



Picture Us

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Category: Romance, New Adult, Lesbian Romance

Description: Drew Hudson and Rose Miller couldn't be more opposite. Drew, a classically trained, traditionalist film photographer hates everything that bubbly, self-taught digital artist Rose stands for. When the two are hired separately to photograph the same engagement, Drew can't wait for the assignment to end. But a request from the brides-to-be that the two photographers work together to capture their special day comes with a price tag that is too tempting to turn down.

Pursuing your dreams comes at a price — for Drew Hudson, that price is working with Rosie Miller, a green, digital photographer with no respect for the conventions of the form.

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1

DREW

This is so corny.

Drew, bathed in the red light of their darkroom, shook their head as they swished the tray of development liquid back and forth. They took in a deep breath as the picture on the photosensitive paper slowly appeared before their eyes.

It was a gorgeous image: a bride and groom delicately holding each other, the groom's hand resting along the bride's jawline. Not to mention the photo itself, in crisp black and white with the perfect contrast. Each of the subjects framed perfectly in the shot.

Drew rolled their eyes. They grabbed the eight by ten photo from the last tray and brought it to the clothesline, delicately pinned the print between two clothespins, and allowed it to drip over the sink.

Standing back for a moment, Drew stared at the photograph. Exposure is a little blown out.

But the order was due in just a few days, and the printing schedule was already so tight. Drew's eyes darted to the analog watch on their wrist.

"Fuck, I need to start getting ready." They set another photo to develop as they began collecting canisters of film from the cabinet in the darkroom. Stretching their arm to

the back of the shelf and finding only empty air, they made a note to order more film.

Once the next photo was developed, they hung it on the line next to the first. This is what over an hour of film photography looked like.

Heading for the darkroom door, Drew did a quick scan for anything photosensitive. Their eyes caught on a piece of four by six paper sitting out by the enlarger. Darting across the creaky floors, they popped the paper into a drawer and took one last look at the hanging photographs.

They shrugged and went for the door, swinging it open.

“Eeeck,” Drew shivered at the thought of another engagement shoot.

Once the darkroom door was closed, they slid open the curtains that acted as a median between the darkroom and the bright light of Drew’s Lower East Side loft. Lifting a hand to cover their eyes, Drew tried to get their bearings in the massive studio as the bright afternoon sun bounced off the white, brick walls.

The black, multi-paned windows cast long shadows on the light wood floors of the loft.

Drew grabbed their camera bag from their bed, packing a Canon 35mm along with a few telephoto lenses. They straightened the white duvet, removing the crinkles the camera bag had left in its wake.

“Where is this thing again?” They asked themselves, slinging the bag over their shoulder and heading to check their laptop.

Laid out on a desk larger than most dining room tables were dozens of photo scraps, negatives, and mounting boards. Drew flipped open their computer and quickly found

the emails with Ellen about the time and location of the shoot.

Ellen had reached out because Finley was a fan of film photography, and she wanted to bring a special look to the engagement shoot for her soon-to-be fiancée. Of course, almost all of Drew's clients were shocked by just how much more expensive their services were, but labor, supplies, and talent weren't easy to come by. Besides, customers were never disappointed with the final product.

As they scrolled through their inbox, one email caught their eyes:

APPLY BY MIDNIGHT JUNE 1ST TO BE CONSIDERED

"Shit." Drew rubbed their face. "That's literally due in a week."

They shook their head, knowing if they ever wanted out of these corny wedding and engagement shoots, they'd have to apply for more photojournalism competitions. But who had the time?

Looking around the loft at their old photographs, Drew bit their lip. They used to work on shoots that mattered, running into warzones and capturing the atrocities that were happening around the world. The gallery shows didn't earn them much, but it was enough to pay their bills most months. Once that source of income dried up, they needed another way to make ends meet: enter wedding photography.

The jobs paid well, but it felt like a waste of their talent and passion. This grant could be their chance to finally break back into photojournalism and prove their talent. If they could throw together something in time for the deadline, that was.

They exhaled the breath they hadn't realized they were holding, trying to release the anxiety around such a tight deadline.

The loud ring of their phone's alarm brought them back to earth. Tucking their short, light brown hair into a baseball cap, Drew checked their pockets to make sure they had their light meter, wallet, and phone. Drew gripped the camera bag strap in their hands, their knuckles turning pale.

They grabbed their keys off of the hook by the towering, metal front door and swiftly left the apartment. Greeted by the flickering, fluorescent lights of the dank hallway, Drew hustled down the stairs and out into the busy streets of the Lower East Side.

Drew was surprised by the amount of foot traffic outside their building until they realized it must be lunchtime for most people working a nine-to-five. With a sigh, they made their way toward the subway that would take them to the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens.

Hopefully, this shoot is just easy money.

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2

ROSE

Rose frantically selected a few dozen photos and applied a new exposure level to each. I have to get these out before I leave.

With Photoshop open, she got to work trying to cover up the few blemishes on the bride's face. Rose thought she looked beautiful as is, but the client had requested they be removed.

A yawn forced its way forward, her recent string of sleepless nights finally hitting her. With a few quick adjustments, Rose saved each photo and dumped them into a shared folder with the clients. Once everything was uploaded, she slammed her computer shut and shot up from her couch.

She zipped around her yellow apartment, her deep red hair blowing in the wind her movements stirred up. Every one of her friends had told her not to paint the place when she moved in, that it would just be another thing to do when she inevitably moved out in a couple of years. But here she was, two years into her lease and still loving the warmth of the afternoon sun glowing on her golden walls.

Trying to center herself back to the task at hand, Rose started running a mental checklist of everything she'd need for the shoot. She looked around her place, trying to remember what was missing.

"Crap, where did I put that?" Rose twirled her long hair with her index finger as she

tried to jog her memory.

Looking around the room, it was impossible to find anything. Though Rose would tell anyone that it was organized chaos. She paced around the room, scanning every surface in sight for her camera bag.

Rose was growing more desperate by the second. “I cannot be late for this.” She closed her eyes and let a breath fill her lungs. The smell of the incense she burned earlier in the day stung the inside of her nostrils.

But a lightning strike smashed into Rose’s mind. “Got it!” She darted over to the kitchen counter where a compact, blue case sat.

She flung open the lid and double-checked that she had a few batteries, her camera, and a couple of lenses. Clicking the case closed, Rose clasped the buckle and tightened the straps before setting the case in a pink “Lavender Menace” tote bag.

Before she could run out of the door, her phone buzzed with a text. Rose blushed as she saw the name that popped up on her screen.

Shannon: Hey sweet thing, we still on for tonight?

Like a teenager with their first crush, Rose giggled and began typing a message back. Her finger hovered over the send button before she finally let her skin meet the screen.

Definitely. I want to see you every chance I get.

Rose tapped her finger against her phone case as she waited for another reply from Shannon. But after a minute, her eyes darted to the time on the top of her phone.

“Right, gotta keep moving.” Rose smiled to herself as she grabbed her things and ran out of the door.

It was only going to take her twenty minutes to get there, but she needed to make sure she had time to hide. The last thing she wanted was to ruin the surprise for her friend. Or screw up a job.

3

DREW

The slope up Daffodil Hill was steep. Lifting their camera to their face, Drew pretended to take pictures of the landscape off the path. They slowly turned their body toward a couple walking a dozen yards ahead.

Ellen, the woman who had hired Drew, was blushing as she held hands with her girlfriend, Finley; the couple was a nauseatingly perfect picture of love. Drew clicked their camera.

As the couple continued up the hill, unaware of their tail, Drew tried to frame up a nice, parallel shot of the two of them walking. But each time they almost had the shot, a woman stepped in front of Drew’s lens, her red hair flying into frame from seemingly every angle.

Seriously? Drew rolled their eyes as the woman continued to weave into her shots. I’m not going to have anything usable.

Drew tried to pull ahead of the woman but knew if they got too close, Finley would start to become suspicious. Looking ahead, Drew knew there was only a few hundred more feet before Ellen would get down on one knee at the pergola in the center of the Rose Garden.

If they could just make it there...

Before they could say anything, the woman stepped back. Finally, Drew got to work shooting the couple. After a few more covert photos, they pulled the completed roll of film out of the camera and swiftly loaded a new reel into the back.

By the time their camera's viewfinder was back up against their eye, they had only missed a few seconds. This reel of film would have to get them through to the big moment. After that, they would have an opportunity to switch rolls and talk to the couple.

They reached the crest of the hill, the beautiful Cherry Esplanade guiding Finley and Ellen's eyes down the long lawn.

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Drew shifted to the left, trying to avoid Fin's wandering gaze. But just as they did, the redhead followed, stepping ahead of Drew again.

Under their breath, Drew muttered, "My god, lady. Just pick a speed and stick to it."

But the woman simply offered a gentle smile, clearly not having heard Drew's rude words.

Instead, the woman pointed her camera down the Esplanade. Drew rolled their eyes; hopefully her pictures of the gardens with some random couple in them were worth ruining an engagement shoot.

But thankfully, Ellen and Finley swiftly moved toward the Rose Garden. So close now.

The entrance to the garden – a narrow, wooden trellis with delicately climbing roses – forced Drew to try and rush past the woman to make the slim walkway. If they fell even one step behind, they could miss a crucial moment of the proposal.

Just as Drew was about to walk past the redhead, the woman nudged past them with a light wink.

What the hell? Why would she do that? Drew gritted their teeth. They worked tirelessly to frame the woman out of the shot, skewing the shots to Finley's face as Ellen prepared her speech.

Ellen cleared her throat. "Finley, you know I love you so much, right? You just mean

the world to me. I don't know how I would've survived this last year without you."

Finley squeezed Ellen's hand and pulled her closer as they walked together. Drew snapped a few shots of this, still trying to preserve as much of the roll as possible. But the same couldn't be said for the stubborn tourist strolling directly to Drew's right. Her shutter sounded as if she was taking pictures at a groundbreaking press conference.

Fucking digital. Drew rolled their eyes.

"I feel like you've healed so much for me. And I just adore you. I love your laugh and the way you refuse to wake up in the morning. You're just everything I could ever want." Ellen and Finley stepped onto the raised pergola.

Drew came around to Ellen's side, their lens perfectly framing Finley. The redhead had moved to Finley's end of the platform, as if she was framing Ellen.

Drew pushed their confusion aside, trying to stay focused as the golden hour sun began to lower onto the couple's faces.

Ellen reached into her pocket while she spoke, lowering down onto one knee. Finley's hand flew to her face, covering her mouth with surprise.

"Finley..." Ellen began as Finley started fishing around her own pocket and getting down on one knee.

What is happening? Drew panicked as they tried to fire off as many shots as they could while maintaining the composition of the shot.

"Ellen..." Finley laughed as she kneeled, now eye level with Ellen.

Pressing their finger down on the shutter-release button, Drew couldn't stop a light smile from creeping onto their face as the couple said in unison, "Will you marry me?"

Drew began to step closer to the scene, no longer needing to keep their identity a secret. As they did, so did the redhead. The gears turned in Drew's head. Finley must have hired this photographer to shoot her side of the engagement.

Shaking their head, Drew tried to recenter on the project. The pair both nodded and said yes as they leapt up from their kneeling positions into a warm embrace.

Drew snapped as many shots as they could, the familiar click of a near-empty roll becoming more and more intense.

Once they broke from the hug, Ellen squealed. "Oh my god! Rose! Rose is here! Did you hire her?!"

Finley nodded and, while swiveling to look at Rose, caught sight of Drew snapping pictures. "Oh, and you hired a photographer too!"

Rose ran up to her friends and gave them both hugs. "I cannot believe I got to see this."

Drew used the last few shots on the reel of film to capture Rose hugging her now-engaged friends.

After a moment, they walked up to the couple and extended their hand to Finley. "Pleasure to meet you and congratulations... to both of you." Drew smiled.

"Thank you so much. Is that a film camera? I bet those shots look amazing!" Finley pumped their fist, feeling the cold metal of their engagement ring for the first time.

“That is a new feeling!”

Drew laughed and stepped off the podium, their smile fading almost instantly. Quickly Drew changed out the film for a fresh canister. Like a leaky pipe drip, Rose’s shutter clicked loudly behind them as they worked. When they turned around, Finley and Ellen were looking at each other’s rings.

Rose pushed past Drew.

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“You’re in my light.” Drew rolled their eyes and nudged past who they could only assume must be an amateur photographer.

“Get your own.” Rose shook her head as she continued snapping pictures.

They kept moving around each other, both trying to get the best shot they could at the oblivious love birds. The golden hour sun quickly hit its peak as Ellen and Finley walked through the blooming roses.

As Rose pulled ahead of Drew, they shook their head and picked up their pace. As they passed, they lightly sent an elbow at Rose’s arm, throwing off her shot.

Get out of my light.

