

The Apartment Pest

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The Apartment Pest

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Summary

A voluptuous Latina woman with enormous breasts shares a cramped apartment with her Latino boyfriend, who works hard to keep them afloat despite their struggles. Their small world is interrupted by a short, skinny, pale neighbor—an antagonistic, petty white guy who always seems to “drop by” with excuses to insert himself into their space....

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The summer our AC broke, everything started to change.

We lived in a one-bedroom box near the edge of East L.A.—me and Maria. Not much to it. Peeling paint, a fridge that hummed like it had asthma, kitchen tiles that always felt warm no matter how early you walked barefoot across them. I didn't mind. I was used to doing without. As long as she was there when I got home, wearing those tiny shorts and grinning like I was the only thing in the world that mattered, I didn't give a shit about the rest.

We'd been together four years. She moved in after six months, and nothing ever felt crowded till lately. The place was too small for two people, let alone the third who started showing up.

But before him, it was just us.

Maria was loud in the mornings, clumsy in the kitchen, and soft everywhere else. She had this wild, dark hair she never bothered tying up, so it was always falling into her face while she cooked. I'd come home from the shop, covered in sweat and brake dust, and find her barefoot by the stove, a tight top stuck to her back, music playing low in the background—always something old-school and Spanish. She danced while she stirred, hips rolling slow and syrupy like the heat didn't bother her. It got me every time.

Her tits were huge. I mean *impossible* huge. Heavy enough to swing when she laughed too hard. I don't know how those tank tops held on, especially the ones that had been through the wash too many times, faded and soft, stretched out at the neck so one strap always slipped off her shoulder. I'd be standing there in the doorway, not saying anything, just watching her wipe sweat from her chest with the hem of her shirt, lifting it up so I could see the undercurve, that soft lower swell, the dark band of her bra barely holding on.

And she always caught me looking.

“¿Te gusta, papí?” she'd tease, biting the corner of her lip.

Every goddamn day.

I was tired, sure. Working doubles, six days a week, at a garage where the fans only worked when you kicked them. But I was *happy*. She kept the place feeling like home, even if the furniture was secondhand and the mattress sagged in the middle.

Then came the knock.

It was late. I'd just dropped my boots by the door and was about to head for the shower. Maria was in the bedroom, probably stretched out in front of the fan, her legs half-naked and glistening with sweat. I was already thinking about crawling in behind her, pulling her close, when I heard it.

Three sharp knocks. Not rushed, not urgent. Just *there*.

I opened the door, towel slung over my shoulder, and there he was.

Scrawny guy. Pale. Looked like he hadn't seen the sun in a year, and didn't miss it. Short, maybe five-five, five-six on a good day, with this skinny neck that made his head look oversized. He had glasses, too, thick ones, with round lenses and silver rims. His shirt was something you'd see at a comic book shop. And he smiled like he already knew I wasn't going to like him.

"Hey, man," he said, too casual. "Sorry to bug you. You guys got any sugar?"

I just stared for a second. He didn't blink.

Then Maria appeared behind me.

"Who is it?" she called, stepping up close so her chest brushed my back. I could feel the heat of her skin through my shirt. And when he looked at her, his whole face shifted.

"Oh," he said. "Hi."

Maria leaned against the doorframe beside me, all curves and bare legs, tank top barely holding it together. She was chewing a piece of ice from the freezer, lips wet, neck glistening.

"Hola," she said with a little smile.

He didn't look at me again.

That should've been the end of it. Give him some sugar, close the door. Done.

But something about the way he looked at her—quick, darting, like he was cataloguing every inch of her, burning it into memory—I didn't like it. It was too sharp. Too deliberate. He didn't **admire**, he **watched**. Like he thought he saw something we didn't.

Still, we gave him the sugar.

He left.

But then he came back.

Next time it was a wrench. Then a phone charger. Then a question about the water pressure. Always with that same bullshit smile. Always lingering.

And Maria... she didn't seem to mind.

She'd lean against the counter while he talked, sipping from her glass, arms crossed under those big soft tits so they lifted, squeezed together. She'd laugh at his dumb little jokes. She'd tilt her head and give these slow blinks like she was flirting, even if she'd never admit it. Maybe it was innocent. Maybe she just liked being looked at.

But I saw what he was doing. And I saw how she didn't tell him to fuck off.

He told us his name eventually. Darren. Said he lived just across the hall. Lived alone.

Figures.

He'd talk like he was just being neighborly. Like he wasn't scoping her out every second she moved. His eyes always drifted, always landed too long. And not just her chest—he watched her mouth when she sipped a drink, watched her thighs when she shifted on the couch. I knew that look. I've seen it in alleyways and behind customers' backs at the garage.

And I didn't like the way it felt seeing it in my home.

But the walls were thin, and we started hearing him through them. At night. Walking past. Coughing. Watching something too loud on his laptop. Sometimes I could hear *his* TV through *our* bedroom wall, late at night, when Maria was stretched beside me and too hot to sleep.

Once, I heard footsteps stop right outside our door.

And stay there.

Not knocking. Not leaving.

Just *standing*.

I got up and opened the door fast, but the hallway was empty.

Maria told me I was being paranoid.

But I know what I felt.

And he wasn't done.

I waited for the next knock.

I didn't say it out loud, but I knew it was coming. There was this rhythm to him now, like a bug that found a crack in the wall and couldn't help squeezing through it again and again. Always when I was home. Always when Maria was in something barely there.

It was two days later, late afternoon. I was home early for once. The shop lost power, and Frankie sent us all home with half pay. I didn't complain—I wanted time with Maria anyway. I'd been thinking about her all damn day. The way she looked in the morning, hair still a mess, those sleepy, half-lidded eyes, no bra under the too-thin tank she always wore to bed. She'd stretched across me in her sleep, her thigh draped over my hip. Heavy, warm, soft as all hell.

Now she was stretched on the couch, same tank, different color—peach this time, and it clung to her damp skin in all the right places. No bra again. She wasn't shy about it. She never had been. She was always walking around like that—careless, or maybe confident. Or maybe because she knew exactly how it made me feel.

“Damn, mama,” I said, standing in the kitchen doorway, drying my hands on a dish towel. “You're gonna melt that couch.”

She glanced up from her phone, smiling just a little. “Then maybe you should come cool me off.”

I crossed the room and dropped down beside her. She was warm. All that summer heat gathered in her skin, and I leaned in, pressing a kiss just beneath her jaw, tasting sweat and coconut lotion.

She sighed, letting her phone fall to her chest. “Mmm... you smell like motor oil.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing.”

Her eyes half-lidded, lips brushing mine. “It’s not.”

We would’ve gone further. I could feel it, the way her thigh pressed against mine, the way her breath caught a little. But then—

Knock knock knock.

“Motherfucker,” I muttered under my breath.

Maria giggled. “You think it’s him again?”

“Don’t act like you don’t know.”

She gave me a look. Not guilty. Not innocent either. Just amused. “Maybe he just likes us.”

“No,” I said, standing up, already annoyed. “He likes *you*.”

I opened the door hard, hoping maybe he’d flinch. He didn’t.

“Hey, man,” Darren said, that same thin smile on his lips. His glasses fogged a little from the hallway heat. He wore a tight gray t-shirt this time, the kind that clung to his bony chest like it was trying to make him look more filled out than he was.

“Hey,” I said flatly.

He held up something in his hand. A DVD case.

“I was gonna watch this later. You guys ever seen it? French horror. Real weird, but it’s got this vibe, you know? Thought maybe you’d wanna borrow it.”

I didn’t move.

Behind me, Maria called out, “What is it?”

“Horror movie,” I muttered.

“Oh?” she said, suddenly interested. “Which one?”

I turned my head to look at her, and in that split second, he stepped past me into the apartment like it was a done deal. Like the door was always open.

Maria sat up straighter, crossing one leg over the other, that tank top riding high enough that her shorts barely counted as clothing. Darren's eyes flicked to her thighs, then her chest, then back to her face like he was trying to act normal.

"This one," he said, holding out the case. "It's called *Dans le Sang.* Super obscure. You won't find it on Netflix."

"Oooh," she cooed, leaning forward to take it. "That sounds creepy. I like it."

"Yeah," he said, eyes flicking down as her tits shifted with the movement. "It's, uh... it's kind of disturbing, honestly. Makes you uncomfortable."

"I like uncomfortable."

