did," Dora snorted.
"He's being supportive," Grace said.
"I know," Dora said. "That's part of what worries me."
Dora sighed, taking another sip of coffee, wincing at its coldness.
"I mean. I'm not saying you shouldn't see him or how you and Nolan work that whole shabang out; I just... I'm just wondering when Nate became someone you automatically make room for in your schedule. And I have to ask, as your friend, as little as I like it. Is Nolan genuinely okay with all of this?"
"Yes," Grace said. That she was one hundred percent sure of. "He knows what I'm doing."
"Everything?"
Grace hesitated. "No. He doesn't need a play-by-play of every event."
"That's not what I asked."
Grace hesitated again. She felt her face a bit more heated than before, but not the same way. It wasn't anger either, as she knew Dora was prying for the right reasons. It might put her on the back foot, but Grace knew Dora had her best at heart. She was just making sure everything was okay. As a friend should.
"I'm not lying to Nolan, if that's what you're worried about," Grace said.
"I didn't say lie either," Dora replied. "Listen, I get it. Nate has a certain... attraction, an exciting intensity to him that I obviously know firsthand what it might do to a woman. I've slept with him, and I understand why you're drawn to that. And I'm not telling you to stop."
"But?"
"But you were always annoyingly clear about what you thought was right. Don't start changing that just because Nate fucks good and perhaps adds some thrills around your life," she said. "And Nolan isn't helping by rolling over every time you ask."
"He isn't rolling over," Grace said immediately, her voice much firmer.
"Grace--"

"No, you don't get to do that," Grace said. "Do you know how embarrassed he was when I discovered his fantasy? And justifiably so, too. I was livid. And it is embarrassing. But he's so trusting, so honest... to even want to pursue something like this, something that scared him so much, I honestly find him incredibly brave. He gives me so much freedom in this because he trusts me. That's strength."

Dora flinched a bit. She had been so focused on her own side of her argument that she probably didn't even consider the counter, or that Grace would respond like this.

"Fine. You're right," Dora said, conceding. "Then don't make him stupid for trusting you. Just make sure you're still choosing things because you want them. Not because you've gotten used to saying yes."

"I am," Grace said.

"Good," Dora said, and this time earnestly.

The two friends sat like that for a moment. In a silence they both had sat in together plenty of times before. Bickering wasn't anything new. And Grace knew why Dora was so adamant. Dora loved Grace and Grace loved Dora. She had been out of the loop for a while, and all of this understandably came as a shock. In the end, it felt great to have a friend like Dora who looked after her like that, even if it was uncomfortable getting grilled like this.

"So does Nate still fuck like a champion?" Dora asked, breaking the silence.

Grace gave Dora a look.

"What? Concerned friend. Just a thorough investigation. What's the wildest you've done with him?"

"He cuffs me to his bed sometimes."

Dora's eyes widened, a slow, wicked grin spreading across her face. "Of course he does. Nate would love the great Grace Harris all tied up and helpless."

Grace couldn't help but laugh, the tension from their earlier conversation melting away with Dora's irreverent humor. It felt good to share this secret with someone who understood, someone who wouldn't judge her for the complicated desires that drove her.

As they finished their coffee and Dora waddled her way back to her car, Grace found herself mulling over their conversation. Dora had a way of twisting perfectly ordinary things into something strange, making her weekly routines with Nate sound like a calculated affair rather than what it was – a carefully balanced arrangement between consenting adults. Still, Grace

couldn't shake the tiny thought that had lodged itself in her mind: when had making room for Nate become so automatic?

She pushed the thought aside.

This wasn't about losing herself or her values. It was about exploring the boundaries of desire, of trust, of love, with Nolan's full knowledge and encouragement. If anything, their arrangement had made their relationship stronger, more honest than it had ever been.

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Grace slammed the fence post with her sledge, keeping an eye on her new hire. Josh had helped out, god bless him after everything he had been through, but she couldn't help but not trust the new kid entirely. He was eager to please, but lacked... focus.

But so did Grace, as her phone chimed up. It was Nate.

"What's up?" she asked, curt as she usually was when she was at work.

"Hello to you too," Nate chuckled. "What are you wearing?"

"Overalls," Grace said. Once upon a time, she'd be annoyed, but she found herself smirking at his antics.

"Sexy. Listen, I need your help," Nate said. "There's a dinner with the soap people on Thursday. You should come."

"Why?" Grace asked.

"It's not too bad, actually. The client has been staring at your face for six weeks, and I think it's a good idea for you to come. You get to meet them; they get to see the person behind the pretty face."

"A dinner?" Grace said hesitantly. "When was it?"

"Thursday," Nate replied.

"It actually does sound a bit tempting," Grace said. She was absolutely intrigued by a bit of networking. She had enjoyed modelling, and this might be a door to do more.

"I mean, if you're busy, forget it," Nate said, his tone as casual as ever.
"No, actually, I'd like to," Grace said. "I'm just trying to figure out what the hell I was doing Thursday."
Grace scrolled through her calendar. Today was Tuesday, and she was working late. Wednesday work, but also movie night with Nolan. Dora had wanted to go for another coffee sometime, but that didn't have to be Thursday, right? She could move that to Saturday. No, Dora had to go on Friday; Nate wanted Saturday.
Grace rubbed her temple. She had originally planned that she'd have an open day to herself on Thursday, really, but this dinner sounded like something she wanted to do. So it fell to Sunday instead, perhaps. The only thing she could think of, that wasn't in her calendar, was Nolan wanting to cook something together, but it wasn't a planned date per se. They could probably do that another day.
"Thursday's fine," Grace said. She could perhaps go home early so she could relax a bit first, and, obviously, get ready for this thing.
"Great. I'll text you the details," Nate said. "I'll pick you up at 6.30."