4

ROSE

What is their problem? Rose rolled her eyes as she fell behind Drew, keeping left to maintain her frame.

Once the sun fell below the treeline, Rose lowered her camera.

From across the garden, Drew started packing up. “That’s it, I think.”

Finley ran up to them and shook their hand. “Thank you so much, Drew. It was so great meeting you, and I cannot wait to see those shots.”

“Yeah, of course. And congrats again to both of you.” Drew smiled, firmly shaking Finley and Ellen’s hands.

Rose walked up next to them and put an arm around Ellen.

“And you!” Ellen grinned at her. “You beautiful bastard, you kept the secret for so long. Having a friend do this just feels like a dream come true.”

Rose shrugged. “It was my honor, really.”

Ellen clapped her hands. “Maybe you guys could compare shots and send what both of you like?”

Drew stammered, clearly uninterested in working with Rose.

But Rose licked her teeth and nodded, “For sure. We’ll exchange info and figure it out.”

“Really? That would be so cool of you.” Finley looked at Drew, who had yet to confirm anything.

But Drew’s eyes darted to Rose as they clenched their jaw, anger swelling in their chest. “Sure. I’d love to.”

The couple beamed, too caught up in the joy of their special moment to notice Drew's clear reluctance. Finley exclaimed, "Great! How long do you think that will take?"

“A couple of weeks.” Drew cleared their throat. “Film takes a while to develop and process. Especially for digital scans.”

Rose tried not to roll her eyes at Drew’s pretentious attitude.

“Damn, really?” Ellen sucked her teeth as she looked at Finley.

Rose cut in with an eager grin. “I can get you some of mine tomorrow by the end of the day. Then you can post them on socials!”

Finley’s head fell backward, “Rose, you are a lifesaver.”

Rose shrugged, a light blush appearing on her soft cheeks. “You know I’ll do anything for you two.”

The group exited the Rose Garden and headed toward the park’s parking lot. Rose listened in as Finley and Ellen gushed about every detail of how they planned the engagement. But her attention kept getting drawn back to Drew, who was sullenly straggling behind the group.

They can’t even be pleasant. Rose rolled her eyes as she walked faster to match Ellen and Finley’s pace.

Once they exited the quiet gardens and were bombarded with the noise of Flatbush Avenue, Finley brought Rose in for a hug. “Thank you so much for keeping this secret for me.”

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Rose laughed, hugging Ellen, “I’m so happy for you guys.”

Drew gave each of them a firm handshake and made their way toward their train. After giving her friends one last goodbye, Rose’s mouth dropped open. Drew was somehow already half a block away.

“Wait!” Rose hollered as she jogged toward Drew. By the time she had caught up to them, Rose could barely get a word out through her panting. “We didn’t exchange info.”

Drew blinked at her.

Rose nudged breathlessly, “So we can meet up and discuss which images we want to send.”

“I think email will work fine.” Drew stared back at Rose’s flushed face.

Taking a deep inhale to finally level her breathing, Rose shook her head and smiled, “I mean, it would be fine, but I’d really love to see your work in person.”

Drew let out a hiss of air, “You’ve never seen a real print? What are you used to... files?”

Rose’s forehead wrinkled, unsure why Drew was being so standoffish. Did they think she wanted to work together? Because she definitely didn’t. And if she was going to work with anyone, it wouldn’t be some stuck-up, aloof asshole.

“Maybe. Would that be so bad?” Rose eyed Drew, trying to understand what they were getting at. But it was also the first good look Rose got at them. Their light brown hair was shaggy on the top with a tight shave on the sides. They were shockingly hot.

It’s always the douchebags...

Rose watched as Drew’s temple tensed. “Fine,” they relented.

Pulling her phone out of her pocket, Rose smiled. “Cool, just put your number in, and we’ll coordinate.”

She watched as Drew’s slender but strong fingers tapped on her phone screen. They didn’t look up when they asked, “Where do you live?”

“Huh?” Rose couldn’t even pretend she wasn’t confused.

Drew rolled their eyes. “Like, where should we meet?”

The sound of Rose’s palm slapping her forehead made Drew look up from the screen. Rose nodded. “Right. I’m in Bushwick.”

Drew laughed. “Of course you are.”

Rose wanted to ask what the hell they meant by that. But before she could, Drew continued, “Let’s meet at my studio in LES. Tomorrow at... 10 am?”

Are they kidding? Rose could hardly believe Drew had the gall to joke about Bushwick when they lived somewhere as pretentious as the Lower East Side. Of course the artsy film photographer lives in some massive loft in Manhattan. Probably a nepo baby, too.

Rose crossed her arms. “Sure.” She turned before Drew could, trying to give them a taste of their own medicine. But as she walked away, something felt wrong.

This was for Finley and Ellen. It wasn’t about her ego or this rude photographer. It was about delivering the best product to her newly engaged friends. Besides... if she played nice, she could say she was the bigger person, and that was the sweetest victory of all.

Licking her lips, Rose turned on her heels to face Drew, who hadn’t budged an inch. Rose smiled, trying to soften her gaze. “I’ve never worked with film. I’m excited to see how you captured all of this.”

Drew nodded.

Is that a smile? Rose squinted to look at the corners of their mouth. Call her crazy, but it almost looked like their full, soft lips were turning up ever so slightly.

She gave a warm goodbye that was met with silence and headed for her train, waiting until her back was turned to roll her eyes. She could still feel Drew’s eyes burning a hole in her back.

But Rose rolled her shoulders back and lifted her chin. She wouldn’t give them the satisfaction of turning around.

Her phone buzzed from her pocket as she walked. Pulling it from the pocket of her jeans, she was thrilled to see a text from Shannon.

Be to yours in like 40.

Rose smiled, happy for the distraction from the prying eyes behind her. She tapped back her response as she hopped onto the Q Train and popped in her headphones.

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Take your time. See you soon :)

Her foot bobbed along excitedly to her music as the train rocked through the tunnels. It wasn't long before she had transferred to the L and was pulling into the Jefferson Street station in Bushwick.

By the time she was climbing up the steps of the exit, the sun had completely disappeared, and the city was dark. As Rose walked up to her stoop, a smile crept onto her face. A familiar figure leaned against the railing outside of Rose's building.

"Hey," Shannon smirked as Rose got closer.

Rose wrapped her arms around Shannon's neck, avoiding the brim of her backward baseball cap. "Hi!"

She gave Shannon a quick peck before pulling her keys from her bag and fumbling to unlock the front door.

"That's a lot of gear." Shannon eyed the bulging camera bag slung around Rose's shoulder.

Rose nodded. "Yeah, it's been digging into my shoulder since noon."

Shannon bit her lip. "I could rub it out for you."

Rolling her eyes, Rose pushed open the front door. "Very funny."

They made their way upstairs and into Rose's yellow apartment.

"So, what do you want to do before we leave?" Shannon asked, toying with a thrifted tea kettle sitting on the stove.

Rose sighed. "I really have to get some of these photos processed, and then I need to shower and do my makeup."

Shannon pursed her lips as she moseyed around the small living space. "Got it. I would've come later if you weren't gonna be able to hang."

"I know, I'm sorry. I honestly just want to make sure Fin and Ellen can post about the engagement." Rose shrugged as she set her camera bag down on the couch and opened up her laptop. She wasn't even sure why she bothered to close Photoshop anymore.

Shannon nodded and plopped down on the couch next to Rose, opening her phone and scrolling Instagram.

Slipping the SD card into her laptop's card reader, Rose waited for the images to load onto her desktop. She opened them as soon as she could and did a quick scan of the thumbnails for the best shots.

It only took her about an hour to select five front runners and another thirty minutes to implement some minor changes. Rose smiled as she looked at the five shots lined up next to each other in her email.

They were damn good photos. The golden hour light made the rings – and the couple – sparkle. Rose clicked send, a smile teasing the corners of her mouth as she closed her laptop.

“Finally have some time for me?” Shannon joked, chewing her lip.

Rose laughed. “No, only some time for a shower.”

She gave Shannon a kiss on the cheek and turned to head toward her bathroom. Before she had even shut the door, Shannon’s phone was blaring with trending audios. Rose rolled her eyes and gently closed the door, turning on the shower.

Pulling off her sweaty Reneé Rapp tour t-shirt, Rose took a deep breath of humid air. It was probably the last moment of peace she would have before the rest of her night got carried away.

So why was it that Drew’s rudeness was still invading her limited head space? Rose covered her face with her hands. But as her lungs filled with air, her mind filled with images of Drew’s forearms straining to get the perfect shot, the intensity of their gaze.

Rose forced her eyes open. Hopefully, the night ahead would be a good distraction from whatever this was.

5

DREW

Grabbing their drink off of the small IKEA island at the center of Quinn’s kitchen, Drew laughed along with the crowd of people. Music blared through the tiny apartment, the thin floor trembled to the bass.

“But you were way crazier in college. This is tame.” Drew took a drink from their red, plastic cup as they shook their head. Images of a drunken Quinn stumbling through the dorm hallway flashed in Drew’s mind.

Quinn, a lanky enby with curly, black hair, waved their hand in excitement. “Drew, you have to tell them about the time you found my dildo while the RA’s were doing room checks!”

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Drew shook their head, the story immediately making them cringe. “No, see, you always say that! It wasn’t just a dildo. Now I’m going to have to tell these poor people this terrible story.”

But the crowd was eating it up. Anyone at one of Quinn’s parties knew exactly who they were: a crazy party kid with a wild past and weekly ragers. Of course, Drew had been on the clean-up end of these parties a few too many times. They already had an exit strategy ready.

Beginning the story, Drew scanned the audience as they milled around the room. “So the RA’s do room checks every semester right after break. And we had a super chill RA...”

“Christine!” Quinn cheered at the mention of their favorite resident assistant. “She was the shit!”

Drew laughed, “Exactly. They give us the decency of basically marking on a calendar when we should hide our contraband. But good ole’ Quinn here, doesn’t bother to hide anything.”

As they speak, the crowd moves around and the front door swings open as new guests squeeze into the place. The duo that entered made their way to the kitchen to grab drinks as Drew continued.

“So I’m shoving this box underneath the bed as Christine and Micah look at the random fucking vulva art on Quinn’s walls. I’m trying to keep the lid on, making sure whips and gags don’t fall out...” Drew fed off the crowd, pausing as they laughed. A

massive grin took over their entirely too-serious face.

The duo started making their way toward the gregarious storyteller at the center of the living room.

Drew shook their head. “. . . They’re talking about how we’re not supposed to have candles while these fucking handcuffs are jingling in my hands. And I can tell they’re trying to like peek behind me to see what it is, but I just keep turning so they don’t notice in this 60 square foot dorm.”

Their head began to survey the crowd as they spoke, scanning the faces: some familiar and some new. But the more smiles Drew saw, the more confident they became. As their head swiveled, the face of one particular redhead stood out.

Rose raised an eyebrow as Drew met her eyes. Drew felt a blush rushing to their cheeks as they realized it was her. And she was standing next to... Shannon of all people.

Drew tried to recover, hoping their surprise wasn’t too obvious. “Um. Yeah. So they finally turn to walk out of the dorm, and I’m so hyped. But they stop dead in their tracks by the door and start cackling. Like, bent over, cackling. And I’m like desperately scanning the room for what I could’ve left out.”

Quinn giggled before Drew even finished the story, knowing exactly what they’d found.

The crowd is hooked, leaning in to finally hear what it was. Drew smirked. “So I finally realize what I forgot. I forgot to check the closet door, because why the fuck would there be anything on the closet door.”

Drew scanned the crowd, trying to avoid Rose’s gaze, but her smile in the corner of

their vision was unmissable. She took a sip of her drink as she waited for Drew to finish the story.

“Leave it to kinky-ass Quinn to install sex swing in the closet of their college dorm.” Drew shook their head and raised their glass. “And guess who’s nowhere to be found while our RAs are doubled over looking at this sophomore’s sex toys.”

Through the thunderous laughter, Drew could clearly hear Rose giggle as Shannon put an arm around her.

Drew shook their head. “My question is, how does a sex swing work in a tiny dorm closet?”

Quinn shrugged and stood from their perch on the arm of the couch. “Worked fine for me!”

As Drew bowed out of their story-telling duties, the crowd started to disperse and intermingle, the volume of Quinn’s playlist forcing everyone to shout-talk.

A path to Rose opened up, and Drew patted Quinn on the back before heading over.

“Funny seeing you here.” Drew forced a smile.

Shannon’s arm lowered to Rose’s waist as Rose replied, “Yeah, Shannon invited me.”

Drew laughed. “So that story is your introduction to Quinn?”

“Sure is,” Rose blushed as her eyes met Drew’s.

Turning to Shannon, Drew held out their hand for a dap. “Shan, I haven’t seen you

in... many years at this point, right?"