That hung in the air a second longer than it needed to.

I stayed standing while they talked. Darren dropped down onto the far end of the couch like he'd been invited, leaning back with one leg crossed over the other, ankle bouncing nervously.

"I just thought you might like it," he said, looking at *her*, not me.

I took a step closer. "We've got plans tonight."

Maria looked up at me. "We do?"

I stared at her, my jaw clenching.

She smiled sweetly, looking back at Darren. "Maybe another time then."

Darren nodded, pushing up his glasses with one finger. "Yeah, no big deal. Just thought I'd share." He stood, gave a little wave. "I'll leave you two to it."

I didn't say goodbye. Just closed the door behind him with a little too much force.

Maria chuckled. "You're such a grump."

"He doesn't even knock like a normal person. He taps like a little bitch."

"You jealous?" she teased, standing up and wrapping her arms around me from behind, tits pressing into my back, soft and warm.

"He looks at you like he's undressing you with his eyes."

"Does he?" she whispered, and something about her tone made my stomach twist.

I turned in her arms. "You *see* it."

"I'm not blind."

"And you don't care?"

She lifted one shoulder. “So what? It’s just looking.”

“You like it,” I said.

Her lips curled into something I couldn’t quite place—smirk, smile, provocation.

“I like *you*,” she said.

That should’ve been the end of it.

But the knock came again. Two days later.

This time, I didn’t answer.

Maria did.

She opened the door wearing one of my old shirts—thin, gray, the hem barely brushing the tops of her thighs. No bra. I was sitting at the table, eating cereal, watching her silhouette framed in the doorway.

Darren stood there, hands in his pockets, face a little red.

“Hey,” he said.

She leaned on the frame, one hand above her head, making the shirt ride up just a little more.

“Hey, neighbor.”

“Sorry to bother you again...”

“You always say that.”

He gave a little nervous laugh. “I, uh, was just wondering if you guys have any beer. I forgot to restock.”

I spoke from the table, voice flat. “Nope.”

Maria ignored me.

“Let me check,” she said, and stepped into the kitchen, hips swaying.

Darren didn’t leave the doorway. He didn’t even pretend to.

I stood, dumped the rest of the cereal into the sink, and followed her. She was bent over at the fridge, shirt riding up just enough to show the crease where her ass met thigh. I stepped behind her, pressed my hand to the small of her back.

“What are you doing?” I whispered.

“Being neighborly,” she whispered back, not looking at me.

“You’re pushing it.”

She stood, a beer in hand, turned, and kissed me lightly on the cheek. “Relax.”

She brought it back to the door, handed it to Darren.

“Thanks,” he said. “I owe you one.”

“You owe us *plenty*,” I muttered behind her.

He smiled. Smug little fuck.

Then he glanced past her, toward me. “You got a great place. Cozy.”

“Yeah,” I said. “Real cozy.”

“Maybe sometime I can hang out. Watch something. If you’re cool with that.”

Maria hesitated.

I didn’t.

“We’re not.”

But she was still smiling.

She closed the door slow behind him.

“You’re being territorial,” she said.

“I’m being sane.”

“You think he’s a threat?”

“I think he’s a roach. And you’re leaving crumbs.”

She paused at that. Just a flicker. But it was enough.

“I’m not stupid,” she said quietly. “I know what I’m doing.”

“Then why do it?”

She looked up at me, and there was something behind her eyes I hadn’t seen in a while. Not anger. Not guilt.

Heat.

“I don’t know,” she said. “I guess I like when you get like this.”

“Like what?”

“Jealous. Possessive. Protective.”

“I’ve **always** been protective.”

“No,” she said. “You’ve always been safe.”

That sat between us like a third person.

And I realized something then.

She **wanted** this.

Not him. Not exactly.

She wanted the tension. The attention. The fire.

She wanted to be looked at, desired, fought over.

And she wanted **me** to feel it.

Not because she didn’t love me.

Because she did.

But she wanted that love to **burn**.

And now that door wasn’t just a door.

It was an invitation.

And I had no idea if I was going to slam it shut, or open it wide.

I got home earlier than usual.

The hallway smelled like dust and dried mop water. A fan buzzed in one of the windows on the second floor, stirring nothing. I didn’t hear music from our place—not even the usual thump of bass through the floor, or Maria singing in the kitchen. The kind of quiet that wasn’t **empty** quiet. Just the kind that made you slow down without meaning to.

The key turned smooth in the lock. I opened the door.

Our living room was dim. The blinds were drawn against the afternoon sun, light filtering through in gold slats that landed like jail bars across the floor. A glass sat half-finished on the table. Water, ice mostly melted.

I knew something was off before I even dropped my keys.

There was a faint flicker of sound—low voices, not hers, and not loud enough to come from a phone. The TV in the bedroom was on. And I heard a laugh.

Not hers.

His.

I stepped into the hallway.

The bedroom door wasn't shut. Just mostly. Lazy. Like someone who didn't care if they were overheard. That door never stayed open like that unless we were both in there.

I moved quiet.

Half on instinct, half on something else.

The movie inside was one of those slow-burn black-and-white types. Something foreign. French, maybe. Droning voiceovers and long stretches of nothing but mood and silence. A woman's voice speaking in subtitles, a man following her through a corridor, and dramatic music trying to mean more than the scene could carry.

Maria was lying on the bed, facing the TV, stretched long on her stomach. She had one knee bent and her toes wiggling slowly in the air. She wore one of my shirts—old, oversized, gray and thinning at the seams. It hung off one shoulder. Her hair was down, unbrushed. She hadn't seen me.

Darren sat beside her.

Not on the bed exactly, not fully. One leg tucked under, the other on the floor. He was angled toward her, his head propped on his hand like a goddamn teenager at a sleepover, too afraid to touch but not enough to keep his eyes where they belonged.

I didn't say anything.

Not yet.

I took one step into the room and she noticed me.

Maria turned her head over her shoulder. Her expression didn't change. No guilt. No surprise.

“Hey,” she said, like I'd just come home from grabbing groceries.

Darren startled, almost comically, sitting up straighter. “Oh—hey, man. Didn't know you were back.”

“Clearly.”

Maria rolled onto her side, slow and easy. The hem of the shirt slipped a little higher on her thigh. “We were watching something.”

I didn't answer.

I looked at her, then him.

He was already fidgeting—pulling one foot back onto the carpet, sitting up straight like I was his teacher and he'd just been caught passing a note.

“I was heading out soon anyway,” Darren said, standing a little too fast. He gave a breathless half-laugh, rubbing the back of his neck like a fucking cartoon.

Maria didn't stop him.

But she didn't rush to move either.

She just looked at me. Calm. Measured. Still lying there on her side like she had nothing to hide.

I watched Darren shuffle toward the door, unsure if he should say goodbye.

Maria finally said, without looking at him, “Leave the remote.”

He blinked. “Oh—yeah.” He reached across the bed awkwardly and dropped it near her knee.

And then he left.

The door clicked shut behind him.

Silence.

The movie continued, the French voice on-screen whispering something about a locked door and a man with dark eyes. Maria turned back toward the TV and stretched, arms above her head. The shirt rode high, her stomach bare. Her skin glowed warm in the TV's flicker.

I stood there in the doorway, still not moving.

“I didn't know you were coming home early,” she said.

“You didn't text.”

“You didn't either.”

“You were watching a movie. In our bed.”

She looked at me over her shoulder again. “You want me to lie and say I didn't enjoy it?”

“That wasn't what I asked.”

She sat up, tugging the shirt down over her thighs. It didn't help much.

“You think I fucked him?”

The words hit hard.

I didn't answer.

She looked at me, that same steady expression—neither defensive nor ashamed. Like she'd already had the whole argument in her head before I even got there.

“You think I did?” she asked again.

I crossed my arms. “I think you’re pushing.”

“Maybe I am.”

“Why?”

Her gaze dropped to the blanket pooled around her knees. She picked at a loose thread.

“Because I wanted to see if you’d notice.”

I let the silence stretch.

Then said, “You think I haven’t been noticing?”

“You don’t act like it.”

“Yeah? And how exactly *should* I be acting?”

Her jaw shifted slightly. She didn’t answer.

“That’s the part that gets me,” I went on, voice low. “It’s not about him. You don’t want *him*. You want *me* to react.”

She looked back up. “And you are.”

“Not the way you want.”

“No,” she said, quiet. “But at least it’s *something*.”