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"Oh, by the way," Grace said.
Nolan looked up, plating the spaghetti he had just made, and handed one of the plates to her.
"Nate has this dinner with the soap folks Thursday. I'm going with him."
There had been a time when that sentence would've ended in a question. Apparently that time had passed. There was no 'would you mind?'.
"Sounds exciting," Nolan said. "Who's being there? You going to ride together?"
"I'm not sure. And yeah. I mean, he lives right there," Grace said, nodding at the door. "He's picking me up at 6.30."

Nolan paused, a strand of spaghetti halfway to his mouth. A faint, almost imperceptible shift occurred in his expression, a tightening around his eyes that Grace knew well. It wasn't anger, not really. It was that funny little look he got sometimes, a complex cocktail of jealousy, arousal, and perhaps anticipation. He masked it quickly, his features smoothing back into their usual pleasant arrangement, but she'd seen it. She always did.

"What?" Grace asked, setting her fork down with a soft click against the ceramic plate.

Nolan shook his head, picking up his fork again. "Nothing," he said, his voice carefully neutral.

"Oh, I think there's something," Grace said, between playful accusation and precision.

"You're going to this as his plus-one?"

"I'm not. It's just I'm part of the campaign."

"You're dressing up, going there with him, sitting beside him, meeting his business people..." Nolan said, his logic flawless and damning. Grace had to admit, he had a point. She hadn't thought about it that way.

"Because my ass is apparently helping sell soap," she said, earning a small smile from Nolan.

"Does that bother you? If I was his plus-one?"

Nolan swallowed, but Grace could tell it was more than just food. "I mean... it's kind of hard not to be jealous, knowing you're going out on a date with another man. So a little."

"Only a little?" Grace teased, seeing her man grow embarrassed and aroused at once. It was a fascinating combination, and she enjoyed watching it happen.

"Well... it's you," Nolan said. "So maybe a lot."

Grace grinned at that. "And why is that?"

Nolan shifted. Grace thought she knew, but she wanted Nolan to say it.

"Because... this is different," Nolan said, setting down his fork with a clatter that echoed in the sudden quiet. He wouldn't meet her eyes, focusing instead on a loose thread on the placemat. "Sex with him... that was our thing. Our fantasy. It's hot, and twisted, and it happens behind closed doors. I know about it, I'm involved in it. It's... contained."

He paused, swallowing hard. "But this... dinner. You're going as his date. Not just a model from his campaign. You're Grace, with Nate. The world will see you two together and think... he's yours. People will see you and believe you're his woman. And that..."

Nolan's voice trailed off, his knuckles white where he gripped the edge of the table. "Sex was different," he started, shaking his head slightly as if trying to clear it. "We made rules for that.

Boundaries." He paused, searching for the words. "But this dinner... somehow sitting beside Nate at dinner, meeting people as though you belonged there with him... that gets under my skin differently." His gaze drifted to their joined hands on the table. "It's not about sex anymore. It's more... social territory. And that feels... real." He finally looked up, his brown eyes dark with an emotion Grace couldn't quite name. "It scares me more than anything we've done so far."

"You say that like you're not enjoying the thought of it," Grace said, her tone gently teasing. She leaned forward, reaching for his hand and giving it a reassuring squeeze. This was adjacent, but certainly new.

"I am," Nolan admitted, his cheeks flushing. "It's a weird, fucked up thing. But I guess it comes with the territory. When you're... cuckolding me, it's easy to pretend like it's all just part of the fantasy, that it doesn't mean more than that. But when you go out in public as a couple... that's not just a kink. It just feels so real."

Grace's eyes lit up with a wicked glint, a slow smile spreading across her face. "Maybe I'll let everyone think I'm his girlfriend all night," she purred, leaning closer to him, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "Just for the thrill of it. Imagine all those executives, seeing us together... He'll probably order for me, you know how he is." She paused, watching Nolan's reaction, his knuckles now bone-white on the table edge, his breath hitching audibly. "I might even kiss him."

"In front of them?" Nolan hissed, his face a mask of conflicted desire. He looked away, then back at her, and she saw it there – the shame and the hunger warring in his expression. "You wouldn't."

"Wouldn't I?" Grace teased, her thumb stroking the back of his hand.

Nolan's hand shot out, gripping her wrist tightly, his eyes dark with a storm of emotions.

"Grace," he choked out, the word thick with a cocktail of fear and undeniable arousal. "Don't... don't say things like that."

"Relax. I'm kidding. It's a work dinner," Grace said.

"I guess we'll do the cooking on Friday, then," Nolan said.

Grace took out her phone. She hated doing that during dinner, but he asked.

"Dora," she said simply. She couldn't neglect her friend now that Dora finally had come out of her hibernation. If anything, it was her duty to help her get out of the house more often.

"The weekend?" Nolan tried.

Grace's thumb jabbed at the screen, her scrolling turning sharp and aggressive. Thursday: dinner with Nate. Wednesday: movie night with Nolan. Ballet was carved in stone. Work was a given. Dora wanted to meet. A hot knot of irritation tightened in her stomach. She wanted to go to the dinner. She wanted Nolan. She wanted Nate. She wanted her job and her hobbies and her friend. And for one goddamned night in the whole week, she just wanted to belong to herself.

"We can always do it next week," Nolan suggested.

Grace snapped a little there. "You always do that."

"Do what?" Nolan asked, hearing her tone.

"Move everything," Grace sighed, rubbing her temples.

"I what?" he asked. He looked so confused.  She felt bad. She hadn't meant to be so frustrated. It was unfair for her to snap at him.

"Sorry," she said, much gentler. "It's just a bunch to maneuver."