Shannon returned the gesture and nodded. "Yeah, dude. I was out working out West for a while, but New York called me home." Looking down at Rose, Shan winked at her.

Ew.Drew tried to hide the visceral cringe crawling up their spine.

Rose blushed and batted her eyes while staring at Shannon. "It's a wonderful place."

Drew laughed. "That's one word for it."

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“You’ve always been such a New Yorker. Got to hate it to live here, am I right?” Shannon lightly punched Drew’s arm, and Drew clenched their jaw at the over-familiarity.

When the joke didn’t land, Shannon cleared her throat. “Wait, how do you two know each other?”

Drew stammered, a sudden nervousness taking over their body.

But before they could reply, Rose jumped in. “We actually just met today.”

Shannon raised an eyebrow as she looked at Rose. “You didn’t mention that earlier...”

“Apparently we’re working together on a project.” Drew met Rose’s gaze, trying to gauge how she really felt about it.

With a nod, Shannon tried to play it off. “Oh, that’s cool.”

Rose smiled up at her. “Yeah I think so.” She turned to look at Drew with her arm wrapped around Shannon’s back, “I have so much to learn from Drew.”

Clearing their throat, Drew looked down at their shoes. The vinyl flooring of the renovated apartment glowed purple under the party lights. Maybe it was because they were caught off-guard or maybe they were just playing nice, but Drew couldn’t think of a snippy reply. “I doubt that’s true.”

Meeting Rose's eyes once again, Drew felt a knot in their throat. Just past Rose's head, the front door swung open again. Drew perked up at the sight of Diana's familiar face. "You'll have to excuse me, a friend of mine just walked in."

Rose and Shannon nodded, happy to disappear back into their own conversation while Drew parted the crowd. As soon as they were out of Rose's line of sight, Drew's shoulders dropped and their eyes rolled.

I cannot stand Shannon. And Rose is... obnoxiously perky.

Even though she'd arrived thirty seconds ago, Diana was already mid-shot when Drew made it to her side. She swallowed the liquor and sucked her teeth as it went down.

Diana covered her mouth as she squinted at the cozy new couple. "How long do you give it?"

"Given Shan's record, like 3... hours?" Drew laughed as they hugged Diana, "Glad you made it." But Drew couldn't stop themselves from watching Rose's hand drift down Shannon's back toward her...snap out of it.Drew turned their attention back to Diana.

Diana laughed and winked. "Maybe 5 if she's lucky."

Drew looked down at the two empty shot glasses next to their friend, the cheap table already covered in spills. "How do you already reek of alcohol?"

"You think I'm going to show up to a sapphic house party filled with a bunch of our exes and not pregame the function?" Diana shook her head. "Amateur hour."

They laughed as Diana grabbed a bottle of tequila and poured a shot for Drew. As she

poured, she asked, “What about you? How was the date with...?”

“Anna?” Drew shrugged. “It was fine, not going anywhere.”

Diana groaned. “Oh my god, just lower your standards.”

“And be like Shan? I’d rather be celibate the rest of my life.” Drew flicked their eyes to Shan, who was guiding Rose’s lips closer with a hand on her neck. Diana’s head swiveled between Drew and Rose, Drew’s forehead wrinkling the longer they watched the pair makeout.

Diana snapped her fingers, confused by Drew’s preoccupation with the couple. “Okay, lower standards doesn’t mean being a douche like Shan.”

When she looked back at Drew, they were still watching. “Dude, do you have the hots for Shan?”

Drew nudged Diana, making her stumble. “You’re ridiculous.” They paused as they looked back at Rose. “It’s her. Rose.”

“Do you know her? Is she someone’s ex? She’s kinda cute.” Diana laughed.

Drew lowered their head in defeat. “Dude, you’re relentless. I have no idea who she is. But apparently, I have to work with her.”

Diana frowned. “How in the fuck do two photographers ‘work together’?”

Pointing their finger at Diana, Drew wiggled their eyebrows. “Ding, ding, ding. That is the question. But it’s a question for the lesbians that hired both of us to shoot their engagements.”

“Wow,” Diana shook her head, scrunching her nose as if she took another shot. “That feels, like, criminally gay.”

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It was going to be a long night if Shannon and Rose kept up like this. Twenty minutes in and they were already getting noticeably handsy.

Drew shook their head. "Pass me a beer."

Diana saluted her friend and slid a bottle across the sticky table. Pulling a bottle opener from their pocket, Drew carefully ripped the cap off. They lifted the cold glass to their mouth, unable to stop their mind from wondering what Rose's lips felt like.

Drew took a few more swigs.

"Let's fucking dance." Diana laughed.

6

ROSE

"That's kind of crazy," Shannon shook her head as she took a drink.

Rose shrugged. "I know, I really would have thought Ellen would've told me she was planning on proposing, because then I could have stopped them from wasting money on two photographers."

As she talked, Shannon's eyes started wandering around the room.

The music had somehow gotten louder as the dancing in the room had gotten closer and sweatier. At some point, Diana and Quinn turned the kitchen island into a beer

pong table, and now they were enlisting Drew's help to complete the match.

Rose kept an eye on the match from across the apartment, watching Drew nudge the blonde that sidled up to be their partner. Her chest tightened as Drew's arm wrapped around the woman.

Grabbing Rose's hand, Shannon led her to the living room where a few others danced to the loud music. As they swayed, Rose couldn't help but notice how much drunker Drew was getting by the minute.

Certainly not what I pictured Drew's extracurricular activities would be like. Rose rolled her eyes as she tried to focus on Shannon's hand on her hips.

But something about the way Drew was smiling at the blonde made Rose angry.

The song stopped, and the familiar notes of Call Me Maybe blared over the speakers.

Drew slammed their plastic cup onto the butcher block counter. "This is my song!"

Before Rose could even process what was happening, Drew was invading the dance floor and belting the lyrics. As they danced, they worked the crowd, holding a fake microphone to various partygoers' mouths so they could add their voices to the cacophony of screaming.

Rose raised an eyebrow. Clearly, Drew knew these people pretty well. They'd probably been partying together since they were in college.

Tucking a stray hair behind her ear, Rose looked down at her feet.

Once the song ended, Drew threw their hands down on Diana's shoulders. "Dude. I love you so much! Do you understand that?"

“I loveyouso much!” Diana cackled at a joke that no one else understood. Before Rose knew it, the pair had wrestled into a tight hug.

At least I know they are capable of being nice.It should be a comfort to know that Drew was actually a human being with feelings and not some self-centered douche. But somehow, it got under her skin more.

Wanting a break from the sweaty living room, Rose wandered to the kitchen for a glass of water. The few drinks she had weren’t helping her feel looser. She wasn’t sure anything would. This was Drew’s turf, and they had made that patently clear.

The longer Rose watched them throw down to the music, the more convinced Rose became that it was all an elaborate performance to make her feel left out.

Shannon sauntered over and roughly rubbed Rose’s arm. “Wanna get out of her?” Her words were starting to slur together.

Rose nodded, and the pair headed for the door. But Shannon stopped in her tracks halfway toward the exit. “Do you want to say bye to your... co-worker?”

“No,” Rose’s nose scrunched in disgust as she glanced at Drew’s beet-red face across the apartment. “I just want to go home.”

As soon as the front door swung open, Rose and Shannon were greeted by the chilled air of the hallway. Chilled was an exaggeration. Rather, the hallway wasn’t a sauna like Quinn’s apartment.

They made their way down the steep, winding stairs, and once they exited onto the streets of Astoria, Shannon gave Rose a peck on the cheek.

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“Your place or mine?” she winked.

Rose giggled. But her joy quickly turned to a groan as she thought about the hundreds of photos sitting on her SD Cards.

Plus, she wasn’t really in the mood to nurse Shannon to bed.

Shannon groaned back at her. “You want to go home by yourself?”

“Would that be terrible?” Rose questioned, trying to catch Shannon’s clearly disappointed gaze.

With a shrug, Shan cleared her throat. “Nah, that’s cool. I should get some stuff done early, anyway.”

Rose nodded. “Thanks, I just have a lot of work to get finished, and I don’t want to be a bore.”

They said their goodbyes, and Rose hopped into her cab. There was no world in which she was taking the hour-long train at 2 am back to Bushwick. She’d rather pay the exorbitant ride-share fees and get home in twenty minutes.

“Hi, how are you?” Rose greeted the driver as she buckled her seatbelt and took a deep breath. She waved to Shan who stood on the sidewalk, scrolling her phone.

Am I a dick?Rose couldn’t help but wonder as the car sped away toward the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. She tried to clear her head as she watched the

streetlights pass.

But all she could think about was how she had to see Drew again tomorrow morning to go over the project.

Before her mind could get too carried away, the car came to a stop in front of her building.

“Thank you!” She said as she hopped out of the car and bounded up the stairs to her apartment. She quickly tipped the driver and pushed her phone into her pocket.

After the endless day she’d had, her apartment was a sight for sore eyes. Leaning against the door as she took her shoes off, Rose let her head lightly tap the cool metal. She was beyond exhausted.

Grabbing a pint of ice cream from the freezer, she plopped down on her couch and queued *When Harry Met Sally* on her TV. She set the movie to restart and cracked open her laptop, settling in for a long night of work.

But the photos could wait just a minute. She never missed the opening scene. As the older couple appeared on screen, telling their love story, Rose began muttering the words under her breath.

Her eyes were glued to the screen as Meg Ryan’s crappy yellow car rolled up to Harry as he made out with her college sweetheart. She smiled along as the meet-cute ensued.

After the first twenty minutes, Rose finally took a look at the images of Ellen and Finley’s engagement on her desktop.

She couldn’t help but smile at her beautiful friends. But as she scrolled through the

image, she groaned. “How are they in almost every shot?”

Sure enough as Rose paged through the photos, Drew appeared in almost every single one. Rose knew this meant hours of work shopping them out to make the images perfect.

I have to see them in the morning, so I have to fix at least a few of these.

Rose got to work correcting the images, tracing out Drew’s tall figure. She drew around their slight curves, usually hidden by the fit of their clothes. Somehow, Drew’s shirts still fit perfectly around their strained biceps despite being looser on the rest of their body.

Her eyes worked their way down from Drew’s shoulder to their biceps to their forearms. A deep line carved from Drew’s elbow to their wrist where the muscles were more defined from years of holding up a camera.

Rose gulped down the tingling that rose in her throat. She rolled her eyes at herself, annoyed at her body’s response to Drew’s.

They’re an asshole. That’s not hot.

Shaking her head, Rose moved on to the next picture. She hoped to find something less salacious but instead found Drew getting down into a deep squat to capture the couple as they walked down the long aisle of roses.

Maybe it is...

Rose slammed her laptop closed and clicked pause on Nora Ephron’s masterpiece. Her head turned slightly toward her messy bed. It had been a minute since she and Shannon hooked up; maybe her body was just desperate for touch.

She stood faster than she meant to and nearly jogged to her plush mattress and pristine white sheets.

Sliding open the drawer of her antique nightstand, Rose grabbed her trusty rabbit toy and pulled off her thong. As she gripped the lace in her hands, she could tell that she had been excited for a while; her pleasure had stained the panties.

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She closed her eyes as she turned on the vibrator, a light humming coming from under the sheets. A moan slipped from her throat as the silicone met her lips, lightly massaging up and down her slit.

The toy moved from one end of her pussy to the other with no resistance. As Rose let the rabbit slip under her hood and rub against her clit, she tried to think about Shannon, or something hot.

But Drew's stupid, know-it-all grin was the only image her mind could conjure.

"Ugh." Rose grunted as she pulled the toy from her center, throwing her hand down on the mattress.

She shook her head, taking some deep breaths to clear her mind.

Still, Drew's slender, strong fingers appeared behind her eyelids.

"Fuck." Rose rubbed her eyes with her hands. She was too wet now to just give up. Going to bed frustrated the night before a big work meeting was a terrible idea...

Actually... Maybe she could work with that.

Maybe it wouldn't be such a bad idea to think about Drew. Then they're out of my system.

Rose bit her lip as her mind began to indulge.

Turning the toy back on, Rose brought the silicone back to her clit and allowed it to rub against her excitement. A moan escaped her mouth as she thought about Drew's toned stomach peeking out from underneath their black t-shirt.

Rose let her free hand grip her own shirt, pulling it up so she could play with her breast. An image of Drew's hand gripping her thigh made her plunge the toy down her slit.

"Shit." Rose's mouth fell open as the toy teased her entrance before sinking deep inside of her, the silicone massaging her passage as she thrust it.

She giggled at the thought of Drew slipping their long, slender fingers into her pussy. The sound they would make as they felt just how wet Rose was for them was enough to send a ripple of pleasure through her core.

"Oh god." Rose began to raise her voice as her mind went wild. If she was going to let herself be dirty, she might as well go all the way with her fantasy.