I stepped further into the room. The fan in the window turned slowly, slicing the heat with weak blades.

“I’m not okay with this, Maria.”

“I didn’t ask you to be.”

“You let him into our space.”

“And he’s gone.”

“For now.”

She didn’t argue.

I exhaled slowly. “You’re not gonna stop, are you?”

Her eyes locked with mine.

“I don’t know,” she said honestly.

I sat at the edge of the bed. Not close to her. Just far enough to feel the distance between us like a wall.

“I don’t like what this is doing to us.”

“Me either.”

“You think this’ll fix it?”

She shook her head. “It’s not about fixing.”

“Then what?”

“It’s about waking it up.”

I stared at the floor.

She shifted, inching closer. I felt the mattress give under her weight. I didn’t move.

“I miss when you used to touch me without being asked,” she said.

“I miss when you didn’t make me feel like I had to compete.”

“You never had to.”

“Then what was *that*?” I snapped, jerking my head toward the door.

“A reminder,” she said.

“Of what?”

Her hand brushed my shoulder. Light. Careful.

“That I still want to be wanted.”

I turned to her, finally. She was close now. Her knees drawn up, one foot tucked beneath the other. That same shirt hanging loose, collar dipped low. Her eyes weren’t proud or flirty—they were tired. Frustrated. Soft.

She wasn’t playing anymore.

“Do you even like him?” I asked.

“I like how he looks at me.”

“You want him to touch you?”

“I want you to stop *letting* him.”

We sat there in that boiling little room, barely a foot between us and more distance than ever.

She reached for the remote and muted the TV.

Then she leaned her head against my shoulder.

“I didn’t kiss him,” she whispered. “I didn’t let him touch me.”

I didn’t answer.

Her fingers slipped into mine.

“But I might,” she said. “Next time.”

I closed my eyes.

And held her hand.

The next few days were quiet.

Not silent. Just... careful.

We moved around each other like furniture that had been rearranged overnight. Nothing outright hostile, no arguments, no shouting. Just a slow, measured kind of stillness where even small talk felt fragile. Something unspoken hung between us, always there in the air, thickening like humidity before a storm.

Maria didn’t bring him up.

I didn’t either.

But I knew she was thinking about it—about him. Darren.

The way her eyes drifted toward the door when a footstep passed in the hall.

The way she lingered in the mirror longer after a shower, brushing lotion across her thighs like her skin deserved a little more care lately.

The way she dressed—shirts that didn’t cling but didn’t hide, shorts that looked like underwear, walking barefoot across tile with slow, soft steps that seemed choreographed to be *noticed*.

I kept working.

Long hours, greasy hands, and the same old jokes from the guys at the shop. At least there, I knew my role. I knew what was expected of me. You pull a seized caliper, you replace a cracked rotor. No guesswork. No watching your girl fall quiet halfway through dinner like her mind was in another apartment across the hall.

It was four days after I walked in on them that I heard his voice again.

It was evening—just past eight. I’d taken a shower, the heat making everything stick to me no matter how many cold rinses I tried. I walked out in gym shorts, towel slung over my neck, and found Maria curled up on the couch, legs bare, scrolling her phone.

She didn’t look up.

That alone was weird. She *always* looked up.

I heard it faintly then—his voice. Muffled. Too close.

Coming from the hallway.

Then a knock.

Three soft, polite taps.

I stood still.

Maria looked up at last, like she'd known it was coming. Not startled. Just waiting.

“You gonna get that?” I asked.

She didn't answer right away.

Then she stood, walked barefoot to the door, and opened it without hesitation.

There he was.

Same nervous posture, same fucking grin that pretended like he hadn't already crossed too many lines. His shirt was different this time—plain black, snug. Hair still slightly damp, like he'd put effort into looking casual.

“Hey,” he said.

“Hey,” Maria replied, soft.

He looked past her—right at me.

“Hey, man,” he offered. “Didn't mean to interrupt. Just wanted to, uh...” He scratched the side of his neck, eyes flitting toward Maria again. “I got that movie I mentioned. The one with the crazy dream sequences?”

She smiled faintly. “You brought it?”

He held up the DVD like a peace offering.

She stepped aside, and for one second—just one—I thought she was going to let him in again. Just like before. Casual. Like the last time hadn't happened.

But she didn't move further.

She stood there in the doorway, fingers resting on the edge of the frame.

He hesitated.

Maria looked back over her shoulder at me.

I held her gaze.

“I don’t want him here,” I said.

She didn’t blink.

“I know.”

And then she looked back at Darren.

“Maybe not tonight,” she said.

His face faltered. “Oh. Uh. Sure. Yeah, no pressure. I just thought...”

“Another time,” she said gently.

He nodded, too fast. “Yeah, totally. Sorry to bug you.”

She took the DVD from his hand, and I watched his fingers linger just a second too long on hers.

Then he turned and walked away.

She closed the door.

Locked it.

The click was louder than it needed to be.

She stood with her back to it, the DVD still in her hand. She didn’t look at me right away.

“Thank you,” I said.

“For what?”

“For not letting him in.”

She finally met my eyes.

“You looked like you were waiting to see if I would.”

I didn’t deny it.

“Were you?” I asked.

Her mouth pressed into a line, like she didn’t want to say yes, but couldn’t say no.

“I don’t know what I was waiting for,” she said. “Maybe... for one of us to say it out loud.”

“Say what?”

She walked past the couch and dropped the DVD on the table. The case slid and stopped near my keys.

“That it’s not over.”

I stared at her.

She sat down, legs tucked beneath her, eyes heavy.

“You think this is about Darren?” she asked.

“It’s not?”

“He could be anyone,” she said. “You think I care about him?”

“I don’t know what you care about anymore.”

“I care that you don’t touch me unless I remind you to. I care that when I smile at you, you don’t always smile back. I care that you come home tired and *leave me alone in this place* with the sound of my own thoughts.”

I rubbed a hand down my face.

“Jesus, Maria.”

She wasn’t crying. But her voice was close to something sharp and breaking.

“I needed something to cut through the quiet.”

“And now?”

“Now,” she said, “I don’t know how to make it stop.”

We sat there for a long time. The TV stayed off. The DVD sat untouched.

Eventually, I went to the kitchen and cracked a beer. The bottle hissed like a warning.

She followed me in after a while. Her fingers brushed mine when I passed her the next one.

“Next time,” she said, “I won’t ask him to leave.”

I looked at her. Hard.

She didn’t flinch.

She meant it.

I drank my beer in silence.

And watched the clock tick past nine.

The next few days were quiet in the same way a wound is quiet.
Not healing—just no longer bleeding.

Maria went through her routines like nothing had happened. Or maybe like everything had. She still made coffee in the mornings, still let her hair dry in long damp waves down her back. Still wore the same old tank tops, no bra, walking barefoot across the cold tile. Still turned on music in the afternoons—but lower now. Something instrumental. Something soft.

She didn't bring up Darren.
And I didn't ask.

But the air in the apartment felt changed, like it had been rearranged into a version of itself I didn't recognize. Like someone had taken all our furniture and shifted it two inches to the left—enough to feel wrong, even if nothing looked out of place.

Every sound in the hallway made me tense. Every footstep past the door. Every creak in the boards near the wall we shared with him. I'd pause, head tilted, waiting to hear the pattern. Fast steps, slow steps, door closing.

The absence became its own kind of presence.

Even when Darren wasn't there, he was.

And Maria knew it.

Sometimes I'd catch her glancing at the peephole when she passed the front door. Just a flick of her eyes. Habitual. Guilty. Sometimes not.

But the worst of it was that she'd stopped trying to *convince* me. Stopped trying to tell me nothing was going on. That it was innocent. That it would never cross a line.

She didn't say those things anymore.

Which meant she was past pretending.
Which meant she was *waiting*.

Waiting for it to feel like the right time.

Or waiting for it not to matter if it wasn't.

That Friday, I came home late.
Frankie had us pushing hard—three cars still on the lifts after dark, everyone wired on gas station coffee and cheap adrenaline. When I finally got home, it was after 10 p.m.

The apartment was dark.

Not silent—just dark.

The kitchen light was off, but the TV was on in the living room, painting shifting shadows across the wall.

Maria was on the couch, knees drawn up beneath her, a blanket over her legs.

She turned her head when I walked in.

“Hey.”

Her voice was soft. Not cheerful. Not apologetic. Just quiet.