"It's fine," he replied, a sound of relief in his voice. "And I really don't mind if you got for that dinner. That new recipe can wait. This is kind of your job now, right?"

"Yeah," Grace said, the word barely scraping her throat. Nolan's easy acceptance settled in her gut like a stone. His accommodation, freely given, was worse than any possessiveness. If he'd fought her, she'd have something to push against, a clear battle line. Instead, he kept carving out space for her, for this other life.

Dora's warning flickered, a ghost in her mind's ear. *Don't make him stupid for trusting you.* The thought flickered.

"I can just decline the dinner," Grace suggested, a last attempt to salvage the evening. She didn't want a fight. She didn't want a guilt trip. She didn't want a concession.

"No, I'm okay," Nolan said, and Grace knew he was being honest. He genuinely meant that.

"Don't. I work in PR; I know how important networking. And I've seen your modelling. Outside of being horribly biased because you're my girlfriend, I'm amazed at how good you look in those pictures. You should go. You *want* to go."

Grace was silent for a moment. He wasn't wrong. She did want to go.

"Are you sure?" Grace asked, watching him closely. She couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to his easy acceptance than just supportive boyfriend stuff. Was part of him enjoying this? The thought sent a little thrill through her. Maybe he did like the idea of her going as Nate's date after all. Maybe he got off on the thought of her playing the part, even just for one night.

Grace gave her calendar a final glance and saw all of it. Work, Nolan, Nate, Dora, Ballet, whatever else. There had to be an easier way of doing this. This constant renegotiation. It wasn't that she was tired of any of them, but the constant readjusting was a real bitch.
But what was she supposed to do? Draw up a custody agreement for herself?

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Picking out an outfit, Grace had put out one of her fits that seemed to always go well in other professional settings. It was flattering, but also practical. The black pencil skirt and white blouse, red lipstick and heels, That would certainly be accentuate her features while looking smart and professional.
Looking over her outfit for the night, Grace was pleased with herself. It would've been boring, but she knew she'd look good in it anyway. She'd seen the looks, from Nolan and otherwise.
Grace looked at it again, and then over at her closet, then.
A small smile crept across her lips.
Nolan had introduced the idea, and Grace found herself wondering why not? She had chosen an outfit that was tailored to a professional setting, but Nolan seemed to have enjoyed the odd thrill of Grace being Nate's plus-one. To, in a public setting, be Nate's date. Girlfriend, even. There was something slightly devious and poisonous in that, but there was also a certain spice to it.
Besides, this was a dinner, not a board meeting. She'd want to make a good impression, right?
Grace went over to her closet again, looking over her outfits.
She first picked out her pink tube dress. It hugged her form and screamed intention. Intention to get all the attention of her date. It had made her first date with Nate... very memorable. No. Too much. This was a professional setting.
The green dress? She had used that a few too many times. It could rest.
Her smile became more devious as she found the perfect one. No... that was one of Nolan's favorites. She couldn't. Nolan would recognize it right away.

It was further back in her closet. Her red summer dress. It was modest, but also fell against her curves in an enticing way. It offered a bit of cleavage, but not too much. It was stylish, light, and wasn't too vulgar. It was a summer dress, but that was nothing a coat couldn't fix.

But it was the context too.

Nolan had taken her out in that red dress one final time before her first date with Nate—a last ordinary romantic evening, their last as the couple they'd always been. Before Nate crossed the threshold from fantasy into flesh, before he'd taken her to his home and she'd slept with another man.

It had been a gift. Nolan had brought it home to her, a dress designed by his own boss. Nolan gave it to her for their date. Now she'd wear it while leaving the apartment with Nate, to a business dinner where strangers may mistake her for Nate's woman.

It was perfect. She had to. If nothing else than to let Nolan look.

Stepping back into the living room, Nolan immediately perked up when he saw her.

"Whoa," Nolan said, looking at the red dress Grace had put on.

"What?" Grace asked, giving a slow turn for him.

"That's the dress I got you," Nolan said. He looked confused.

"Yeah. I figured it would be a good fit for tonight," Grace said. She tried not to smirk. "You like?" She put a bit of a spin, letting the red fabric flare out around her before settling back against her hips.

Nolan just stared. His eyes followed her movements, and she could practically see the gears turning in his head as he processed what she was doing, what this meant. "You're wearing that... for him?"

"Maybe I want to impress the soap people," Grace said, her tone light and breezy. But they both knew that wasn't the whole truth.

Nolan swallowed hard, his Adam's apple bobbing in his throat. "Grace..."

"You don't like it?" Grace asked, her feigned innocence almost comical. She took a step closer, the soft rustle of the dress filling the quiet space between them. "You don't think I look beautiful in it?"

"You look..." Nolan started, then stopped, his breath catching. He looked away for a second, then back at her, his dark brown eyes clouded with that intoxicating mix of pain and desire that had become so familiar. "Jesus..."

Grace smirked. Not only because of Nolan's reaction to her dress, but that she could always rely on him being so mesmerized with her. But the potency wasn't exactly secondary.

"Like a plus-one?" she teased, her voice dropping to that husky, provocative tone she knew drove him wild.

"You look good," Nolan said. "They'll definitely like you."

Just then, a firm, familiar knock echoed from the door. Exactly at 6:30. Punctual bastard.

Grace turned without another word to Nolan, her heels clicking on the hardwood as she walked to the door. She could feel Nolan's gaze on her back, heavy and intense, as she opened it to find Nate waiting, hands in his jacket pockets. His dark, unruly hair was slightly damp, as if he'd just showered, and he'd swapped his usual work slacks for a pair of dark trousers and a crisp black button-down that stretched across his broad shoulders and gut.

Nate always had a much rougher look, but tonight, he had actually put in an effort to dress up a bit. She wondered if that helped Nolan read them as a pair.