As her hips rocked back and forth on the toy, Rose let herself imagine Drew's strap slipping inside her. She couldn't help but wonder how Drew would fuck.

Would they be slow and tender? Or hard, deep, and relentless?

Both excited Rose as she pushed her toy deeper and deeper inside herself.

Her moans grew louder as she neared her peak. "Fuck."

But it wasn't until she was imagining Drew's charming smile looking down on her while they fucked her that Rose began to scream.

She grabbed her pillow and threw it over her mouth as she climaxed, her body

shaking as the rabbit toy pushed her over the edge.

“Please...” Rose begged to no one as her muscles tensed.

Finally her body stopped, and she slowly pulled the toy out from inside her. Setting it on her nightstand, Rose took a deep breath and laughed. From the looks of the vibrator, she’d been really excited.

She shook her head as she began to drift to sleep. Hopefully, she would be able to control herself tomorrow.

7

DREW

Everything is too fucking bright. Drew could barely keep their eyes open as they walked down the street to their favorite coffee shop, C&B.

Even with their Ray-Ban aviators on, the sun was far too strong. Drew pushed open the door to the shop, cringing at the loud ding of the bell above the entrance.

“What’s up, Drew?” The cashier dapped them up as they approached the counter.

Drew moved slowly to meet her hand. “Hey, Jess.”

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Jess laughed. “Rough night, huh?”

“You have no idea.” Drew could hardly muster a smile as the noise of the coffee shop invaded their ears. They looked up at the specials for the day.

“You want your usual?” Jess started tapping away at the POS.

Shrugging, Drew pursed their lips as they thought. “Definitely the usual coffee. Is the pastrami sandwich any good?”

With a groan, Jess nodded. “You have no idea; it’s heavenly. And the perfect hangover cure.”

“I wonder why you would say that.” Drew laughed.

Jess got to work on the order while Drew looked out the window facing Tompkins Square Park. They used to spend every day in that park in college, wandering around taking sneaky portraits of the strangers who would spend their time there.

It’d been so long since Drew had gotten to do a passion project. To do anything worth showing in a gallery or submitting to a newspaper.

They tapped their fingers along the polished, slick wood of the coffee bar.

“Order for Drew,” Jess winked.

Drew grabbed their hot, black coffee and deli bag from Jess. “Thanks, Jess. Have a

good one.”

Pushing the door open and cringing once more at the loud ding, Drew was greeted by the bright morning sun. They squinted into the light, hoping their eyes would adjust faster if they just blinked fast enough.

They made their way down their avenue toward their loft.

At least I can spend most of the day in the darkroom. Drew sighed, the peace of the dull, red light already comforting their exhausted brain.

A part of them was oddly nervous to develop Ellen and Finley’s engagement film. Something about working with peppy Rose made Drew want to outdo themselves. Which was ridiculous considering she was just some basic, digital photographer.

Drew had met dozens of event photographers like Rose. They’d all picked up a DSLR in college, taken a few cheap headshots for their friends’ LinkedIn profiles, and thought that made them a professional.

Drew rolled their eyes as they thought about how muddled the field was.

As they rounded the corner of their block, Drew stopped in their tracks.

“Hey! What took you so long? I’ve been ringing for like ten minutes.” Rose smiled.

Fuck. I completely forgot.

Stumbling to cover their mistake, Drew pushed their sunglasses up the bridge of their nose. “Just grabbing a coffee. I didn’t expect you to be on time.”

Rose nodded. “Right. Or did you just have a few too many last night?”

Drew shook their head, hoping they were doing a decent job hiding how caught off-guard they were.

“Besides, you’re an hour late,” Rose smirked, sucking in her cheeks as she tried not to laugh. “And you set the time.”

Drew’s eyebrows wrinkled. “Of course I did,” they mumbled under their breath as they dug their keys out of the deep pockets of their dark gray denim jeans.

Rose crossed her arms as she watched Drew fumble to unlock the front door.

Is she looking at my arms?

Drew gulped as the lock clicked open. They pushed open the door, barely holding it for Rose.

“Cool building.” Rose’s eyes wandered around the filthy lobby as she caught the door. Strangely, she wasn’t being sarcastic. Drew had half expected Rose wouldn’t like the pre-war look. That she’d prefer some ultra-modern building where she could throw some pretty prints on the wall and call it hers.

They made their way up the stairs slowly. Each step made Drew’s brain rattle in their skull, the headache that had been lightly playing at their temples now dominating their mind.

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As they climbed, Drew could hear Rose's breathing become staggered. Drew couldn't stop the corners of their mouth from rising with a smug grin. Of course, the stairs kicked their ass too – they were just better at hiding it.

At the top of the fourth floor, Rose gasped for breath and rested her hands on her hips. Her face was glowing with a light layer of sweat that had developed on the way up.

Drew grabbed the three keys for their apartment door, undoing each in quick succession. The large metal bolts slid free with athunkas Drew turned each key.

The door clunked open when the final lock was undone. It swung open, heavier than the average apartment door. Drew walked in confidently and placed their keys on the hook by the entrance.

Rose followed, placing her palm on the heavy door to stop it from slamming her out of the loft. Her mouth fell open as she gawked at the space.

“Sorry it's a mess. I left in a rush yesterday, and then last night...” Drew trailed off as they headed to the open kitchen and set their sandwich on a plate. Of course, the place was spotless; Drew never missed a morning making their bed or running the vacuum.

Rose shook her head as she looked around the loft. “Oh no, it's great. Cleaner than my place ever is.”

Drew walked back to the coat rack by the front door, which was really just a black,

spray-painted pipe. As they peeled their bomber jacket off, they could feel Rose's eyes scanning their toned arms. Feeling a blush rise to their cheeks, Drew swallowed nervously under her gaze. Wasn't she with Shan?

Shooting Rose a glance, Drew wandered toward the work tables at the center of the massive, minimalist loft.

Rose cleared her throat, embarrassed to have been caught. "How long have you been here?" She walked closer to Drew, who had pulled up a stool and taken a seat at the metal table.

They took a sip of their coffee. "A couple years. I got in when the prices dropped. I give the landlord free portraits for his friends and family, and he lets me keep the deal."

"A-ha. I knew there was a catch." Rose wiggled her eyebrows at Drew.

Drew looked away, trying to stop themselves from blushing under her gaze. Despite her obnoxious personality, Rose was breathtaking. Her hair glowed auburn in the bright sun of the loft. It was so eye-catching that Drew almost wanted to grab their camera and capture it.

They swallowed the lump growing in their throat. "Besides, no one wants to do the stairs."

Rose giggled, meeting Drew's gaze. Drew hadn't noticed how stunning her green eyes were. Their breathing grew heavy as they looked at the beautiful woman before them. As if their whole body had frozen through, Drew couldn't move.

Trying to snap themselves out of it, they stood up abruptly. The metal legs of their stool scraped against the wood floors, sending an ear-splitting screech echoing off the

floor-to-ceiling windows. “I’ll be right back. I forgot to grab something.”

Before Rose could even respond, Drew was disappearing behind a pair of curtains. They shook their head, trying to steady their breathing and ignore the tingling sensation building between their legs.

Sure, she’s beautiful. But I’ve seen plenty of beautiful girls. Drew closed their eyes. None of them have ever looked quite like that.

Drew rolled their eyes at the thought as they wrestled for control of their mind and body. “God,” they whispered to themselves, “Just fucking play it cool.”

8

ROSE

Rose paced around Drew’s loft, wandering toward Drew’s low, platform bed. It was clearly an expensive frame, a light wood stain with beautiful craftsmanship.

The bed was perfectly made, not a single wrinkle on the white duvet. Rose raised her eyebrows. Considering how hungover Drew was, the lack of mess was astonishing. She kept moving around, not wanting to be caught too interested in any one spot.

Despite Rose’s hope that her... session... the night before would stop her from being a little too interested in Drew, she couldn’t stop looking at them. Drew was stunning, and so was their apartment.

Rose’s eyes wandered the framed prints on the white brick walls.

Mostly in black and white, the photos were signed with Drew’s signature in the bottom corner. She rolled her eyes; it was so typical for someone like Drew to

decorate their own apartment with their own art.

But it was the subject matter that surprised Rose. They weren't weddings or engagements or events. Instead, they were a series of travel photos.

Kids playing soccer in the desert, an old man pushing a cart down a cobblestone road, an unhoused woman in the subway. Looking at them, Rose felt their presence as if they were in the room with her. Drew had captured something truly special about their lives. A brief glimpse at eternity placed delicately on the walls of this gorgeous loft.

As she walked along the wall of art, Rose's eye caught on a familiar face: Diana.

"Wow," Rose shook her head. Diana's eyes were soft as they looked into Drew's lens, like they held a secret just for Drew.

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Tilting her head, Rose's eyes followed the delicate drape of Diana's hair. She could feel the love between them. It wasn't the same love they had professed at the party the night before.

No... this was something from many years ago.

Before Rose could think about it much longer, Drew burst back into the room, the screech of the curtain along its rod making her jump.

Drew twisted the black canister in their hand. Their eyes looked to what Rose had been enamored by. With a sigh, Drew sat down.

Rose looked back up at the print, letting Drew see her admiration. "I'd give anything to have someone look at me like that."

"That was a long time ago."

"Do you still love her?" Rose asked, point blank.

Drew laughed, caught off-guard. "No, no. We're past that. We were not good for each other. We've always been better as friends."

Rose pursed her lips together as she peeled her eyes away from the photo and walked back toward the stool. "Have you seen anyone since?"

"I'm not a nun. That was literally like five years ago," Drew shook their head, a blush rising in their cheeks. They gulped. "No one serious. Just sleeping around."

Rose nodded, giggling as she pulled her laptop out of her tote bag and set it on the table.

Drew looked down at their hands and cleared their throat. “You and Shan are cute.”

She was surprised by the comment. From everything she saw last night, Drew could hardly stand Shannon. But Rose simply shrugged. “Yeah, she’s sweet.” Rose looked off toward Drew’s perfect bed. The thoughts she had about Drew the night before invaded her mind once more, images of Drew’s hands on her thighs...

“So, show me what you got.” Drew interrupted.

Rose jumped, her forehead wrinkling as she tried to catch up. Her clit was throbbing, and her heart was pounding with excitement. Did they mean...?

“The engagement?” Drew raised an eyebrow, laughing.

“Right,” Rose tucked a piece of her hair behind her ear. “Sorry.”

Her fingers guided the way to Photoshop, giving her mind a moment to catch up and clear the nasty thoughts lingering in her brain.

She opened the few hundred photos and began scrolling through them. She tried to skip over anything she knew was trashed.

“Sorry I didn’t get rid of the duds: no time since yesterday,” Rose giggled.

Drew shrugged, concern washing over their face. “That’s a lot of shots.”

Rose shrugged, “Benefits of digital?”

As much as Drew tried to hide the eye roll, Rose could have seen it from space.

Asshole. Rose felt her center grow slick. Traitor.

She shifted in her chair and eyed Drew. “What do you have?”

“The shoot is going to take an hour to develop, and that’s just the negatives. Then I’ll have to print the best ones and digitize them.” Drew took a deep breath. It was clear to Rose that as tedious of an operation as it was, Drew was almost giddy about the lengthy process.

Drew continued, “So maybe I can cull some of mine, you can cull some of yours, and we’ll check in. Meet later this week, maybe?”

“Seriously?” Rose tried to hide the annoyance in her voice. She took an hour train into Manhattan just to have Drew turn her around and send her out the door.

Beneath her annoyance, though, was surprise. From everything she had seen, Drew couldn’t stand being around her. Why would they offer to spend more time in person?

Shaking their head, Drew lightly licked their lips. “Yeah, seriously. If you can get through that many pictures in time.”

Rose nodded. “Sure.”

Pretentious ass. Like I’m not used to cutting down. Rose rolled her eyes.

She slammed her laptop closed far louder than she meant to and shoved it into her bag. As she packed up her bag, she half expected Drew to look up from their canister. But instead, they continued fidgeting with the black container, swishing the liquid inside around.

Rose collected her things and headed for the door. She turned to look back at Drew, who was still staring down. Opening her mouth to snap, Rose decided against saying anything and gritted her teeth instead.

She swung open the heavy door, having to pull harder than she would’ve liked, and slammed it closed behind her. The clang of the metal echoed in the loft.

Unlike the tedious climb up, the trip down the steep steps was quick and frantic. Drew was possibly the most annoying person she had ever met, and she couldn’t get out of their building fast enough.

As she pushed open the lobby door and out into the June heat, Rose shook her head. With a deep breath, she tried to recenter herself. It wouldn’t have been right to let some pretentious ass ruin her entire day.

Since she’d already traveled into Manhattan, maybe she could make a day of it.