“Hey,” I said, kicking off my boots. “You eat?”

She nodded toward the counter. “Left you a plate.”

I looked over. Covered in foil. Still warm.

“You didn’t have to.”

“You work late.”

I stood there a second too long, staring at her. The light from the TV flickered over her face. Her hair was pulled back into a messy knot, a few strands loose around her neck.

She looked tired. But not in the way I was tired.

She looked tired of waiting.

I grabbed the plate, didn’t bother heating it. Ate standing up, chewing slow, watching the screen over her shoulder. French movie again. The same one, I think. Long shots of people walking through corridors. Women staring into mirrors. That same dissonant piano soundtrack.

She didn’t speak while I ate. Just watched.

I finished and tossed the fork in the sink.

“Long day,” I said.

She didn’t answer.

I turned to leave the kitchen. “I’m gonna shower.”

She didn’t answer that either.

But before I reached the hall, she spoke.

“He stopped by earlier.”

I froze.

My stomach turned to concrete.

I didn’t ask who.

I didn't need to.

I turned around slow.

“What did he want?”

“To talk.”

“Talk,” I said. “That’s what we’re calling it now.”

Maria didn't look away.

“He didn't come in.”

“Good.”

“He knocked.”

“And you opened the door.”

“Yes.”

I waited for her to say *but nothing happened.*
She didn't.

“What did he say?” I asked.

“That he's sorry.”

“For what?”

“For pushing. For being around too much. For the last time.”

I raised an eyebrow. “And?”

“And I told him I'd let him know when I was ready to see him again.”

I stared at her.

“*When*?” I echoed.

She didn't blink.

“Yes.”

I let the words sit between us. Let them burn.

“You've already decided.”

She shook her head. “No. Not completely. But...”

“But what?”

“I’m done pretending I don’t want to *try* something different.”

My chest tightened. “You’re done pretending you care how I feel?”

“That’s not what I said.”

“That’s what it sounds like.”

She stood from the couch, pushing the blanket off her legs. She wore nothing but a long sleep shirt—thin, soft, and swaying with every step. No bra. No shorts. She stood barefoot on the cold tile and looked at me like she’d been rehearsing this moment for weeks.

“I care how you feel,” she said. “I care *so much* it hurts. But I don’t care enough to keep living in a room where we don’t talk. Where we don’t *touch*. Where I stop existing the second you step through the door.”

I stepped forward. “You think that justifies this?”

She didn’t flinch.

“No,” she said. “It just *explains* it.”

Silence again.

I looked at the wall behind her.

And then back at her.

“You’re still in love with me.”

“Yes.”

“But you want him.”

She paused.

Then: “I want the *feeling* I get when I know someone’s watching me. Craving me.”

“And you don’t get that from me anymore.”

“I don’t get it from *how* you are with me.”

I turned away.

But she caught my wrist.

Not hard. Not desperate.

Just enough to stop me.

“I’m going to let him in next time,” she said quietly.

“No,” I said.

“I’m not asking.”

“I’m telling you I’ll be here.”

She looked at me. Her grip loosened.

“And if I ask you to stay?”

“I don’t know,” I said honestly.

She let go.

And walked into the bedroom without another word.

The days after that were quiet in a different way.

Not tense. Not explosive. Just hollow.

We still shared a bed. Still made coffee. Still brushed our teeth in the same cramped bathroom, shoulders bumping in front of the mirror. But she had started using different cups. Not the ones I always grabbed, not the blue ones from her mother’s house. Just glass tumblers. Smaller. Cleaner. Like she didn’t want to leave a trace.

She started wearing perfume again. Not for me.

I noticed it the first morning—something floral and faint, not the usual coconut lotion she always wore around the apartment. I didn’t ask. But I watched her wrist linger near her neck just a second too long as she passed the mirror. Saw the way her eyes stayed down as she adjusted her shirt. A little more effort. A little more quiet.

The first time she left in the middle of the afternoon, I assumed it was errands.

But when I came home, I saw her shoes by the door, damp soles from the stairwell. She was barefoot inside, folding laundry on the couch.

“You go out?” I asked, tossing my keys into the bowl.

She didn’t look up. “Just stepped across the hall.”

I said nothing.

She didn’t elaborate.

After that, it became normal.

She stopped hiding it—just started saying it outright.

“Darren wants to show me something he’s writing.”

“Darren needs help hanging a shelf.”

“Darren asked if I’ve ever seen this movie.”

I’d say nothing.
She’d leave.

And then come back three hours later with a softness in her step she didn’t have when she left.

There was nothing sexual in what she said.
Nothing concrete.
No confessions. No apologies.

But I could feel it happening all the same.

She started laughing more. With *him*.

From our bedroom, I could hear it sometimes through the wall—the murmur of voices, then a pause, then her laugh, muffled and full. The kind that came from her belly. The kind I hadn’t heard in our apartment in weeks.

And every time, it cut deeper.

Once, I walked out of the shower and found her sitting on the couch, knees pulled up, texting. She didn’t notice me at first. The screen lit her face in that soft glow, and she smiled at whatever it was he said. Her fingers moved fast, thumbs flying.

When she noticed me watching, she clicked the phone off and tossed it aside, like nothing had happened.

But she didn’t meet my eyes.

“You seeing him again?” I asked.

“Not tonight.”

“Tomorrow?”

“Maybe.”

The space between us wasn’t just physical anymore. It was time. She started staying across the hall longer. First an hour. Then two. Then full afternoons. She’d come back barefoot, like she’d gotten comfortable over there. Like it was normal now.

I began to wonder what his place smelled like.
If he kept it clean.
If he’d started cooking when she came over.
If they sat on the couch close.
If he touched her hand while explaining something.

I never asked.

Because I didn't want to hear her say yes.

One night, she came home at nearly midnight. I was still up, sitting in bed, phone in my hand, a beer half-warm on the nightstand.

She walked in slow. Quiet.

Her shirt was wrinkled, hair a little messier than usual. She looked surprised to find me awake.

"You didn't text," I said.

"I lost track of time."

"You were with him?"

"Yes."

I nodded. Sipped the beer. Warm now. Metallic.

"You kiss him yet?"

She stood still, just inside the doorway.

"No."

"But you're going to."

She didn't answer.

I looked away.

"I wish you'd just fuck him and get it over with."

Her voice came sharp. "That's not what this is about."

"Could've fooled me."

She stepped closer. "I haven't touched him."

"But you want to."

Her breath hitched. "I don't know."

"Maria."

"I *don't* know."

"Then why do you keep going over there?"

She stared at me.

Then, finally: “Because he makes me feel like I’m still *allowed* to want things.”

I didn’t sleep that night.

She curled up beside me after brushing her teeth, body warm, familiar. Her breathing even. Steady.

I stayed awake.

Listening to the wall between us and him.

Thin plaster.

Thin boundaries.

And something waiting.

The invitation came two days later.

Quiet. Simple. Like a favor offered without weight.

I’d just gotten home, arms sore from hauling rotors all morning, and the first thing I saw when I stepped into the apartment was Maria sitting on the edge of the coffee table, her phone still in her hand, that distant look in her eyes. The kind she used to get when she was thinking about something but didn’t want to say it yet.

She looked up when I entered.

“He invited us over,” she said.

I didn’t even ask who.

Just stood there, sweat drying in patches on my chest.

“Us?”

She nodded. “He said he’s been meaning to. Just for a bit. A drink.”

I dropped my keys into the bowl too hard. “You already told him no, right?”

Her silence was enough of an answer.

“Maria,” I said, voice low. “Why the fuck would I want to sit in that guy’s apartment?”

“You don’t have to want to,” she said softly. “But I do.”

“Why?”

Her eyes didn’t leave mine. “Because I’m tired of pretending there’s no middle ground between all or nothing.”

I stood there for a long time. Watching her.
She didn't blink.

“He said he'll open a bottle of wine,” she added. “The expensive kind.”

I let out a breath. “This is a bad idea.”

“Maybe,” she said. “But it's already happening.”

And it did.

Two hours later, we were standing outside his door. Apartment 3B. Same hallway, same walls that always smelled faintly like old mop water and cheap air freshener. Darren had left the door slightly ajar like he was expecting company. Like he'd been pacing near it for the past ten minutes.

Maria reached for the handle first. Turned to look at me before she pushed it open.

“You coming?”

I didn't answer. Just stepped in after her.