Nate's eyes, those dark, beady things, roamed over her, a slow, appreciative smirk spreading across his rugged face as they took in the red dress.

"Damn, princess," he said, his voice a low, gravelly rumble. "You clean up nice."

"Good to see you too, cowboy," Grace replied, grabbing her coat from the hook by the door. She turned to give Nolan one last look, a quick, mischievous glance that was loaded with unspoken meaning. He was still standing by the couch, watching her, his expression unreadable.

"See you later," she said, her tone casual.

"Have fun," Nolan replied, his voice strained but steady.

Grace let Nate lead her out of the apartment, the click of the door closing behind them sounding unnaturally loud in the quiet hallway. She could almost feel Nolan's presence through the wall, a phantom limb that ached with a sweet, phantom pain.

Nate's ancient Golf sputtered and groaned as he navigated the evening traffic, the faint smell of stale cigarettes and cheap air freshener filling the small space. He drove with a certain aggressive competence, one hand on the wheel, the other resting casually on the center console, just inches from Grace's thigh.

She looked at it and wondered if Nate would move that hand across those inches. On one note, it would be better if he didn't. The dinner was of a professional calibre, and riling each other would surely make them way too distracted. But if he wanted to, she'd let him.

But he didn't.

"Fucking traffic," Nate rumbled. "Good thing we're early."

"Good thing your car is working," Grace teased. "You should get a better car now that the campaign is doing so well."

"Like a Ford Equinox?" Nate teased.

"So Chloe's father is going to be there. Him, a few others. Beware of ol' Vern. He talks too much," Nate said.

As they drove, Grace felt a bit of what Nolan had been feeling. It was different from her other dates with Nate. Those had been with one purpose. But now it was more like she was going... with him.

Glancing over at him, she took in his fit again. It wasn't just that he had put on a clean shirt. For the second time, she felt herself appreciate that he had actually dressed appropriately for the dinner. And actually, she found it strangely flattering that he had made the effort. Like he didn't want to go to a professional dinner like he had just come out of a dryer.

"Your dress is really nice," Nate said. "I said it before, but damn. Is it new?"

"Nope," she said, omitting that it was a gift from Nolan. That was... between her and Nolan. "It's actually one of Josh's designs."

"That man," Nate said. "On one hand, a guy who designs clothes..." Nate left a portion unsaid. Grace felt a flicker inside of her at that. "But on the other hand, he clearly knows what looks good on a woman." Nate threw another glance, resting a bit too long on her thigh, on how her curves was visible but not in a vulgar way. "Fuck me, maybe I should try designing myself."

"Don't quit your day job yet," Grace mumbled, her mind drifting to wondering what Nolan was doing right now. How he felt. He had seen her go out with this favorite dress of his. She just knew what that poor man was imagining, and she felt a small thrill at that thought.

"So what am I actually doing here?" Grace asked after a brief pause. "Am I supposed to sell soap? Smile, pretend like I know what a media buy is?"

Nate shrugged, not even bothered. "Just be yourself. Preferably the version that doesn't insult everyone in the first ten minutes."

"Yes, I'm known to do that," Grace said, the sarcasm heavy.

Arriving, Nate parked the car and they went up to the restaurant together. As they went inside, Nate put a hand on the small of her back as if to guide her through the door. It was a small

gesture, but it was more than a friendly touch, a public claim. And, as he kept his hand there as they entered the restaurant, Grace realized that it wasn't just for her benefit. Anyone watching would probably read the gesture exactly the way Nolan had.

But Nate made no show of it. He just gestured with his other hand toward the hostess, who led them to a large table where several other people were already sitting.

"There they are," Nate said, guiding her towards the table.

Grace's gaze flicked over the table, taking in the assembled party. A middle-aged woman sat at the head of the table, her sharp features softened by a kind smile. Her grey eyes met Grace's and lit up with recognition. Someone who looked like they could be Chloe's dad, indeed, Bryan. Nate made the introductions, and Grace was happy to find that most were easy to strike up a conversation with, even those he didn't get the best first impression of.

"Grace," Nate would say. "She's my model, actually. Been helping me since the pilot."

And nobody batted an eye at that. Of course Grace was a model. And that, that was a huge ego boost. Especially when she heard how Nate actually seemed to take some pride in her modeling. Every comment made her chest swell with a small sense of pride. She was in her element, talking about the experience of the shoot, how it surprised her that modeling was exciting, her thoughts on the campaign, her enthusiasm for the project, and they listened. They actually listened.

"The concept was Nate's, but he really let me be a part of it," Grace said, feeling herself getting into her stride. "He gave me a lot of freedom, and that made it easier for me to feel comfortable in front of the camera."

"Well, it shows," the woman at the head of the table said, Fiona Grace learned. "You have a very natural look, Grace. A very marketable look. The campaign shows so much potential, and your work made it come alive."

The dinner progressed, and Grace found herself in a flow of conversation, fielding questions about her modeling, her experience with the campaign, and her thoughts on the final product. She was articulate, confident, and charming, and she could feel the shift in the room as they began to see her not just as Nate's model, but as a valuable asset in her own right.

They weren't even taken aback when it came out that she ran her own little landscaping business.

"Makes sense. It actually makes all the sense," Vern said.

"I mean, she's a confident woman," Nate said. "Of course she'd run her own business."

"And in a man's field," Vern said, making Grace raise an eyebrow.

Grace's drummed her fingers against her wine glass impatiently. She met Vern's patronizing gaze head-on, her steel-blue eyes glinting with something dangerous.

"And what's that supposed to mean, Vern?" she asked, her voice deceptively sweet. She could feel Nate's eyes on her, knew he was watching her, waiting to see what she'd do next.