Just as she was pulling out her phone to see if Ellen or Fin would be around to hang

out, a text from Shannon popped onto her homescreen. A smile took over her face; maybe this was exactly what she needed to cheer her up.

She swiped on the message and read it:

Hey. Sorry to do this over text. I just don't think this is working for me. Hope I'll see you around.

Rose's mouth fell open. She felt like she'd have to scoop her jaw off the hot cement.

"Is she fucking for real?" Rose gasped as she looked around. No fucking way did Shan just...

It couldn't be...

But as she read it over again, she knew it was true. She shook her head; the worst part was that she should have seen it coming. Shan had been a douche from the beginning, no matter how hard Rose tried to explain her behavior away.

Groaning, Rose looked up to the sky. She wasn't sure who she was looking for answers from, but she thought she might as well ask: When will I ever catch a break?

9

DREW

The restaurant was stupidly busy for a Thursday night, and Drew could hardly focus on the woman in front of them.

"But yeah, it's not what I want to do forever, obviously. But it works for now." Liz smiled nervously as she looked at Drew.

Drew nodded, “It does sound interesting, though.” Drew looked at Liz’s face, a light, glittery eyeshadow brightening her brown eyes.

Their mind jumped back to Rose’s glowing red hair and summer green eyes. They gulped as they focused back on Liz. It was a first date; they shouldn’t be thinking about a colleague. Besides, Liz was pretty, and she seemed sweet.

Shaking themselves out of it, Drew took a sip of their Old Fashioned.

“And I am working on artistic projects too, obviously.” Liz swirled her glass.

Drew nodded. “That’s cool, what are you working on?”

Liz’s face lit up, immediately enthused to talk about her passion. But before she could jump in, the waiter approached the table. “Can I get either of you anything else?”

Looking to check with Liz, Drew shook their head. Her eyes looked hungry, but not for anything on the menu. Drew’s lips curled into a smile. “I think we’re all set actually.”

With a nod, the waiter headed for their station to grab the check.

“Mostly, I’m working on an art installation about the modern dating scene.” Liz tossed her hair at her scalp, letting the wild brown locks settle wherever they pleased.

Drew nodded. “Oh really?”

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Liz lifted her hand, “I never use any real names. But I think the way we fall in love is so meta.”

Taking a sip from their glass, Drew looked into Liz’s eyes. It was a strange project. Of course, Drew knew the deal; when you date an artist, you end up in their work. So it wasn’t the most asinine thought to them.

Hell, that picture of Diana is proof enough.

The waiter returned with the check and set it in the middle. Drew and Liz both put their cards down. With a sigh and a light eye roll at the additional work, the waiter took the cards back to their station.

Drew turned their attention back to Liz, “Well I guess I’ll have to see it when it’s done.”

Liz blushed, as if she was imaging Drew on her arm at the gallery opening. The pair stared into each other’s eyes for a moment before the waiter set their cards down. Without another word, the two stood up and headed for the door.

The warm rush of early-summer air slammed into them as they pushed open the restaurant doors. Drew felt a light sweat building on their forehead as they stepped off to the side of the curb.

“So...” Liz looked around, rocking on the ball of her feet. She leaned closer to Drew. Drew looked slightly down at her. It was clear where the night was headed. So Drew dove in, planting a lush kiss on Liz’s lips.

But as they pushed against hers, Drew's mind wondered what Rose's would have felt like. What it would have felt like to have her intoxicating eyes luring Drew in for more...

Seriously, that's fucked up. Drew shook themselves out of it as they pulled away from the kiss. Liz was great. She seemed funny and smart.

"Your place or mine?" Liz bit her lip as she looked up at Drew.

Drew laughed and looked down at their feet. "Mine's a couple blocks from here."

"Fuck," Drew grumbled as they scrambled to silence the obnoxiously loud phone call. They squinted in the bright, early morning light of their loft. "Who the fuck calls this early?"

Drew groaned as they finally got the phone in the palm of their hands. Lowering their voice, Drew slid their finger across the screen to accept the call. "Hello?"

"Hey."

Their forehead wrinkled as they tried to place the low and sultry voice. "I'm sorry, who is this?"

A familiar scoff from the other end. "You haven't saved my number? I thought we had something."

"Rose." Drew rolled their eyes.

With a laugh, Rose continued, "Bingo. Look, I was just calling to see if you had a chance to look at the edits I sent you. I want to send Fin and Ellen more than two pics today so they have some stuff to post."

Drew fell back into their bed, the plush mattress surrounding them. It wasn't long before Liz, who had been sleeping peacefully beside them, rolled over and began planting kisses on Drew's bare chest.

Raising a finger, Drew tried to get Liz to be a little more subtle as they answered, "Uh, no. I didn't even know you sent them..." Their voice trailed off as they sat up, putting the phone as speaker as they checked their email.

Crap. She sent them yesterday afternoon.

Liz giggled from next to Drew and whispered, "That was quite a night. We should grab breakfast or something."

Before Drew could say anything, Rose was giggling on the other end of the phone. "A-ha. Sounds like you were busy. Don't worry about it, I'm just gonna send over the ones I think are best."

Drew cleared their throat, beginning to get out of the bed. They fumbled around the floor for a t-shirt, finding only the dirty Hozier shirt from the night before. "No. No, don't do that. I'm looking right now."

As they pulled the shirt over their head, they stumbled toward their desktop.

"Ya know... for someone who..." Rose trailed off.

Drew almost egged her on, desperate to know what Ms. Pep really had to say. But before they could, Rose sighed. "Nevermind. It's not worth it. Just let me know what you think.."

"Okay..." Drew started.

But before they could say anything else, the call disconnected. Drew looked at the phone screen to make sure the call hadn't dropped. Sure enough, Rose had hung up.

Rude.

Drew chewed the inside of their cheek as they tapped their finger against their phone. Their eyes wandered around the apartment, landing on the near stranger in their bed. Liz sat upright in the bed with the pristine, white sheets wrapped around her torso, concealing the body Drew had gotten to know the night before.

They struggled to find the words, stammering over themselves. Eventually, Drew settled on, “So, I’ve actually got some work to do.”

Liz took a deep breath and nodded, leaning over the edge of the bed and to grab her shirt. “I take it we won’t be going on another date?”

Looking at her, Drew chuckled. She was a sweet woman. She wouldn’t struggle to find someone. But Drew clearly wasn’t in the place to put their work aside for even the shot at love.

Not if they had any hope of getting back to the projects they really cared about.

The silence was enough of an answer, prompting Liz to collect her scattered things.

“There’s no need to rush out though; help yourself to coffee or food. I’m just going to be over here,” Drew pointed to the desk.

Liz was already standing, half dressed. “That’s okay. I’ve gotta feed my cat anyway.”

As Liz made her way to the front door, Drew stepped closer. “I really do want to see

the installation though.”

Turning, Liz laughed. “I’ll text you the details.” And just like that, she was gone, and Drew was alone in their studio. They took one deep breath, closing their eyes as they thought, I hope she isn’t offended.

Drew drummed their fingers along the table before turning back to the desktop once it fully booted up. They opened the email, and while the images processed, headed to the kitchen for a fresh cup of coffee.

Leaning against the counter, their cheeks poked out of the boxers they had thrown on. The cold stone shocked them, almost making them spill coffee on the wood floors. From across the loft, Drew saw the images appear.

They basically threw themselves toward the computer, strangely eager to see what Rose had to offer.

Sitting in the desk chair, Drew scrolled through what ended up being forty pictures. Still way too many to whittle down, but whatever. Drew pursed their lips against their mug as they sipped the boiling hot coffee.

But they couldn’t lie that nearly every picture was worth being included. The minor edits Rose had made the day before had gone a long way. Drew selected one of Ellen down on one knee. Fin’s hands clasping her face as she got down on her own knee. Rose had captured the shock perfectly. But not just the shock.

Drew leaned closer to the screen. Her exposure was perfect, an exact balance of the setting sun behind them and their well-lit faces. Drew shook their head as they laughed.

Even the framing is perfect.

They forced air into their lungs. Something about the way she had captured her friends was making Drew's chest hurt.

They found a few that needed to be sent: a classic shot of the rings, both of them holding hands before the proposal, the shock of the dual proposal, and a few posed after the engagement. Drew compiled them in the body of the email and began writing back:

Rose,

Below are a few I think work. Sorry for judging you. They're beautiful shots.

Drew

Drew hovered over the keyboard for a minute. A part of them couldn't believe Rose had managed to do something so stunning, especially with such an attitude.

They rubbed their ring finger along the delete button. Eventually, they slammed down on the button, added something back, and clicked send, crossing their arms to stop themselves from hitting the "undo" button.

As they chewed their lip, they reread it.

Rose,

Below are a few I think work. Fin and Ellen will like them.

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Drew Hudson

Drew shrugged it off and stood from the desk. She'd have to do more than get a few shots out of a few hundred right to impress them.

Grabbing a pair of loose jeans from the clothes rack by the window, Drew pulled them over their hips and headed into the dark room.

They ripped a few dried negatives off the clothesline at the back of the room, the red lighting dimmer than usual as the bulb warmed up. With the negatives in hand, Drew went back out to the loft and headed to the lightbox by the desktop.

Flicking the switch to the machine, the bright white panel illuminated, and Drew set each negative down gently. They pulled out a clear plastic sheet from inside a drawer and slipped each row of negatives inside the two-inch wide channels. Once they were secure inside the sheet, Drew placed them on top of the lightbox.

Each picture glowed, the brownish-amber film finally showing images. Drew grabbed the magnifier next to the box and lowered their head to the strips of images.

There were over fifty shots in this sleeve and another fifty still hanging to dry. As Drew examined each shot, they couldn't help but smile.

The way Fin and Ellen looked at each other... how could they not be a little jealous?

"That's it," Drew clicked their tongue as they looked at a shot of Fin's face when Ellen kneeled down in front of her. It wasthepicturesque shot of the happy couple.

Drew stood up from their desk chair and paced around, unable to tear their eyes from their inbox, still open on the desktop. They took a deep breath and rolled their eyes before pulling their phone out of their pocket.

“Hey. Do you want to come to the studio and help me out?” Drew licked their teeth as they shook their head. They couldn’t believe what they were doing.

A giggle came from the other end. “Is your company gone, or is it gonna be a party?”

Drew chuffed and raised their eyebrows. “Very funny. Do you want to or not?”

Rose cleared her throat. “Yeah, I do. I’ll be there in an hourish.”

“See you then,” Drew said as they hung up the phone, tapping the device against their palm. A smile crept to the corners of their mouth. This better not be a mistake.

10

ROSE

Rose hung up her phone and stared at the screen in disbelief. But she didn’t have time to linger.

She sprinted around her apartment, throwing supplies into her tote bag. Grabbing her laptop, charger, and hard drive, she frantically searched for anything she might be missing. I must be missing something.

As she reached for the front door, Rose paused and looked down at her outfit.

“Oops.” She had completely forgotten to actually get dressed. Running to her closet, Rose grabbed a pair of red corduroys and threw them on. She ripped off her Central

Valley High t-shirt and put on a simple, black bra.

She scooped her hand into the bra and lifted, giving her boobs some extra cleavage. The beige, knit vest she threw on top had a slight v-neck that gave just a peek. She hustled to the mirror to make sure it all worked.

Looking her outfit up and down, Rose's heart raced. She couldn't stop herself from wondering if Drew would think she looked hot. If they were just as tempted by her as she was by them.

Rolling her eyes, Rose grabbed her tote bag from the counter, happy enough with her outfit. She threw on a pair of white sneakers and scanned her living room one last time for anything she might be forgetting.

She sprinted out of her apartment and down the stairs, already certain to be late.

Warm, summer air filled Rose's lungs as she pushed open the door of her building and headed for the subway. She hopped on the next train and before she knew it, she was rocketing toward Manhattan.

By the time she had caught her breath halfway to Drew's place, Rose couldn't believe what she was doing.

Why am I so eager to spend time with this absolute asshole?The train rumbled through the tunnels.

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Rose convinced herself it was because Drew was a good professional contact. It never hurt to have friends in the business. But before she could dissect her motives, the train was screeching to a halt at the Delancey-Essex Station.

As she walked, she realized it was still before noon. Maybe a cup of coffee would make Drew more tolerable.

Rose stopped in front of a Starbucks, about to grab the door handle when something stopped her. Pulling out her phone, Rose googled the coffee shop she had seen on Drew's cup. It was only a block out of the way... plus, she could avoid the inevitable lecture Drew would give her if she brought big-box-store coffee.

She certainly wasn't in the mood for more of Drew's judgy looks.

"This is ridiculous." Rose groaned as she walked away from Starbucks and toward C&B.

When she approached the hole-in-the-wall shop, Rose almost missed the entrance completely.