His apartment looked exactly like I thought it would.

Too clean. Furniture a little too new. Bookcases too neatly arranged, like someone had Googled how to look smart and followed instructions step-by-step. But the light was soft—warm yellow lamps instead of the hospital overheads we had in ours. A small speaker played something ambient, electronic, forgettable.

Darren stood near the kitchen counter, wiping his palms on the sides of his jeans like he'd rehearsed a hundred different greetings and forgotten them all at once.

“Hey,” he said.

Maria smiled. “Hey.”

He glanced at me, his grin twitching like he wasn't sure if I'd swing or shake his hand.

I did neither.

“Got wine,” he said. “Figured—uh—Cabernet?”

He turned to the counter and started pouring. The glasses were already out. Three of them. Clean. Like this wasn't spontaneous.

Maria drifted into the living room. Looked around. Her fingers ran along the edge of his bookshelf. She stopped near a small photo frame—an old family picture, maybe, or something too private to ask about. Her hips shifted slightly as she stood there, and I saw Darren glance at her—quick, but unmistakable.

He passed her a glass first. Then held the second out to me.

I took it without speaking.

We sat in silence for a bit. Maria curled into one corner of his couch like it belonged to her, legs tucked beneath her, glass resting on her thigh. Darren sat on the far edge of the loveseat across from us, posture tense but trying not to be.

I stayed standing.

The wine was good.
Of course it was. He'd made sure of that.

"So..." Darren said after a while. "Been meaning to do this. Have you guys over?"

I raised an eyebrow. "Over for what?"

He hesitated. "Just to talk."

"You talk plenty through our walls."

He flinched. "I—I didn't mean to—"

"It's fine," Maria said, cutting through. "We're here now."

She took a slow sip, eyes still on him.

Darren's fingers tapped the stem of his glass. His eyes flicked from her to me and back again.

"You guys have a nice rhythm," he said suddenly. "The way you live. I always thought that."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

He looked down, shrugged. "I don't know. I guess... some people, when you hear them through the walls, it's noise. Fights. Weird habits. But you two—you're like... background music."

"That supposed to be a compliment?"

Darren winced again. "Sorry. I didn't mean—"

"It's okay," Maria said. "He means it."

I turned to her. "You're enjoying this."

"I'm trying something new," she said. "You said it was a bad idea. You didn't say it wasn't allowed."

That stung more than it should've.

We lapsed into silence again.

She finished her glass before I did. So did Darren. He stood to pour more, hands shaking slightly now. The tension in the room wasn't spoken, but it lived in every breath. Every glance.

When he passed her the second glass, their fingers touched.

Neither of them looked away.

Maria sat back into the cushions, head tilting against the back of the couch.

"He said you write," she said.

Darren nodded. "Sort of. Just stories."

"About what?"

He gave a small laugh. "Lonely people. People who want something they probably shouldn't have."

"Sounds dramatic."

"It's not," he said, quieter. "Just honest."

Maria smiled faintly. "Read one to me sometime."

Darren looked like he'd stopped breathing.

She turned to me. "You okay?"

"No," I said flatly.

She nodded. Accepted it. Sipped her wine.

"I won't lie to you," she said. "I want to know what it feels like to be looked at the way he looks at me."

"You already know."

"I want to feel it longer."

"You want permission?"

She shook her head. "No. Just honesty."

I set my glass down.

"I'll wait in the hall," I said.

She didn't stop me.

The light in the living room had shifted.

I woke with that dry taste of old wine in my mouth, and the thin blanket Darren had thrown over me sometime after I'd nodded off still clung to my legs. The TV was off. The room was quiet, too quiet—the kind of quiet that made you aware of everything. My heartbeat, the clock tick-ticking faintly from the microwave, the sound of the fan down the hall.

And the creak of the bed.

Not mine.

Not ours.

I sat up slowly, my limbs heavy with that wine-dull hangover that doesn't quite hurt yet—just slows your thinking like a hand pressed gently to your skull. I looked around, blinking through the dim. The overhead light was off, but there was a glow coming from down the hallway. Faint. Warmer. Coming from his bedroom.

The hallway stretched like a tunnel between me and the sound.

The bed was moving. I heard it now—clearer. The rhythm was subtle, but unmistakable. A soft, pulsing thump. Not loud, not aggressive. Just steady. Unhurried. Like a song with no chorus.

A breathy sound carried next—soft, high, half-caught. Maria. Her voice.

I stood, leaving the blanket pooled on the couch. My bare feet sank into the carpet as I walked slowly toward the hall, heart in my throat. I wasn't shaking. Not exactly. But I felt *stripped*. Like something had already been taken from me, and I hadn't noticed until it was too late.

The door was cracked. Not wide—just enough for a sliver of gold light to paint the wall. The sound of the bed creaking grew louder. A wet gasp. A muffled thump. Skin against skin, dulled under blankets. Her voice again, barely a whisper this time.

She left it open for me.

I knew it with that sick, perfect clarity.

She *wanted* me to see. Not just hear.

She'd chosen this moment. Chosen *him*. Chosen *me*, standing outside.

I stepped forward, pressing my hand to the edge of the door, and leaned in just enough to see the room.

The light inside came from a lamp on the dresser, casting everything in amber. Shadows rippled along the walls as the movement in the bed continued—slow, rolling. The bed itself shifted in waves. The blanket had been pulled halfway up—concealing everything but giving away too much.

The shape beneath it told the whole story.

Her body moved with purpose. Not in jerks or frantic lurches—but with a rhythm that came from *inside* her. She was straddling him. I could tell by the slope of her spine under the blanket, the sway of it, the way the tension in her thighs made the covers rise slightly with each push down. Her shoulders rolled as she rode, her hands pressing against his chest under the sheets.

Darren's breath was audible—tight, stuttering, uneven. A groan choked in his throat.

The bed bumped the wall again, harder this time.

Maria gasped. I could see the arch of her back now, the way she pushed down harder. The blanket lifted with the movement, no longer covering everything. The curves beneath were too distinct. Her hips rising, falling, rising again.

She moaned again, higher now.

And I stepped further into the doorway.

I wasn't hiding.

I wasn't creeping.

I was *watching*.

Her hair had come loose—spilling over her shoulder as she leaned forward, her pace increasing. I heard Darren swear under his breath. She bit her lip, still moving, the blanket barely holding its place now. Her hands slid up beneath her hair, pushing it back. Her hips dropped down again, slower now, grinding.

The sound of skin meeting skin was wet and open and real.

I couldn't breathe.

Then—her hand reached back.

Gripped the blanket.

And *ripped* it off.

The sheet flew off the bed in one motion, crumpling near the floor.

And there she was.

Fully astride him. Naked, flushed, and riding.

Maria's thighs were wide around Darren's hips, her body arched back, tits bouncing freely with every rise and fall of her movements. They were flushed red, glistening faintly in the warm light, the heavy weight of them swinging with every thrust. Her nipples were tight, her belly soft and flexing as she moved harder now, grinding down on him with abandon.

Darren lay beneath her, face contorted in disbelief, hands clutching her hips like he couldn't decide whether to hold on or let go. His mouth moved without sound. His chest heaved.

I watched Maria ride him—watched her **take** him. The strength in her thighs, the way her eyes closed, her head falling back, hair trailing down her spine. She was making sounds now—short, broken cries. Wet, rhythmic gasps that got sharper with each bounce. Her hips slapped down again and again, her whole body shaking.

She was close.

I could see it in the tension of her movements.

Then Darren groaned—loud, guttural.

He gasped her name. “Maria—fuck—Maria—”

And then it happened.

His hands clenched her hips hard, holding her still as his back arched.

Maria leaned forward just in time to pull free of him—and Darren **exploded**.

Thick, hot ropes of cum splattered across her chest, streaking her tits, dripping down the curves with obscene mess. Her mouth opened, not in surprise, but in that slow, sultry satisfaction of someone **knowing** she made that happen. His orgasm hit in waves, painting her chest, sliding down over her nipples and pooling in the curve beneath.

She looked down at the mess. Smiled faintly.

Ran two fingers through it.

And **still** didn't look at me.

I turned.

Walked out of the room.

Back down the hall.

Into the living room, where the blanket still sat where I left it.

I didn't take the glass of wine.

Didn't sit back down.

Didn't say anything.

I opened the door.

Stepped back into the hallway.

And walked across to my apartment alone.