Vern shifted in his seat, suddenly looking uncomfortable under her direct stare. "I just meant... it's impressive, is all. Most women don't go into that line of work."

"Is that right?" Grace said, taking a slow sip of her wine. She set the glass down with a soft click, her gaze never leaving his. "Well, I guess I'm not most women."

"I'm still here," Grace said, playfully, but her eyes held a challenge. She could see Fiona suppressing a smile from the head of the table, while Nate just watched, his expression unreadable but his eyes dark with approval.

"What did I say? Confident woman!" Nate chuckled, breaking the tension. He shot her a look that said, *'See? I told you.'* And she had to admit, he was right. She could hold her own. She was a professional.

Grace turned to Fiona, asking about her daughter Chloe, the makeup artist on Nate's campaign. But when asking how Chloe got the job, Nate chimed in.

For a small moment, Grace thought about how Nate and her had people they knew separately from those Nolan knew. That was a small list of people, but they were actually starting to form a small circle of acquaintances, some of which were mutual. Chloe and Vern. Fiona, who also was the head of the marketing department. The photographer Sam. Even Jason. That was Nate's people. She found herself being part of that world more and more. It felt a bit weird, but also... fun.

The dinner was winding down now, plates cleared, coffee being poured. Grace sat back in her chair, a pleasant warmth spreading through her that had nothing to do with the wine. She'd spent the evening fielding questions, laughing at Vern's terrible jokes, and deflecting Fiona's not-so-subtle hints about her modeling future. Through it all, she'd been acutely aware of Nate beside her, his presence a steady, grounding force. It was only now, as the conversation shifted to lighter topics, that she realized something: she hadn't once had to think about how to act around him. It was just... easy. Their movements, their responses, their very breathing seemed to fall into a familiar sync. They knew one another's rhythms now, the subtle give and take that comes from

spending time together. This easy comfort, this unspoken understanding, should have felt perfectly natural. And for a moment, it did.

And at one point, what Grace should've seen coming came.

"And how long have you two been together?" Fiona asked curiously, leaning in. "I mean, he's older but... I guess it's nice to be working with your partner."

Grace looked at Fiona.

"Oh, we're not together," Grace said. "I'm just helping out with modeling."

"Oh, sorry," Fiona replied, then moved into some other aspect of the campaign.

She felt herself adjust her seat a bit. Not by the question or the question of age, but by realising the optics. Nolan was right.

Grace knew how he'd react if he had heard Fiona right now, especially with how the evening had gone. He'd be so jealous and embarrassed. But also so, so turned on.

"Plus-one."

That had been his phrase, and she had deliberately played into it when she dressed up. But the rest, that had all been organic. Grace found herself not minding the little momentary perception that she was indeed Nate's...

Grace knew he might make her his woman later tonight anyway. Thoroughly.

Glancing over at Nate, she saw him looking over at her. He didn't say anything, but Grace wondered if he had caught that little moment. A small knowing smirk creased his lips.

"Shut up," Grace hissed at him, but with a small smile.

The evening ended with handshakes and promises to send over the final shots for review, Fiona shaking Grace's hand with a warmth that went beyond professional courtesy. As they stepped out into the cool night air, Grace felt a strange sense of accomplishment. It had definitely been the right call to come.

"Good seeing you both," Fiona said as they left. "And if you're serious about more work, here," she said, handing Grace her card. "There is plenty of work out there."

Nate opened the passenger door of his Golf for her, a gesture that was both gentlemanly and possessive. The interior of the car was cool, smelling faintly of him. He slid in beside her, the engine turning over with a reluctant grumble.

"See? I told you it wouldn't be so bad," Nate said.

"It was fun, I'll give you that," Grace said.

"You handled that 'girlfriend' thing pretty well," Nate remarked, his tone laced with amusement.
"You're not my boyfriend," Grace shot back.
"Didn't say I was."
"Nolan would've lost his mind if he heard that," Grace mused, staring out the window at the city lights blurring past. The thought sent a warm, familiar thrill through her.
"Bet he would."
Old Nate would've pounced on an opportunity to shit-talk Nolan, but he had learned not to over the last few weeks. Grace was glad for that.
As Nate navigated the quiet street back toward their building, Grace found herself mapping out the evening's trajectory with an unsettling clarity: dinner, the drive home, the inevitable pull toward his apartment. The sequence was painfully conventional, a perfect echo of any other date. Nate's hand found her thigh as he turned a corner, his touch both present and absent, as if it belonged there. Grace didn't flinch away, instead watching the familiar storefronts pass by while thinking of Nolan sitting alone in their apartment, likely imagining this exact moment. Grace was going back to Nate's after an evening as his girlfriend. Going back to continue doing things that would continue to confuse her as his girlfriend if anybody knew.
And in his apartment, Grace took her coat off and put it on a hanger. Looking at herself in the hallway mirror, she saw the red dress Nolan had given her, he had watched her leave in it, and now she was about to let Nate peel it off. She would have loved to see Nolan's reaction.
It didn't take long for the red dress to land in a heap over Nate's old recliner. Grace found herself on her knees before him, his thick, warm cock pressing against her cheek. There was something about the sheer size of him that still managed to catch her off guard. The way it filled her hand, the heat radiating against her skin. She closed her eyes, thinking of Nolan back home, imagining him sitting in their apartment, his mind probably playing out exactly this scene. The thought sent a sharp, electric thrill through her, a dark pleasure that made her body hum with anticipation.
"You're so big," Grace gasped, gliding his fat, throbbing cock along her cheek.
Nate chuckled, reaching down to grab the base of his cock, smearing his leaking precum along her lips like lip gloss. "You know you like it."
Grace could only moan in agreement, her tongue darting out to lap up the salty taste. He was right. She did like it. Maybe too much.