As soon as the door opened, a bell above the door announced her entrance. A peppy barista smiled at her, "Hey, how are you?"

Rose smiled back and tapped her fingers on the counter. "I'm good, thanks. How are you?"

The barista nodded and shrugged. "Livin' la vida loca. What can I get for you?"

“This is going to be odd,” Rose stuttered as she looked up at the Barista’s nametag, “Jess, do you happen to have a regular customer with light brown hair, photographer, stunning hazel eyes?”

Stunning hazel eyes? Get over yourself. Rose stopped herself from straight up describing Drew’s bulging biceps.

Jess laughed. “Drew?”

“That’s the one,” Rose giggled, “Do you happen to remember their order?”

Wrinkling their eyebrows, Jess paused before saying, “Sure, but I have to ask: are you planning on poisoning them?”

Rose tucked her hair behind her ear with a laugh. “No, though I can’t say I haven’t thought about it. Could I get one of what they ordered and one oat milk latte, no whip?”

Jess smiled and put the order into the system. “You got it.”

Once Rose paid, Jess shook her head and laughed to herself. Rose couldn’t help but ask, “What’s so funny?”

“I probably shouldn’t,” Jess considered, “I just never thought Drew would have someone coming to pick up coffee for them. They can be... hard to read.”

Rose looked up to the ceiling and then back down to the smiling Jess. With a wink, Rose confessed, “Honestly, I’m trying to win them over. But I will find you and end you if you ever mention that to them.”

Jess used her hand to zip her mouth and lock the secret away.

By the time they had finished chatting, the drinks were done.

With a cardboard carrier in hand, Rose waved to Jess. “Thanks for your help! Have a nice day!”

Rose turned and left the shop, speed walking the last couple blocks to Drew’s place. As soon as her finger met the cold, metal doorbell, she was buzzed into the building.

Maybe I’m not the only eager one.

After an intense trek up the worst steps she’d ever climbed, Rose knocked on the door, not waiting to catch her breath.

She had barely lowered her fist from the door when it was swinging open.

“You said an hour,” Drew snipped.

Rose shoved the coffee into Drew’s hands. “Yeah, from Brooklyn, which really means two hours. Especially with coffee.”

Drew blinked at the cup in their hand, raising an eyebrow before taking a sip and opening the door for Rose. “Let’s get to work then.”

It was so typical that Drew wouldn’t say thanks. Or that they wouldn’t even acknowledge that she had gone out of her way to get it from Drew’s regular shop.

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But as she moved past Drew and into the loft, Rose could have sworn she felt Drew's eyes scan down her body, checking out her ass in the corduroy pants. And she couldn't blame them; her ass looked fantastic.

As she set her bag down on the spotless work table, Rose flattened the flyaways she knew were frizzing at the top of her scalp.

Drew closed the door and looked at the cup in their hand. "I didn't know you went to C&B."

"I don't." Rose almost confessed the truth but settled for, "But I had a feeling you'd complain about Starbucks."

"Gotta support local." Drew cleared their throat as they sat across the table from Rose.

Rose ran her finger along the cardboard sleeve of her coffee cup. "Thanks for answering my email by the way. Ellen and Fin were happy to have some more pictures to select from."

Drew nodded. "Yeah of course. We still have a long way to go."

"Sure do." Rose swallowed the lump that appeared in her throat when she looked in Drew's golden eyes. The sunlight in the loft did them a lot of favors, accentuating... their sharp jaw... their plump lips... all of their features, really.

Slapping a hand on the table and making Rose jump, Drew asked, "Have you ever

worked with film before?”

Rose shook her head, trying to slow her breathing and stop her eyes from wandering further than they already had.

“Cool,” Drew jolted out of their chair, “Let’s go into the dark room and get to work.”

Rose took a sip of her coffee, checking the time as she got up.

Drew narrowed their eyes at Rose. “I hope you don’t have other plans. It takes longer than Photoshop.”

Rolling her eyes, Rose groaned. “Do you even know how to run Photoshop on your computer, grandpa?” She gritted her teeth and stared back at Drew. “Besides, I like a challenge.”

A light chuckle rumbled from Drew’s throat as they walked to the curtain on the far side of the loft. Rose followed after them, trying not to look like she was rushing.

But the truth was, she was desperate to be as close to Drew as she could get.

Drew stood in front of the large machine against the wall of the dark room. They explained it was called an enlarger and was what projected a negative into a positive image that could be printed – with light – onto light sensitive paper.

“So, then you’ll want to place the photo paper directly underneath the image the enlarger projects down.” Drew slid a negative into a black clamp with a small rectangular hole at its center, then placed it delicately inside the enlarger.

Rose watched their every motion, carefully making note of how the machine worked. And not at all how Drew’s fingers moved or what they’d feel like inside Rose’s —

She shook her head as she moved a few feet away to a drawer where the photo paper was kept. As she lifted out the light-tight box, Drew lifted a finger. “Hold on. You’ve gotta make sure the image is aligned and focused first.”

Rose lowered her head and eyed Drew. “So... you have to reshoot the photo?”

Drew looked up from their work, a slight smirk lurking at the corner of their mouth. “Yeah, pretty much.”

“Sounds like a lot of extra work.” It was easier for Rose to hide her blush here; the dim, red light provided easy cover for the pink in her cheeks.

With a flick of their hand, Drew summoned Rose closer. “Here, try to focus it and align the image with the photo clamp.”

Rose cleared her throat as she got closer to Drew, their cologne from the night before still lingering on their skin. Her throat tightened at the now familiar smell.. She squeezed her body between Drew and the enlarger, her ass grazing their hips as she moved past.

Drew leaned against the wall next to the enlarger, but didn’t step back.

Flipping the light switch at the base of the machine, Rose started focusing the image, using the small dials to adjust it into a crisp project on the photo clamp. She could feel Drew’s eyes on her, like an animal stalking its prey.

Or maybe they think I’m going to break their machine, Rose tried to convince herself. But unless she was hallucinating, Drew was clearly drawn to her. The same way she, despite how rude and ill-mannered they were, was drawn to Drew.

A part of her hoped she was wrong. If Drew dared look at her like they wanted to

fuck her, she knew she wouldn't be able to resist. But Rose also couldn't deny that her clit was throbbing at the thought of Drew pushing her against the wall in the dark room and fucking her like she'd never been fucked before.

Just as Rose's mind was getting carried away, the shot of Fin's shocked face as Ellen proposed came into focus.

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Rose felt herself smile at her happy friends.

Drew nodded and reached around Rose's body to the light switch, delicately flipping it. Their chest leaned against Rose's back, lightly pressing their warmth into her.

"Now you're ready for the photo paper," Drew's voice came out as a low rumble.

Rose swallowed her excitement, trying to ignore the slickness growing in her panties. With the light off, Drew passed her the photo paper she had been so eager to take out. As Drew released it into Rose's grip, the tips of their fingers grazed her palm.

Lifting her eyes to meet Drew's heady gaze, Rose's chest heaved with anticipation, an electric shock of lust jolting from her palm through her body.

With the paper in hand, Rose delicately opened the clamp and placed the paper inside. She was careful not to nudge it as she dropped the clamp down tightly around the paper.

She pulled her hand from the clamp and looked at Drew, a smile on her face. "What's next?"

Drew reached across Rose's chest to point out a timer on the opposite wall, just above the on-switch.

Rose's heart raced, feeling Drew all around her. Their chest was hovering over her back while their arm caged her front.

Biting her lip, Rose avoided looking into Drew's eyes. "How long do you set it for?"

"That's part of the fun," Drew whispered, careful not to yell in her ear. "You have to guess."

Rose couldn't hold back her smile any more, instead whipping her head around and glaring at Drew. "Seriously?"

Drew laughed at her annoyance. "Well no. I don't have to. But you do."

"What? Why?" Rose scoffed as she playfully pushed Drew's chest with the palm of her hand.

Drew licked their lip at the touch, a fire burning behind their eyes. "Because it's more fun that way. I'm not just going to hand it to you."

Are we even talking about photography anymore? Rose tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Willing to wager a piece of photo paper? You're either rich or risky... or both."

With a shrug, Drew waited for Rose to do the math. "You're a smart woman, you can figure it out."

Rose closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Shutter speeds are 1/100th of a second, so I can't imagine it's anything longer than ten seconds..."

Drew's eyes scanned Rose's face as she worked through the problem. Which was not helping Rose think... like, at all. In fact, it was actively distracting.

"Okay, final guess, seven seconds." Rose crossed her arms, as if she was arguing with Drew. To be fair, that seemed to be their standard.

Staring back blankly, Drew watched Rose begin to panic.

“Oh god, that’s not enough? Or is it too much? Shit.” Rose rubbed her forehead.

Drew placed a hand on Rose’s shoulder, heat rushing from their warm palm through Rose’s knit vest. She couldn’t pretend to not be calmed by the heavy, calloused hand.

Working photography was a manual job, but it didn’t wear on your hands quite like that. How seriously did Drew workout? Rose tried to steady her breathing as she pictured the muscles hiding beneath their clothing.

“Just try it, there aren’t any consequences for being wrong.” Drew lowered their head to intercept Rose’s spiraling gaze.

Drew drew in a comically large breath, looking into Rose’s eyes as they did. Rose followed suit, reaching to her left and starting the timer for seven seconds. But as she did, she realized the timer went as high as sixty seconds. Which meant seven seconds was like... barely any time at all.

Panicked, she looked back at Drew, who still had a small smile on their face. But their eyes were steady, nodding to Rose as the bright, white light flicked on and the exposure began.

It felt like the longest seven seconds of her entire life. Rose’s breathing grew heavier, and she couldn’t tell whether it was the scent of Drew’s cologne making her woozy or her anxiety about screwing up in front of them.

Click.

The enlarger flicked off, plunging Drew and Rose back into dim, red light.

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With the light off, Rose just stood still, unsure what came next.

Drew cleared their throat, stuttering. “Okay, grab the photo and throw it in the bath.”

Rose lifted the clamp and pulled the paper, careful to only touch the edges where an image wouldn’t print. When she turned around, she jumped a little. She hadn’t even noticed the three trays of liquid in the basin of a long sink behind her.

“Which one?” Rose asked, her eyes scanning from tray to tray, unable to find a difference in the liquids.

Drew flicked their head toward the closest tray. “This one, it’s called developer.”

Rose nodded, setting the photo inside the bath. As she did, Drew reached around her body, grabbing the tongs that sat next to the tray and gently pushing the paper under the fluid.

Once it was submerged, they set the tongs along the edge of the tray. With both hands, Drew reached around Rose and gently rocked the bath back and forth, letting the liquid slowly lap over the photo.

Rose felt their forearms tensing with the controlled movement. She looked down to watch as an image began to develop on the paper.

It started gray, slight lines beginning to appear on a blank paper. Lines that felt like they led her eyes up Drew’s strong arms, their veins tempting Rose’s gaze to explore them.

As the image rocked in the waves, the lines became crisper, deep blacks and pure whites beginning to distinguish themselves from the vague grays. Spotting an uncovered section, Rose grabbed the tongs and lightly dunked the photo.

“Good catch.” Drew whispered in her ear, their breath tickling Rose’s skin.

Fuck. Rose could hardly control herself. She could only imagine the mess that waited for her in her thong. Touching myself to them was a terrible idea.

When Rose turned her head to look at Drew, it was clear to her that they were surprised by the image.

“After about a minute, you can move the photo to the next tray. It stays in the stop bath for fifteen seconds.” Drew’s temples tensed as they met Rose’s gaze.

Rose looked up at them, seeing their chest was rising and falling as quickly as hers was.

With a smirk, Rose joked, “Is it called the stop bath because it stops the development process?”

Drew chuckled as they pulled away from Rose’s back.

Oh my god, don’t tell me they have fucking dimples. Rose shook her head. She hadn’t ever seen Drew smile deep enough to reveal the dimples before.

I’m fucked.

“You’re joking, but yeah. It’s a pretty literal name.” Drew leaned their hand against the steel sink, staring at Rose with softer eyes than she’d ever seen from them. Rose looked down at their straining hands, a smattering of veins rising from their skin as

they moved the tray.

Rose cleared her throat and took a deep breath as she felt the release from Drew's warmth.

After what felt like an hour, Rose grabbed the photo from the developer and placed it in the next tray. She mimicked Drew's motions, letting the water wash over the now crisp image.

She could feel Drew's eyes watching her every movement, clearly impressed by how quickly she picked it up.

Fifteen seconds later and Rose was lifting the photo into the final bath. She followed the same process, gently rocking the liquid over the paper.

"How long does this one go for?" She asked.

Drew shrugged. "Like five minutes, and then it hangs to dry."

Rose set down the tongs and crossed her arms while Drew set a timer, a cold breeze drifting in under the door of the isolated room. The tension was too high, and she needed to find a way to cool it off.