The bedroom was too quiet.
And the wall was too thin.

I lay there on my side, eyes open, staring into the dark. The fan on the dresser pushed warm air in circles. My skin stuck to the sheet, heat clinging to me like guilt. The apartment had never felt this big, not when Maria was here. Now, every creak in the floorboards sounded hollow. Every empty inch of the bed felt like a reminder.

And then I heard it.

The soft thump of a mattress shifting.
Muted, but distinct.

Not ours.

Not mine.

I closed my eyes. But it didn't go away.

A pause.

Then a breath. Female. Sharp. Swallowed.

I turned toward the wall.

It was coming from **there**. Darren's apartment. The next room over. His bedroom pressed up against the side of ours, separated by nothing but old drywall and decades of tenants before us. I heard it again—Maria's voice, not loud, but **real**. Gasping. Guttural. The kind of sound she only made when she wasn't thinking about anything but what she was feeling.

The bed hit the wall once.
Then again.

The rhythm started.

God.

It was worse because I knew her.

I knew the cadence of her breathing. The difference between her sharp cries and her slow moans. I could hear her building—slow at first, rolling into something harder, needier. And Darren—faint but there—letting out these short, staggered breaths like he couldn't believe this was happening to him.

Maybe he couldn't.

The wall behind my head pulsed with it. The frame thudding gently at first, then harder. My hand curled into the sheet. I squeezed my eyes shut, breathing through my teeth, trying not to

see it in my mind.

But I could.

Her hips rolling on top of him.

Her hair sticking to her back.

Those huge tits bouncing as she rode him harder than she ever rode me lately.

And she wasn't holding back.

She didn't have to.

She *wanted* me to hear it.

The sounds went on for nearly thirty minutes. Long enough for her to come twice—maybe more. I knew the pace. I knew the way she cried out when she was close. There was a part of her scream, near the end, that broke into this helpless, desperate noise. I'd only heard it a few times.

Now he had, too.

When it ended, I lay there in silence.

Sweating.

Staring at the ceiling.

I didn't sleep.

Not that night.

Not while I could still hear the occasional sound—laughter, the soft creak of the bed again a half-hour later. A moan. A wet slapping. A sigh.

It went on and on.

Until the morning.

When the sun came up, I sat at the table. Coffee gone cold. Shirt clinging to me. I didn't shower. Didn't move. Just waited.

The key rattled in the lock around nine.

I didn't look up.

The door opened, and Maria stepped in. Her hair was a mess—tied up but unraveling. She wore a black tank top I'd never seen before and her favorite old cutoffs. No bra. Skin still flushed. Legs bare. Her lips were a little swollen.

Behind her, Darren.

He followed like he belonged there. Like he'd walked through this door a hundred times before. No glasses. Hair slicked back, a little damp still. And his shirt—a white tank, cheap, tight across his shoulders. His frame was narrow, but he wasn't frail. Just lean. Wiry. He knew it, too. He looked taller somehow.

Maria turned and closed the door behind them. Didn't say anything at first. She met my eyes.

Then smiled.

That same soft smile she used to give me after sex.

“Hey,” she said casually, like nothing had happened.

Darren wandered past her, looking around. He grabbed a glass from the sink like it was his own kitchen.

I stood. “What the fuck is this?”

Maria tilted her head. “You knew I'd come back.”

“I didn't know *you'd bring him*.”

“You knew that too.”

Darren leaned against the counter, sipping water. He was calm. Like he'd already won something and didn't need to gloat.

But then he looked at me.

“Hell of a night,” he said.

I turned to Maria. “Is this a joke?”

“No,” she said. “It's just easier now.”

“Easier,” I repeated. “To fuck him where I sleep?”

She didn't blink. “It wasn't about *you* anymore.”

Darren grinned. “You heard us, didn't you?”

I stared at him. “You think this is funny?”

“I think,” he said slowly, “you need to get used to a few things.”

I took a step forward.

He didn't move.

Maria stepped between us. “Stop.”

I looked at her. Really looked.

There was no shame in her face. No hesitation. Just quiet certainty.

She turned slightly, brushing Darren's arm as she moved past him. "You don't own me."

"I never said I did."

"But you thought I'd stay yours forever. Just because you showed up every night. Because you worked hard. Because you were *comfortable*."

Her words stung more than I expected.

Darren walked past me and dropped onto our couch. His legs spread. He looked around like he was measuring the space. Like he was thinking about what might look better with *his* things in it.

Maria didn't stop him.

She looked at me.

"I'm still staying here."

"Why?"

"Because this was mine before it was ours."

She glanced toward the couch.

"And now it's *ours* again."

I swallowed. My fists clenched at my sides.

"You're going to let him stay here?"

"Sometimes," she said. "When I want him to."

"And what am I supposed to do? Just leave?"

"No," she said. "You stay right where you are."

Darren stretched out.

"I mean, if you *want* to leave," he added, "we'll understand."

I turned toward him. "Shut your mouth."

He smirked. "Touchy."

Maria stepped between us again. "You're not going to hit him."

“I’m not?”

She looked at me. “You stayed. You watched. That means you *knew*.”

I didn’t speak.

She stepped closer, lowering her voice. “You wanted to see what I’d do. Now you know.”

I looked past her, at Darren, slouched on my couch, his tank top clinging to his chest, his eyes flicking down to her ass when she moved.

I turned back to her.

And left the room.

Later, I lay on our bed.

Alone.

Through the wall, I heard her laugh again.

And his voice, soft but confident.

The couch creaked.

And the rhythm started again.

Just like the night before.

The sound didn’t stop.

Not after an hour.

Not after two.

No matter how I pressed my pillow over my head, the rhythm leaked in—the thump of the couch, the muffled sighs, the low male groans and Maria’s high, uncontrolled gasps. There was a time, not long ago, when I thought I’d known every sound she could make. Now I realized I was wrong.

There was a new music to her—one she never played for me.

I lay there, staring at the ceiling, sweat cooling on my chest, sheets twisted between my legs. I could picture her so clearly in the next room, her thighs parted, her mouth open, her hair tumbling wild. Darren’s hands on her body. Darren’s mouth where mine used to be. It made my skin itch with jealousy and helplessness.

Finally, something inside me broke.

I sat up, half-naked, feet finding the cold floor. My pulse pounded in my ears. I didn’t bother with clothes, just stalked out of the bedroom and down the hall, each step heavier than the

last. I expected—hoped, maybe—for the sounds to stop as I got closer. For Maria to pull away, to hide, to show some shame. She didn't.

The closer I got, the clearer it became.

Maria's voice, bright and raw, her breath coming fast. Darren's, low and urgent. The couch thumped steadily against the wall, springs squeaking. I hesitated for only a second outside the living room, the dull yellow glow of the lamp spilling into the hallway.

Then I stepped inside.

What I saw hit me harder than anything I'd heard.

Maria was sprawled over Darren on the couch, both of them completely naked. She was on top, her back arched, her mouth lowered to Darren's cock, her hand stroking him slow and wet. Her thick hair fell like a curtain, trailing over his thighs. Darren, meanwhile, was buried between her legs, his hands gripping her hips, tongue deep inside her as she rocked against his mouth. They were tangled in a 69—Maria's knees planted on either side of Darren's face, her breasts hanging heavy, nipples brushing his stomach as she moved.

Neither of them looked up.

Not at first.

Maria moaned, deep and wanton, the sound vibrating against his cock as she sucked him in, deeper than I ever remembered her taking me. Darren grunted in response, fingers digging into the flesh of her ass, pulling her down harder onto his mouth. She ground against his face, her back undulating, the muscles in her thighs flexing.

I stood frozen in the doorway, eyes locked on the scene. My jaw clenched, throat tight with a mix of arousal and humiliation. She had never done this with me. Not once.

After a moment, Maria twisted her head, her eyes meeting mine over the arch of her shoulder. She didn't stop. If anything, she became more deliberate—her lips sliding over Darren's shaft, her hand stroking what her mouth couldn't reach. She held my gaze as she pushed herself deeper onto him, moaning around his cock, her tongue swirling.

Darren's eyes flicked open, catching the line of sight between Maria and me. He grinned—shameless, cocky, owning every second. He reached up, squeezing her ass, spreading her wider. She gasped, arching, her whole body trembling. Then, with a boldness I never expected, Maria shifted her position, angling her hips further back until her mouth was nearly at the base of Darren's cock and her ass was squarely in his face.