Grace opened her mouth, her tongue lapping eagerly at the underside of his shaft, savoring the salty tang of him. He filled her mouth easily, stretching her lips wide around his girth and nudging gently against the back of her throat. She let him, his cock feeling natural in her mouth. Nolan's cock was very enjoyable too. But something about this big, aggressive cock made her tremble with arousal and need, his natural domination making her feel smaller and weaker than she really was.

The transition from floor to bed happened in a flurry of tangled limbs and hungry kisses. Grace found herself on her back, the familiar sheets beneath her, legs parted without shame as Nate settled between them. His thick length nudged against her entrance once, twice, before pushing inside with a slow, deliberate pressure that stole her breath.

"Fuck, Grace," Nate growled, his face hovering inches above hers, dark eyes locked on hers as he sank deeper, inch by delicious inch. He filled her completely, stretched her until she was certain she could feel him in every corner of her being. "This pussy was made for me."

The bed creaked beneath them as he found his rhythm, deep, languid strokes that made her writhe beneath him. The headboard thumped rhythmically against the wall, and she imagined Nolan in the apartment next door, headphones useless against the rhythmic percussion as her cries grew louder with each thrust.

"Think of him listening," Nate panted against her ear, nibbling the lobe, sending shivers down her spine. "Getting all hot and bothered, knowing I'm in you right now."

Grace's hands clawed at his back as he rolled his hips, grinding against her clit in a way that made stars explode behind her eyelids. "God, Nate... harder."

He answered with a grunt, pulling almost completely out before slamming back into her, harder this time. The sounds she made now were raw, unrestrained—gasps and moans that echoed off the thin walls. She could feel herself approaching the edge, that coiling tightening inside her that promised something spectacular.

Her body arched off the bed immediately as waves of pleasure crashed through her, leaving her trembling and breathless.

Nate rode out her orgasm, his movements becoming more erratic as he approached his own release. "Where do you want it, princess?" he grunted, his control clearly fraying.

"Inside," she gasped, wrapping her legs tighter around his waist. "Fill me up."

With a guttural groan, he buried himself to the hilt, his hot release flooding her. It was exactly what she needed, that primal claiming that made her feel both owned and wildly free. As they collapsed into a sweaty heap of tangled limbs, the only sound in the room their ragged breaths slowing gradually back to normal.

"Jesus," Nate rasped, his fingers tracing light patterns over her ribs.

"Mmmhmm," Grace murmured, her body still buzzing with aftershocks. She could feel his cum trickling out of her, pooling in the sheets beneath her.

"Wanna go again?" Nate asked, playfully. "I could find the cuffs. You know, to celebrate our 'union'?"

Grace turned onto her stomach, propping her chin on her hands. "I don't think 'our union' is being recognized by the state. Or my boyfriend."

"Your boyfriend who loves knowing I'm stretching you out like this?" Nate countered, running a hand down her back to cup her ass.

"I didn't say that," Grace said, but the heat creeping up her neck betrayed her.

Nate smirked, knowing he'd scored a point. He stood up from the bed and stretched, unconcerned about his nakedness. "Beer?"

"Sure. But then I'm out."

Nate nodded without complaint as Grace watched him walk to the kitchen. His body was rough and out of shape, but with that slight blue-collar strength she'd noticed the first day they met. She found herself appreciating the view more than she did when they met. He was older than her dad for Christ's sake...

Entering their small hallway, she found Nolan watching TV. He looked disheveled, and he was sitting in nothing but his boxers. Grace grinned, knowing he had spent the evening wondering how bad she had been, what Grace had been up to as Nate's plus-one. How people would look at her with Nate.

"How was it?" Nolan asked, standing up as she came through the door. "Did it go well?

"Eager to know how well I performed as Nate's girlfriend?" Grace teased. Nolan stopped in his tracks, fist clenching and unclenching.

"I mean, I don't know about 'girlfriend'-- I mean, plus-one and-- but, of course," he stammered. He cleared his throat and sat down. "Yes. That too, but also the dinner. I mean, it was also a professional thing too, right?"

Grace made her way over to him, promptly sat down sideways on his lap, a gentle arm around his neck, and told excitedly how the dinner had been, how the people there had been so proud of her work. It wasn't just that she looked good, but that she had been able to do something more than look good. And people seeing it was awesome, and she told Nolan just as much.

And Nolan was listening to her as if she was reading him a bedtime story. He was nodding, smiling, and looking genuinely proud of her. And that in turn made her even more excited to tell him.

"You're amazing," Nolan said. "And they loved you, didn't they?" Grace could see he was happy. So happy that it almost seemed like he didn't mind what else she had been up to.

"So, what did you do with your evening?" Grace asked.

"Watched some TV, played some games, nothing special. But mostly I was just waiting for you," Nolan admitted.

"Aw, poor man," Grace said. Some men would lean into the pity, or use this as a segway. But no, Nolan wanted to hear more. He wanted to hear how his girl had managed to get another foot into the modeling world.

Grace went through the dinner again, but this time with questions from Nolan about the campaign, who the people were, and such. They migrated from her sitting on his lap to sitting and chatting over a glass of wine each at the dinner table. Nolan drew some recognition of some of the people, too. He didn't know them, but he knew of them. It made sense, given his work, and it sort of spoke to how useful this little event had turned out to be.

"Oh, and somebody thought Nate actually was my boyfriend," Grace said.

That paused the whole conversation. Nolan stopped mid-sip and looked at her. After a short sip, he put his glass down. A small flushness crept up his neck.

"You like that way too much," Grace teased.

"No. I mean... the thought, the idea is... a thrill beyond imagination, but..." Nolan began. "I mean, I meant it earlier. Girlfriend is a lot... What did you say?" he asked, his voice hoarse.