As she searched for a topic, Rose remembered the early morning phone call. The woman in Drew's bed.

"How was your date? If it was a date." Rose cleared her throat and bit the inside of her cheek.

Drew nodded, looking away from Rose. "It was good."

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Rose blurted out her next question, “Are you going to see her again?”

“Probably not,” Drew raised an eyebrow at the boldness. “She’s not quite my speed.”

Nodding, Rose shrugged. “But you still slept with her?”

Drew shook their head and smirked. “We both knew where it was going. It doesn’t always have to be serious to have a good time.”

Rose laughed and looked away. “Well it does for me.” She gritted her teeth. It was all the proof she needed that Drew was another type. It was just chemistry and nothing else. They were a good-looking sapphic with an attitude problem.

And as hot as that might be, Rose had no interest in being with someone so rude.

“And that’s why you’re dating Shan?” Drew quipped, raising an eyebrow and shaking their head. “How is she by the way?”

It was clear they were suppressing a laugh.

Rose sucked her teeth. “She’s great.”

Liar. She had literally been dumped a few days ago. But she couldn’t handle seeing the smug look on Drew’s face when they realized all of their assumptions about her relationship were right. Even if they did look hot with that self-satisfied grin.

“Really?” Drew could tell it wasn’t entirely true. Rose was aware that they knew each

other, but hadn't realized just how well. It was entirely possible that Drew knew more about Shannon than she did.

"Mhmm. Yeah, she just told me she loves me, and we're thinking about moving in together." Rose looked down at the picture still in the fixer.

Why do you keep lying? Who cares what they think? Besides, Rose could tell Drew saw right through her.

With a nod, Drew looked up at the ceiling. "Well, congrats."

"Thanks."

The rest of the time passed slower than molasses in snow. But the loud ring of the timer eventually broke the silence that stewed between the pair as they stood.

Rose couldn't have reached for the tongs faster. With the photo in hand, she scanned the room for a place to hang the dripping print. Drew pointed to the clothesline above the sink at the end of the room.

As she clipped the photo onto the line and took a step back, Drew sidled up next to her. It was pretty incredible to watch an image come from what appeared to be nothing. It felt untouchable, unchangeable. There was a permanence to it that Rose couldn't help but admire.

Even if it was pretentious.

A smile crept onto her face. "Can we do another?"

Drew looked over at her and let their own smile come back.

Rose was giggling as the curtain to the dark room flew up to reveal the blazing afternoon light of Drew's loft. As the light hit her, she winced and covered her eyes, squinting to keep the brightness out. "Oh god, that's bright."

"You never get used to it." Drew answered the question Rose hadn't asked yet, their own hand shading their eyes.

Rose looked down at her phone. "Holy shit. It's been two hours?" As shocked as she was, she couldn't really complain. The photos in Drew's hands were evidence of the work they'd gotten done. And besides, it had actually been nice to spend some time with Drew.

In their own element, they could be far kinder and gentler than Rose had expected.

Drew blinked wildly as their eyes finally adjusted to the light, taking a seat in the stool. "Time passes differently in there. Probably because there's literally no circadian rhythm."

Rose pulled up her own chair as Drew laid out the prints they had just developed. She shook her head as her eyes scanned from piece to piece. "These are really beautiful. You really captured their love."

"You did a great job developing them." Drew met her eyes, swallowing a lump in their throat before returning their gaze to the work.

As much as Rose could recognize the artfulness each shot of Drew took, she could also tell there are some key moments they missed. Moments spent reloading film had stolen the show from the organic love on display.

Of course, it was a picky note; any client would be thrilled to receive these.

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“Thanks for teaching me.” Rose smiled back at Drew, a tension lingering between them from the close proximity of the dark room.

Drew smiled, looking away. “You’re welcome, thanks for helping.”

Were they nervous? Rose licked her lips, hesitating. Fuck it.

“Now you’ll have to let me teach you Photoshop.” Rose wiggled her eyebrows, an excited smile on her face.

Without thinking, Drew scoffed. “I wouldn’t be much of a photographer if I needed that.”

Rose tried to avoid letting her shock show. That’s so fucking classic. Of course they still don’t respect my work.

Clenching her jaw, Rose shot out of her seat and grabbed her bag. “I’ll see you when you finally finish developing. Send them over when you’re done... which will be what? Two weeks?”

The metal of her stool scraped against the wood of the floor, jolting Drew out of whatever judgment haze they were stuck in. “Wait, Rose. Come on. You know what I mean.”

Rose headed for the door, looking over her shoulder. “Oh, I know exactly what you mean.”

Before Drew could manage another pathetic word, Rose swung open the metal door. As she stood on the threshold, she stopped for a moment. But when Drew had nothing else to say, she slammed the door behind herself and headed downstairs.

Her feet were heavy on the cement steps. She had no interest in staying in this stupid fucking building for another second.

As soon as the glass door of Drew's building swung open, Rose was bombarded by the loud honks and sirens of the Lower East Side. Aside from the insane rent, it was the excruciating, ceaseless noise that had driven her out of Manhattan.

Her brain was on fire, trying to process an immense amount of sensory input after emerging from the isolation tank that was Drew's apartment. For such an old building, the loft had strangely noise-proof windows.

Once she got her bearings, Rose headed north toward Tompkins Square Park. As she stormed down the street, she pulled out her phone and scrolled through her contacts.

She only knew two other people who lived in the Drew's area, and conveniently, they were the only two people Rose wanted to talk to right now. Her leg shook as the dial tone rang in her ear.

The phone clicked as the line was answered.

Rose bit the nail of her index finger. "Hey, are you guys around?"

11

DREW

Their apartment was quieter than a library after midnight. Drew could hear their own

swallowing louder than music blaring from concert speakers.

Fuck.

Looking down at the pictures laid out across the table, they shook their head. Rose took an interest in their craft: a serious interest. And they fucking ruined it.

Their phone buzzed with a text from Diana:

Mary's tonight? Game's on.

Drew let out the air they were holding hostage in their lungs. They typed and sent a text back within a matter of seconds.

God yes. Time?

While they worked out the details, Drew scanned through their emails. Another reminder to apply for the grant sat at the top of their inbox.

It was already almost four, and they hadn't eaten all day. The grant would have to wait.

They quickly scarfed down some leftover pad thai from the fridge, took a quick shower, and started getting dressed. With a cropped button down and a pair of nice trousers, they were ready to head out to Brooklyn. The match was going to start at seven, and at this rate, Drew would get there right as it was starting.

Before they knew it, Drew was on the L with everyone else heading out to Bushwick for a party or a hookup.

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As the train rocked back and forth, the guilt set in. Drew knew it was wrong to act like what Rose did wasn't really photography. Objectively, it was. And a lot of her shots were really amazing, as annoying as it was for Drew to admit.

I have to fix this. It's a bad look, professionally. Drew cleared their throat, trying to convince themselves that's all it was about. They didn't want to mess up the contact. Nothing else. Even if Rose had a stunning face with a gorgeous ass.

Drew felt their body tense at the thought. They had been so close in the dark room, moments from lifting her onto the counter and fucking her. But Drew wanted to keep a professional line. Besides, Rose wasn't their type and was already with Shannon.

The train screeched to a halt, ripping Drew from their fantasy.

The rush from the train to the street was like the running of the bulls. If you were too slow, you'd get swallowed up by the crowd. When Drew emerged onto Graham Avenue, the sun was just beginning to lower in the sky, the summer light starting to fade.

Mary's Bar was oddly crowded for a Thursday evening. But everyone knew the sapphics loved a tennis match. Besides, tonight was a matchup between up-and-comer Mackenzie Bennett and long-time champ, Taylor Young.

Everyone wanted to see how it would turn out. The two had been rivals on and off the court for a few seasons. Their press conferences were more reminiscent of the WWE than of the Women's Tennis Association.

When Drew stepped through the door and into the crowd, they did a quick scan for Diana, who was nowhere to be found. As usual, she was late.

They made their way to the bar, smiling and nodding as they excused themselves through the mass of people.

They flagged down the bartender with a wave, raising their voice over the noise of both the sports announcer and the faint music playing behind it. “Hey, how are you? Can I grab two IPAs? Whatever you have.”

With a nod, the bartender grabbed a pair of beers in a comic-style can and began pouring them into two large glasses.

With the cold beers in hand, Drew searched for some open seats. Eventually, they spotted some by the wall, expertly weaving their way to them without spilling a drop. They sat down and settled in as they waited for Diana to breeze through the door.

The bar patrons quieted down once the two players walked onto the court, shook each other's hands, and headed to their starting positions.

Just as the first serve left Bennett's hand, Mary's door swung open, and Diana rushed inside. A quick survey of the crowd led Diana's eyes to Drew stationed by the wall with their drinks.

“Hey,” Diana said as she dapped Drew up. “Thanks for coming at the last minute.”

Drew raised their eyebrows, exhaustion and guilt riddling their face. “Yeah, thank you.”

Diana chuckled. “Uh-oh. What happened to you?”

Without a word, Drew's head hung as they thought about explaining how much of a dick they had been. But if they couldn't be honest with Diana, then who could they be honest with?

"I fucked up." Drew sipped their beer.

"Well obviously." Diana waved her hand at Drew. They were a sad sight, like a depressed puppy. "Is it about the grant?"

Drew groaned. "God. You really know how to make things worse."

Diana shrugged, raising her hands in surrender. "Well you didn't give me any details."

"I still haven't even applied for the grant."

Lifting her glass to her lips, Diana raised her eyebrows. "You'll never win it if you don't apply."

Drew rolled their eyes, which darted to the TV hanging from the ceiling. They had just started, the first set well on its way.

"I know that. But all of my actually good work is like five years old at this point. I haven't been out in the field for a long time." Drew gulped down some beer, the sour taste making their jaw clench.

Diana reached her arm across the table and patted them on the arm. "I know, sorry. I don't mean to make you stressed about it. But your work is awesome, even if it is a little older. That's why you need the grant!"

Drew nodded. "Making enough money to survive is hard."

Diana clinked her glass against Drew's. "No kidding. But that mindset is exactly how you got stuck in this rut."

Before Drew could argue against what they knew to be true, the bar patrons erupted with excitement as Mackenzie scored her first point. She was the match favorite: an underdog by all accounts. As an up-and-coming star and a native New Yorker, this bar wanted nothing more than to see her demolish Young.

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“Okay but if it’s not the grant, why are we depressingly drinking beer instead of watching tennis?” Diana had waited far longer to ask than Drew had expected.

“It’s Rose.” Drew looked down at their knuckles.

Diana clapped her hands together. “Ha! You slept together, didn’t you? I knew it!”

Drew waved their hand back and forth. “Woah, dude, no. I just fucked up.”

“Boo. What else is new?” Diana giggled to herself as she glanced up at the screen.

“Seriously. I can’t stop myself from being a dick to her. And I have to be nicer because this is a professional thing.”

Diana winked at a short masc from across the bar and turned back to Drew. “You do that when you like someone and don’t know it would work.”

“Huh?” Drew was too shocked to admit it was true. They thought they would be used to Diana’s bluntness by now. But even after a decade of friendship, her frank attitude was still jarring.

“Don’t play dumb,” Diana lowered her head to meet Drew’s gaze. “You like her.”

Drew shook their head. “You know, it’s not always about sex, you perv. I can’t stand her. She’s chatty. And inexperienced. And a know-it-all.”

“And?”

“And what?” Drew shrugged, a blush rising to their cheeks.

“And you think she’s hot.” Diana wiggled her eyebrows. “Come on, she’s totally your type: femme, artsy, super sweet on the surface, but I bet she can bite back.”

Crossing their arms, Drew watched the match rather than respond. Diana was always pitching some ridiculous idea. Rose was not their type. First of all, Drew hated dating other photographers. It never ended well.

But even worse than Rose being an artist was the fact that she was a co-worker on this project. And that blurred the line between genuine affection and social nicety.

“What even happened?” Diana pushed for details.

Drew sighed. “We were working in the dark room. I asked if she wanted to learn, and it was going great. We were joking and getting to know each other. She told me that she and Shannon are great and they’re in love. Which is gross because Shan. And I could just tell she was kind of bullshitting.”

Lifting her chin as she listened, Diana waited for Drew to get to the bad part.

“We left the dark room and she joked about teaching me Photoshop next. And I said, ‘I wouldn’t be much of a photographer if I needed that.’” Drew peeked up at Diana.

She slammed her head down into the table and groaned. “Drew. Why are you like this?”

“What?!” Drew looked around, confused. “It was a joke.”

Diana lifted her head and shook it. “No it wasn’t. What did she say?”

Drew shrugged. “She just left.”

Groaning, Diana started downing her beer. She gulped down multiple mouthfuls before speaking again. “Not that it’s her fault, but she shouldn’t have let you get away with that. You’re such a steamroller.”