She rode his mouth harder, her head thrown back, hair wild, tits swaying in rhythm. Darren's tongue worked her relentlessly, loud and messy. She looked like a goddess, in command, unstoppable.

Then, to my shock, Maria changed her position again. She leaned back, using one hand to steady herself on Darren's chest, the other to spread herself open. Without a hint of

embarrassment, she lowered her face between his legs and flicked her tongue along the sensitive skin behind his balls, teasing, exploring. Darren groaned, hips jerking up, his hands clutching at her hips. She took him in her mouth again, but this time her tongue trailed further, caressing places I'd never dared ask for.

She ate him, slowly, expertly, every movement precise and hungry. Darren's head fell back, mouth open, helpless beneath her. Maria looked up at me as she did it, eyes dark and shining, challenging me to say something. I couldn't. I was mesmerized.

After long minutes of this—of Maria pleasuring him in ways she'd never done for me, of Darren moaning helplessly under her—she finally lifted herself off him. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, smiling down at him, then at me. Her lips were swollen, her face flushed with exertion.

She climbed off Darren, straddling his hips, and sank onto his cock in one smooth motion. No hesitation. She rode him slowly at first, grinding down, her hands pressed to his chest. Darren gasped, clutching at her waist, letting her set the pace.

She fucked him right there on the couch, legs spread wide, breasts bouncing with each thrust. She didn't rush—she wanted me to see it, wanted to show me exactly what I'd lost. Her eyes found mine and held them, a slow smile curving her lips as she moved harder, faster. Darren was panting now, his face slack with pleasure, his whole body tense.

“Is this what you wanted?” Maria breathed, not breaking eye contact with me.

I didn't answer.

She laughed, a short, sharp sound. “Watch, then.”

She leaned back, hands on her knees, and rode Darren with a brutal rhythm. The slap of skin echoed in the quiet apartment. Darren tried to keep up, but Maria was relentless. She was using him, taking everything she needed, showing me how easily she could choose someone else.

Darren's hands gripped her ass, kneading, urging her on. She arched her back, hair flying, tits bouncing wildly. Her breath hitched, then she cried out, the sound raw and shattering. Her whole body trembled as she came, her hips stuttering, thighs clamping tight around Darren's waist.

Darren moaned, frantic now, his hips jerking up into her. Maria rode him through it, faster, harder, until Darren's eyes rolled back and he gasped, “Fuck—Maria, I'm gonna—”

She didn't slow.

He came with a loud, helpless groan, his back arching, his cock pulsing deep inside her. Maria stayed on him, grinding, milking every last drop. Then, as his orgasm faded, she leaned forward, letting his softening cock slip free.

Darren's cum spilled out, thick and hot, splattering across Maria's belly and breasts. She scooped it up with her fingers, smearing it across her nipples, rubbing it in with a lazy, satisfied grin.

She looked at me, cum streaked across her chest, her body glowing.

“Do you get it now?” she asked softly.

I couldn't answer.

She turned back to Darren, kissing him deeply, not caring that I was still there. He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close, their bodies pressed together in the aftermath.

I stood there, broken and silent, watching the two of them entwined on my couch, my world shifted sideways. I turned, walking out of the living room, my footsteps echoing in the empty hallway.

The sounds of their bodies, their pleasure, their laughter, followed me all the way back to my bed.

And that night, sleep didn't come. Not once.

Nights in the apartment became rituals of endurance.

It was the little things at first—Darren's toothbrush next to mine in the bathroom, his mug in the sink, his phone charger tangled with Maria's by the bed. Sometimes I'd find one of his shirts tossed over the back of a chair, the kind of plain white tank that showed off his skinny arms, his soft chest, the trail of hair on his belly. It should've looked pathetic, but somehow it never did. Not anymore. Maria had started to smile at those shirts, wearing them herself on lazy afternoons.

They took the bedroom, of course. My bed. Our bed. The first night, I slept on the couch because I had nowhere else to go, telling myself it was temporary, that Maria would tire of Darren soon and everything would snap back to normal. I kept telling myself that as days stretched into a week, then two, then a month. But the longer it went, the less it felt like a phase.

The living room was mine in name only. Their laughter bled through the walls, through the old cracked door, through the thin, battered floor. The sounds were inescapable. Even when I put in my headphones and tried to drown them out, I could still feel the rhythm of the bed shaking. The low, guttural moans. Maria's laughter, gasping and high, unashamed.

And then, when I finally gave up and let myself listen, it was always the same—

Darren's voice, strained and urgent:

“Yeah, just like that—Maria, fuck, you're so tight—”

Maria's voice, wild and happy:

“Harder. Don't stop. Give me all of it—”

The slap of skin. The creak of the mattress. The squeak of the headboard against the wall.

Every night.

Sometimes I'd hear them in the kitchen. Maria, giggling as Darren kissed her neck, his hands already working up under her shirt, the two of them pressed against the counter as she gasped, "You're going to make me spill the coffee—" before dissolving into moans. They didn't stop if they knew I was in the next room. Sometimes Maria even caught my eye, her mouth parted, her cheeks flushed, as Darren's hands squeezed her ass and she rocked back against him, letting me see it all before they vanished down the hall.

They didn't hide.

Not anymore.

If anything, Maria wanted me to see.

Some nights, I couldn't help myself. I'd stand in the hallway, just outside the bedroom door, the wood warm from their bodies on the other side, and listen. I'd hear the soft, wet sounds of Maria's mouth on him, Darren's gasping, stuttering praise. Then the slap of her ass as she rode him, bouncing, his hands full of her tits, her cries filling the whole apartment. It was torture. And yet, I couldn't leave. Couldn't turn away.

Sometimes, after they finished, Maria would come out into the living room, skin still flushed, wearing nothing but a tank top and panties. She'd pour herself water, leaning over the sink, the curve of her breasts swinging with every breath. Darren would follow, sometimes still half-hard, tugging his boxers up, grinning at me like this was all a game.

He started saying things, little jabs:

"Rough night, huh? She wore me out."

"You okay out here, man? You look tired."

Maria never scolded him.

She'd just smirk, stretch, and let the hem of her shirt ride up high.

I tried to fight it. I tried to hate them both. But the more I watched, the more I felt that mix of rage and humiliation melting into something sick and hot in my gut. I'd find myself hard after every show, my hand sneaking into my boxers, stroking myself to the rhythm of Maria's gasps echoing in my mind. I hated myself for it, but it was the only release I had left.

One night, they left the door open. Maria was on her knees on the bed, ass up, Darren behind her, his hands gripping her hips as he fucked her deep and slow. She moaned, tossing her hair, meeting my eyes just for a moment. I froze. She smiled—soft, knowing, inviting me to watch. She didn't stop moving, didn't cover herself. Darren grunted, pulling her back, Maria arching, her tits bouncing with every thrust. I watched until Darren came, Maria's name on his lips, until she collapsed beside him, both of them spent and tangled.

When she came out to the living room after, Maria sat beside me on the couch. Her hair was damp with sweat, her skin still shining. She leaned in, her thigh pressing against mine.

"Still can't sleep?" she whispered.

I shook my head.

She put her hand on my knee. Her fingers were warm, sticky with the last traces of Darren's touch.

"You'll get used to it," she said gently.

I looked at her. My throat was tight. "Do you even love me anymore?"

She sighed, brushing her hair back from her face. "I'll always care about you. But I'm not going to stop."

She kissed my cheek, soft and sad.

Then she went back to bed.

And I sat there, hard and aching, the ghost of her mouth burning on my skin, listening to the sounds of her and Darren laughing in the dark.

The invitation came quietly—almost like a warning.

One evening, Maria came out of the bedroom with her phone in hand, her hair wild from another long session with Darren, her cheeks still glowing.

"We're having friends over tomorrow night," she said, not asking. "You should be here."

She said it like she was inviting me to dinner, not an orgy. I felt my chest tighten but nodded. I couldn't pretend anymore that this wasn't my reality.

The next evening, the apartment was transformed. Maria lit candles on every surface. The faint trace of perfume and weed hung in the air, sweet and heavy. Laughter echoed down the hallway before they even knocked—the kind of laughter that said "we do this all the time."

Darren opened the door with a new ease, chest out in a sleeveless black tank that showed off every lean muscle and line of pale skin. He wore a cocky grin I'd never seen when he was just my neighbor.