"I corrected them," Grace said, and she saw Nolan's shoulders sink and relax immediately. But the flushness didn't disappear. The idea got to him still. And perhaps he found the idea appealing, but Grace read that it was too much to play around with too much. But they had some decent testing ground now.

"Did you look like a couple?" Nolan asked after a bit, hesitantly.

"I suppose. From the outside, I guess," Grace admitted.

Nolan looked away, then at the kitchen wall, the very wall separating their apartment from Nate's.

"And you slept with him after?" Nolan asked, looking back at her.

Grace looked at the wall too, then nodded. "Didn't you hear?" she teased.

"Heh, yeah, I did. Nate opened the door before the date to let bad air out and... he didn't close it when you guys came back," Nolan said.

"Oh my, I wonder who might've heard," Grace said easily.

"So for tonight, you were basically his date," Nolan said. Not on a date. His date.

"It was a work dinner," Grace insisted.

"Grace. Come on," Nolan said, with a small chuckle.

Grace blushed a bit. Nolan had a point. She couldn't deny the shape of it. She only shrugged.

"That's fucking with my head," Nolan said, and Grace could tell he meant it in both senses.

She took his hand. She had seen his reactions to the teasing, and now the possible minute reality of it.

"And where am I now?" she said, gently.

Nolan met her eyes, appreciative. Loyal. But struggling. Her hand went from his hand to his cheek.

"I like that. That you return," Nolan said. Grace smiled, then leaned into the warmest kiss all evening. The last few kisses with Nate had been all fire, conquest, and raw need. But this? This was coming home. It was familiar and loving, but with a new electric current running beneath it.

"I'm sorry," Nolan whispered as the kiss ended.

"For what?"

"I'm sorry for how... complicated this is," Nolan said. "You've got a lot going on. And I guess I don't make this easier sometimes."

"Don't be," Grace said.

The dinner with Nate had been surprisingly seamless, slipping into a rhythm of conversation and stolen touches that felt more natural than it should have. The ride home, his hand heavy on her thigh, followed the same easy pattern. Even Nolan's reaction had been a predictable cocktail of jealousy and arousal that she could navigate with practiced skill. No, the real struggle had been the calendar gymnastics required to make it all happen.

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Nate closed the door behind Grace and stood there for a moment, listening. A few footsteps across the open hallway. A key. The neighboring door opened, then closed again.

And just like that, she was Nolan's girlfriend again.

"Fuck," Nate muttered.

He grabbed the empty beer can Grace had left behind and carried it into the kitchen, cracking open another for himself on the way. The apartment had been loud five minutes ago. Grace laughing, Grace talking, Grace moving around like half the damn place belonged to her.

Now it was quiet.

That irritated him more than it should have.

Not because Grace had gone home. He knew she would. She'd never suggested otherwise. She had spent the evening with him, gone to bed with him afterward, then walked the ten feet or whatever it was back to Nolan.

Same as usual.

Maybe that was exactly what pissed him off.

Nate dropped onto the couch and took a long pull from his beer.

Oddly enough, it wasn't what happened after the dinner that stayed in his head. It was the dinner itself.

Grace sitting beside him.

Talking to FIona like she'd known the woman for years. Giving Vern shit without making an ass out of herself. Talking about the campaign intelligently enough that Nate barely had to jump in.

People liked her. More importantly, they listened to her.

She'd fit right in.

Nate expected her to look good. Grace could wear a garbage bag and still make half a room stare. But she had been good there. Easy. She hadn't needed Nate hovering around, explaining things or smoothing anything. If anything, having Grace beside him made Nate look better.

He liked that.

He liked how she looked beside him too. And then Fiona had gone and assumed they were together.

Nate smiled into his beer.

Grace had corrected her immediately, obviously. 'Oh, we're not together'.

Nothing wrong with that. It was true.

Still.

For those two or three seconds before Grace corrected her, Fiona had looked across the table and seen Nate with Grace Harris beside him and simply assumed she was his woman.

And that had felt pretty fucking good. The thought made Nate snort.

"Jesus Christ," he mumbled, wiping a bit of beer away.

What was he doing now? Turning into somebody's fucking boyfriend? He could practically picture himself buying flowers next. It made him cringe.

No, that wasn't it. Nate didn't need the word. He wanted what came with it.

If Grace had actually been his girlfriend, Nate wouldn't have spent the last month asking what she was doing Thursday. Or Friday. Or after ballet. Or whether Nolan had something planned. He wouldn't have needed to squeeze a restaurant between somebody's movie night and somebody else's coffee.

He'd just have time with her.

Expected time.

That was what tonight had given him, if only for a few hours. He'd picked her up; they'd driven somewhere, eaten dinner. Talked with people they both knew. Come home together.

Nobody had checked a clock until the evening was already nearly over.

That was different from an hour stolen after work. Different from Grace coming over at eight and leaving at eleven because Bickle was waiting next door. Different from a shoot where she appeared, did the job, fucked off home, and Nate had to start from zero again the next time.

Tonight had kept moving. One thing into another. That was useful.

Nate leaned back, staring across the room.

What would that look like if Grace didn't leave? Not forever. He wasn't getting fucking married. But another morning? Grace waking up here instead of ten feet away. Walking around in one of his shirts, complaining because he had no decent coffee. Going to work from here.

And then coming back here.

Not going home first because that was simply where she automatically went.

Nate looked toward the kitchen, and he could practically see it. Grace standing there making coffee, looking tasty as ever, bitching about that new kid she'd hired. Going on about some plant not getting enough light. Nate half-listening while trying to figure out where he'd left his cigarettes.

Ordinary shit.

And ordinary shit added up. That was the part Bickle had. Nolan got mornings. Breakfast. Dinner without having to arrange it first. He got Grace whenever nobody had specifically decided she should be somewhere else. Nolan was the fucking default.

Nate's jaw tightened.

That was the problem.

He could take Grace out, have her spend the night, and he could get her to do thing she once would've slapped him for suggesting.

Then she went home.

And Bickle got to reset everything.

Grace would crawl into his bed. Wake up beside him, have breakfast, talk about work, and whatever the hell those two did in the mornings.

Home.

Default.

Nate took another long drink.

Give him more than a few hours, though? That was different. A night could become morning. Morning became a day. A day became another evening. Enough time to stop feeling like she was visiting.

Enough time for Nate to work on her.

That thought made him smile. Nothing dramatic. Grace was too smart for dramatic. But another joke about Bickle, pushed further than last time. See if Grace would laugh instead of defend him. Let Nolan send some messages while sitting beside Nate... see if she answered immediately.

Maybe she wouldn't. Maybe Nate could give her a reason not to.

'You're here. He can fucking wait'.

See what happened. Once she'd scolded him... but with momentum...

Maybe even get her to keep something between them simply because it belonged to them and nobody else. Maybe get her irritated enough with Nolan one evening that she sided with Nate without thinking. Small things.

Nate had learned that lesson. Big pushes made Grace plant her feet. Little ones had away of becoming normal before she noticed them. And Nate had plenty of things he wanted to make normal. Especially Bickle not getting everything by default.

Nate clenched the beer can slightly.

He was fucking sick of asking.

Thursday, Friday, Sunday after ballet? No, Nolan has something. No, Grace promised Nolan. No, she wanted Saturday with Nolan. No, she needed a night to herself. Fucking calendars.

Of course, Nate could make it worse. That would be easy.

Ask for days he knew Nolan wanted. Move something. Let a shoot suddenly need Grace on a Saturday. Create enough little collisions and eventually Grace would get pissed off at the whole arrangement.

He'd already done versions of it. Worked too. Nolan moved. Grace complained, but still, she came.

Nate smiled faintly.

The problem was Grace wasn't stupid. Do that too often and she would eventually ask why every coincidence seemed to benefit Nate. Then he would become the problem. That wouldn't help.

No, it would be better if Grace already had the problem. And she did.

Nate had watched her stand there more than once with her phone in her hand, scrolling through that fucking calendar. Work. Nolan. Nate. Ballet. Dora now too, apparently. Then whatever Grace wanted for herself.

Every decision became another negotiation. That was what irritated her. Not seeing Nate.

That part, she obviously liked.

It was having to figure out where Nate fit every damn time.

Nate stopped with the beer halfway to his mouth.

There it was.

He sat forward.

Grace wasn't pissed because too many people wanted her time. She liked being wanted. No, she was pissed because every fucking day required another decision. And if Grace didn't have to decide every time Nate saw her...

Nate wouldn't have to ask every time either.

His mouth slowly curled.

That was interesting. Very fucking interesting.

Maybe the problem wasn't how much time everybody had. Maybe the problem was that none of it was settled. Everything stayed open until Grace decided where she was going, and everybody started pulling at the same pieces. What if some of those pieces weren't up for grabs?

Nate leaned back again.

He didn't have the details. Not yet. But something was there. Time Grace already knew was his before he asked. Enough of it so that she didn't come over already thinking about when she had to leave. Enough that he could build some momentum before Bickle got her back and turned everything into breakfast and domestic bliss again.

And if he got enough of it? Maybe Grace eventually started sitting beside Nolan, wondering what Nate was doing.

That thought pleased him considerably.

Maybe she missed this place. Maybe she caught herself wishing it was time to come back. Now that would be something.

Nate chuckled.

And with enough time, he could fuck with Bickle properly too.

Nothing too enormous. One night Grace went home, and Nolan was desperate for her, only for her to decide she wasn't interested. Or, Nate could put the idea in her head beforehand just to see if she'd do it.

That would be funny.

He'd have to be careful, though. Walk up to Grace and demand half her life and she'd tell him to go fuck himself. Grace did not like anybody deciding things for her. He knew that better than most.

So don't decide for her.

Give her a better option. That was the trick, wasn't it? Whatever this became couldn't sound like Nate demanding more Grace. It had to solve something Grace already hated.

And Bickle?

Nate rolled his eyes. That fucking weirdo might actually make the whole thing easier. Grace had told him what Nolan thought about tonight. The idea of Grace sitting beside Nate in public, people mistaking them for a couple. Apparently, that got under Bickle's skin in all the ways Bickle liked having things under his skin... Freak.

Still, useful.

Give Nolan enough certainty, and he'd probably tolerate things other men would've started swinging over. Nate didn't need to understand it. He just needed the idiot cooperative.

Grace got less bullshit with the calendar. Nolan got whatever fucked-up thrill made him happy.

And Nate...

Nate got time. Real time. Not two hours here, and Thursday after work there. Time that was already his before he opened his mouth.

He stared down at the beer in his hand.

Maybe that was it. Maybe the problem was simple: that every fucking day was up for negotiation.

His eyes shifted toward the hallway. Toward the bathroom. Grace's toothbrush sat beside his in the cup. There were two of her shirts in his hamper. A book she'd left on the nightstand. Her mug in the kitchen.

None of it had arrived ceremoniously. Grace had never packed a suitcase and announced that she was moving part of herself in. The stuff had simply migrated. One piece at a time. And now it belonged there.

Nate looked at the toothbrush for another moment.

Maybe time could work the same way.

He smiled.

There was a way to make this easier.

For Grace. For Bickle. For everyone.

And if Nate happened to come out of it with a hell of a lot more Grace than he had now?

Well.

That was the fucking point.