The friends came in waves.

First, two white guys—both gym-fit, one with close-cropped hair and sleeve tattoos, the other tall and freckled, a dimple in his chin. With them, two busty white girls, one with platinum blonde hair, tits pushing against the front of her dress, the other a redhead in yoga shorts, her curves poured into a crop top that barely covered her. They droppeded bags, cracked beers, laughed and sprawled onto the couch like they owned the place.

Then the Latinas—two of Maria's friends from her old neighborhood. One with caramel skin and hips that made every man stare, the other with a mane of black hair and a smile that could melt concrete. Both wore short dresses, all legs and ass, giggling in Spanish as they filled the kitchen with tequila shots.

No one introduced themselves.

No one had to.

Maria wore a thin tank and nothing else, her tits moving freely as she bounced between the kitchen and living room. She looked more alive than I'd seen in months—hugging her girlfriends, letting the white girls grope her ass as they took selfies, dropping into Darren's lap and kissing him hard, tongue deep, right in front of everyone.

The music went up. The lights went low. Bodies pressed closer together.

I sat on the far end of the couch, holding a beer that went untouched, watching it all unravel. I didn't belong. I was invisible. But Maria saw me—she made sure of it. Every time she laughed, every time she let someone touch her, she looked my way.

The games started quickly. Maria's friend with the black hair pulled out a deck of cards and announced, "Strip poker, bitches!" The coffee table was cleared. Clothes hit the floor fast. The white guys stripped down to boxer-briefs, muscles flexing as they lounged with the girls on their laps. The blonde lost first, her tits spilling out as she giggled, climbing onto her boyfriend's thighs. Maria lost next, peeling her tank off with a grin, letting everyone stare at her huge, perfect breasts.

"Damn, girl," the redhead laughed, leaning in to squeeze them, "you been hiding those from us?"

Maria rolled her hips, pressing her ass into Darren's lap, letting everyone watch as she arched her back. Darren's hands found her tits, squeezing them, pinching her nipples. She threw her head back, moaning loud enough to make the whole party pause.

Things went from playful to raw in minutes.

The Latina with caramel skin dropped to her knees in front of one of the white guys, pulling his boxers down and taking him deep into her mouth. The blonde straddled her boyfriend, tits bouncing as he fucked up into her, both of them groaning loud, lost in their own world. The redhead leaned over the arm of the chair, yoga shorts down to her knees, ass high as her man took her from behind, her cries sharp and wild.

Maria spread her legs in Darren's lap, letting his fingers find her under the thin scrap of panties she wore. She didn't even flinch as he pulled them aside and slid two fingers inside her, pumping slow, her juices wetting his hand. She rocked her hips, grinding on his hand, eyes locked on me as she came.

It was a symphony—bodies moving everywhere, flesh on flesh, gasps and laughter and the slap of skin echoing off every wall.

Someone handed me a bottle of tequila. I drank, barely tasting it.

Maria's friend with the black hair crawled over, her dress hiked up, tits out, and kissed Maria deeply, their tongues tangled, hands sliding over each other's bodies as Darren fucked Maria with his fingers. Maria moaned into her friend's mouth, grinding harder, legs shaking.

“Go on,” Darren said, voice low, “let them see what you can do.”

Maria slid down to the floor, knees spread, pulling her friend with her. The Latina lay back, spreading her legs wide. Maria ducked between her thighs and began to eat her out, slow and skillful, the other woman’s hands in her hair, hips rolling. Maria lapped at her, moaning softly, while Darren stroked himself above them, his cock hard, thick veins standing out as he watched.

It didn’t stop there.

Bodies shifted, partners changed. The white girls made out on the couch, their hands on each other’s breasts. The Latina with caramel skin rode one of the guys reverse-cowgirl, her huge ass bouncing, back arched, hair flying. Maria lay on her back, legs spread, Darren between her thighs, fucking her deep while her friends cheered her on.

All around me, sex. Unapologetic, loud, beautiful, messy. Sweat, perfume, the sharp scent of tequila and weed.

I watched. I couldn’t not.

At some point Maria looked at me, breathless, her tits heaving, sweat running between them.

“Are you just going to watch?” she called out, loud enough for everyone to hear.

I hesitated, cock already hard, my hand trembling. She didn’t look away. Neither did anyone else. The whole party turned, watching me.

“Go on,” Maria whispered, voice full of invitation and command.

So I did.

I slid my hand into my shorts, wrapped my fingers around my cock, and stroked. Slow at first, then faster, eyes locked on Maria as Darren fucked her harder, as she arched and cried out, coming around him. The others watched, some smiling, some lost in their own pleasure.

I came, gasping, shame and heat and relief mixing in my chest, as Maria came again, her thighs shaking, Darren filling her.

The night blurred after that. Bodies tangled on the floor, the couch, the bed. Maria and Darren, her friends, their lovers—all moving together, a tide of flesh and sound. I watched until I couldn’t anymore, my body aching, my mind empty.

When the last guest left, Maria came to me. Naked, flushed, hair a mess.

She kissed me softly on the forehead.

“Good night,” she said.

She went back to Darren, curled up with him in my old bed.

I stayed on the couch, the taste of her still on my tongue, the sounds of their pleasure echoing in my head.

I woke on the couch to the filtered gray of morning.

The air was stale—sweat, sex, and something sweeter, like Maria’s perfume spilled across the carpet. My body ached. My mouth was dry. My skin felt coated in a film of last night’s humiliation. The apartment was silent now. All the music and laughter and moaning had faded to the quiet tick of the old kitchen clock and the hum of the refrigerator.

I sat up slowly.

In the hallway, Maria’s bra lay abandoned, one strap inside out.

A used condom glistened in the trash.

The bathroom door was half-open; steam lingered, and I caught the muffled echo of Maria laughing, Darren’s voice rising and falling with hers.

They were already starting their day.

I moved through the living room, stepping over discarded bottles, a pair of panties that weren’t Maria’s, a tangle of bedsheets dragged from the bedroom to the floor. Every object was a marker, a memory. I remembered the white girls giggling on the couch, the Latinas pressed close to Maria in the kitchen, Darren walking naked through the crowd like he’d always belonged.

All of it—their world now, not mine.

I went to the kitchen, filled a glass with water, sipped slowly. My phone buzzed—a missed call from work. I didn’t answer. It felt like someone else’s problem.

Maria came out of the bathroom, hair wrapped in a towel, skin gleaming. She wore nothing but one of Darren’s tank tops, cut low over her breasts, her thighs bare and marked with love bites. She caught me watching and smiled, a soft, familiar smile.

“Hey,” she said.

“Morning.”

She moved to the fridge, pulling out orange juice, pouring two glasses. Darren followed her, towel around his waist, his skin marked by Maria’s nails. They stood side by side, not even trying to hide their intimacy.

Maria sipped, then glanced at me. “How did you sleep?”

I let the silence hang, then shrugged. “Better than I expected.”

She smiled, almost tender. “You always could sleep through anything.”

Darren laughed, sliding his arm around Maria’s waist, pulling her close. He kissed her neck, murmured something, and she giggled, leaning into him. They looked like a couple. My

replacement wasn't just here—he was home.

Maria watched me for a long, quiet moment.

“You're really leaving, aren't you?” she said.

I nodded.

“I can't stay here, Maria. Not like this.”

She came closer, taking my hand. Her touch was warm, gentle—almost like old times.

“I'm glad you stayed as long as you did,” she whispered.

I looked at her, saw her eyes were bright, a little sad.

“I hope you find someone who gives you what you need,” she said.

I squeezed her hand, then let go.

Darren didn't say anything—he just watched, arms folded, confidence radiating from every inch of him. He knew he'd won. It wasn't even a contest anymore.

I went to the bedroom—what had been mine, ours, theirs. I packed what was left of my life into a small duffel. A couple shirts. My wallet. Toothbrush. The memories I couldn't pack, I left behind.

Maria helped me at the door, straightening my collar. She kissed my cheek—soft, lingering, not a lover's kiss but a blessing.

“Thank you,” she said. “For everything.”

I stepped into the hall. The air was fresher, cooler. I felt lighter and heavier all at once.

I closed the door.

On the other side, I heard laughter—Maria's, Darren's, and somewhere, the echo of last night's party.

I walked down the stairs, into the city, into the sunlight.

The world was still there, waiting for me.

And for the first time in weeks, I let myself hope.

****END****

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