Drew was going to question it, but Diana beat them to it. “You have to learn to play nice. Just because her photography style isn’t yours doesn’t mean it’s not hard work. You’ve admitted that her photos are great.”

“I know.” Drew hung their head.

“So what is it going to take for you to respect her work?” Diana questioned, getting more serious.

Drew took a deep breath just as another eruption of cheers flooded the bar. “I have no idea. Because I really do think she’s good at it. Her client relationships are great. She’s amenable and generous. Her work is more than good. I’m just...”

“An asshole.” Diana finished for them.

Drew raised their glass to Diana’s. “Bingo.” After a clink, they both took a drink.

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Diana shrugged. “Maybe you should fuck. Might help you get over this stupid shit.”

“How in the world would that help?” Drew shook their head at their friend, questioning her sanity.

With a sigh, Diana explained, “You just don’t know how to handle sexual tension. It sounds to me like you guys had a great time, and as soon as she talked about Shan, you got defensive and mean.”

Drew crossed their arms. No, that’s not it.

“Maybe you just want her so bad that the thought of her with anyone else is pissing you off,” She raised her finger and added, “Which, by the way, is not an excuse to be a dick. Even if you don’t fuck, you have to play nice.”

Drew wanted to fight, opening their mouth to argue. But Diana shook her head, “That’s final.”

Of course, Drew knew she was right. Rose had been nothing but kind and thoughtful.

“I doubt she wants to work with you either, but she’s being nice and making it work. So you have to put in some effort here.” Diana polished off her beer and turned toward the match, cheering as Bennett scored another point.

Drew couldn’t get the conversation out of their head as they headed home on the train. They had stayed to watch the rest of the match with Diana and then headed their separate ways so Diana could flirt with the cute masc she’d been eyeing all

night.

But as the train shot through the tunnels toward Manhattan, Drew kept thinking about her advice.

Do I want to fuck her? Drew rubbed their forehead. Their body immediately responded to the idea, their clit throbbing with excitement.

Shaking their head, Drew convinced themselves it was just a natural reaction to the thought of fucking a gorgeous person and not an indicator of intent. But they couldn't shake the thought as the train pulled into the 1st Ave station.

The walk home from the train felt like an eternity, every step rubbing Drew's trousers against their clit and making the anticipation to get home grow stronger.

Every time they blinked, all they could see was Rose's smile. Eventually, they gave up on resisting their urges. They raced home at a near-sprint, throwing open the door to the building like they had left the stove on.

They took the staircase two steps at a time. By the time they were closing their apartment door behind them, Drew was dripping in sweat and aching with desire.

Throwing off their button down, Drew unbuckled their belt and moved toward the bed. With just a sports bra and tight boxers on, Drew threw themselves into bed. They could feel the slick excitement between their legs, their body begging to be touched.

Reaching into their nightstand, Drew grabbed their air pulse vibrator and powered it on. The familiar hum made their body tingle. Lifting the band of their underwear, Drew brought the toy to their clit. They let it lightly rub at their folds, slowly allowing the toy to push up their hood.

“Fuck,” a low growl escaped their throat. Drew couldn’t stop thinking about Rose. But not her sweet smile. No, this time it was the rage on her face when they fought that was making Drew need her.

With their eyes pressed shut, Drew pictured grabbing her wrist and turning her around to face them. Gripping the back of her head through her flowing red hair, Drew wanted to pull her in. To press their lips together, warm and lush.

Drew groaned at the thought of Rose’s tongue teasing their own. Letting the vibrator slip between their folds to pulse on their clit, Drew pictured pulling Rose’s hips closer to theirs. Gripping her thighs and lifting her, feeling her legs wrapped around their waist as they carried her to bed.

No – carried her to the desk. Yeah, the desk. Drew nodded to themselves as the vibrator sent waves of pleasure from their center out to the rest of their body. They shuddered as they thought about Rose.

“I want you,” Drew moaned to the air as they pictured slipping their fingers inside Rose’s slick entrance. With a jolt, Drew let out a growl. “Fuck.”

They wanted nothing more than to feel how excited Rose got. Because despite Rose acting like she was crazy about Shannon, Drew knew that she left that afternoon with a slick stain on her panties.

Drew felt like they could basically smell her pleasure, and the thought of licking her clean set another wave of excitement through their throbbing pussy.

“Oh god.” Drew moaned as they pictured Rose’s mouth, agape and moaning. As much as Drew loved to be touched, they loved nothing more than getting a beautiful woman to beg for more.

Turning up the intensity of the vibrator, Drew began rocking their hips against the toy. It was as if they were already fucking Rose, as if they were pushing their strap deep inside her, the pressure massaging their own clit.

They could picture how incredible she would look on her hands and knees, her plump ass pressed against their hips. As Drew got closer to their own peak, they imagined Rose's moans growing louder and louder. It wasn't long before their entire body was shaking with pleasure.

"Shit," Drew yelled as the vibrator hit the perfect spot. They threw their hand down onto the mattress, gripping the sheets in a balled fist.

What really sent them over was the thought of Rose looking into their eyes and begging for more. They could almost hear her whispering in their ear, "Fuck me, Drew. I need you to make me come."

With a jolt and a stutter, Drew's body seized up, hardly moving as they reached their orgasm.

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“God.” Drew groaned as they finished, pulling the toy from their clit as they tried to catch their breath.

As they lay in bed, sweat dripping down their forehead, Drew closed their eyes. All they really wanted was to feel Rose’s head rest on their chest. To feel her breathing settle as she drifted off to sleep.

Drew’s eyes shot open as they caught themselves in the thought.

That’s not good.

12

ROSE

By the time Ellen and Finley were strolling into the park, it was already nine at night. Rose had spent most of the day roaming around the East Village after storming out of Drew’s.

“Hey, sorry that took a minute!” Ellen brought her friend in for a hug.

Rose lingered in the hug for a minute, holding onto her friend for longer than either of them expected. When she finally pulled back, Fin came right in with another hug.

They sat down on a park bench across from the dog park to watch the pre-bedtime crowd: dozens of dogs goofily sprinting around with their last bits of energy. Rose was so engrossed that she couldn’t talk about anything else for a while.

“I love that Great Dane; he takes no shit.” Rose crossed her arms as she watched the gentle giant parade around the park.

Fin watched her with a wrinkled brow. “What’s going on, Ro?”

With a deep sigh, Rose shook her head. “That fucking photographer is...” Her voice trailed off as she tried to find a way to succinctly explain what an ass Drew was.

“Yeah, Drew is a bit of a traditionalist.” Ellen laughed, clearly having gotten a taste of Drew’s pretension during the planning phase of the engagement.

“To say the least.” Rose rolled her eyes. “I love you guys, and I love working on your photos, but I can’t wait for this project to be over. If I never saw them again, it’d be too soon.”

Ellen put her hand on Rose’s knee reassuringly. “Look, once you guys send all the pictures to us, you’ll just have one more shoot to get through. If you could do that job with the naked guy, you can definitely get through this..”

Rose whipped her head around to meet Ellen’s gaze. “What?”

“Maybe now isn’t the best time...” Fin cleared her throat, squinting at Ellen.

Ellen groaned. “I thought you told her.”

Before Fin could give a good excuse, Ellen was already shaking her head.

“Told me what?” Rose raised a finger to make sure they didn’t forget she was sitting right there.

Fin bit her lip. “I may have mentioned you guys working together to a friend who

was planning a maternity shoot, and she may be, like... very wealthy and excited. I bumped your rate up 20 percent!”

Rose’s head dropped, the weight of her head dangling listlessly. “Fin, are you serious?”

“To be fair, you’re both so talented, and the blend of the work is great. Drew sent us a scan of the negatives and it’s so fresh!” Ellen tried to come to her fiancée’s rescue.

“More like fresh hell.” Rose snipped, crossing her arms at the thought of having to spend more time with Drew. “They won’t compromise on anything, and they constantly demean my work.”

Ellen scoffed. “Why are you letting them?”

Rose could hardly believe what came out of Ellen’s mouth. And clearly, Fin couldn’t believe it either – their mouth hung open in surprise.

“Excuse me?” Rose laughed the words out as she looked into Ellen’s eyes. They told Rose that she was entirely serious, even if the words had come out a bit harsh.

“Ellen...” Fin stammered.

With a deep sigh, Ellen lifted her hands in surrender. “Look. Honestly, Rose? You’ve never been one to let someone walk all over you. You might give too many second chances, but you always stand your ground.”

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A wave of silence passed over the group. She wasn't wrong, and they all knew it. Despite Rose's relentless kindness and aura of ease, she never let anyone stand in her way.

"It's because she thinks they're hot," Fin blurted out.

Ellen covered her mouth as a shocked laugh bubbled in her throat.

"What? No!" Rose was already blushing. "They're just more experienced than me, and I feel like they know more. Don't make it some schoolyard-bully nonsense."

Ellen's mouth dropped open when Fin buckled down. "Bullshit. You've just got the hots. But, you've gotta put them in their place. They'll probably think it's sexy, anyway."

Rose rolled her eyes, her attention returning to the dogs in the park. They desperately chased each other in circles. After a minute, Rose turned to Ellen, hoping she'd have some better advice to offer.

"I mean Fin's right, Rose. Not necessarily about the last part, but I mean, you have to stand up for your work."

Rose's eyes flickered between the couple, annoyed by their unified front.

Ellen smiled. "Don't let some douche affect your career. It's not worth it. You're a fucking awesome photographer. And no one will believe in you if you don't believe in yourself."

Letting her head roll back to glare up at the darkened sky overhead, Rose sighed. “It’s so obnoxious how right you guys are. Like, all the time.”

Ellen and Fin laughed as they each wrapped an arm around Rose.

“Have you thought about doing something not work focused with them?” Ellen asked, preparing for Rose to shoot the idea down.

Instead, Rose scrunched her eyebrows together. “What do you mean?”

“Like, so much of the frustration comes from working together. Maybe if you went out and did something not work-based, you’d be able to connect better and get over some of it.” Ellen shrugged.

Rose couldn’t pretend like it was a bad idea. Drew got antsy talking about Rose’s work and whenever they had to make a decision. Maybe removing them from that kind of tension would help to ease their perfectionism.

But Rose paused, “Are you trying to get me to go on a date with Drew?”

Ellen shook her head briskly. “I would never suggest that.” It only took a second for her facade to crack, a goofy grin taking over her face as she winked at Rose.

“Would that be so bad?” Fin asked. And based on Rose’s blush, she wouldn’t have minded.

Silence passed over the group again as Rose considered it. She wasn’t crazy about having to spend more time with Drew than necessary. But there was a 20 percent bump on the table, and Rose was ready to step up her game. If Drew was the only way to do that... maybe she could stomach it.

Trying to lighten the mood, Fin smiled. “How’s Shan?”

“You have terrible timing.” Rose chuckled. “We broke up like two days ago.”

The couple winced, but didn’t seem quite surprised. They knew from the jump that Shan wasn’t going to last. Rose might have been offended if Shan wasn’t so obviously a douche. Obvious to everyone else, at least.

Ellen held out her hand to Fin for a high-five, “3 weeks. I called it, pay up.”

Rose feigned offense and laughed. “You guys are rude as all hell.”

13

DREW

Even after sending an email with some scanned photos, Drew still hadn’t heard back from Rose the next afternoon. They’d tried to take their mind off Rose by hanging out with Diana, but it hadn’t helped.

All Drew could think about as they sat in the mess of prints sprawled across their bed was Rose’s disappointed face.

For once, Drew actually cared that they had upset someone.

They took a deep breath into their tight lungs as they stared down at the photos. They had managed to finish printing almost all of the shots they wanted to develop, and now all that was left was to have Rose look at them. If they could ever get a hold of her.

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Pulling out their phone, Drew hoped to see a text waiting on the lockscreen. But they knew there wouldn't be anything.

Their leg began to shake as the afternoon sun warmed the loft.

“Fuck it.” Drew began collecting the prints and tossing them into a manilla folder, sealing them away. They jolted out of the bed in their loose, light wash jeans and plain, white t-shirt.

Heading for the door, Drew threw on their black Chelsea boots, hoping this wasn't a huge mistake. With the folder in hand, they ran out of the apartment, letting the door lock behind them.

Drew's finger pushed the buzzer and waited for a voice to come through the building's intercom. “Who is it?”

Standing outside, arms crossed, Drew smirked. “Delivery.”

“For who?” Rose asked, her confusion clearly evident.

“It's Drew.”

The intercom went dead for a moment. Drew's mind started to spiral. Maybe she fucking hates me and won't let me in.

But after a moment, Rose's voice rang out again, this time a little breathless. “Come up.”

The door buzzed open. Drew pushed the handle in and headed down the narrow hallway that led to an old, creaky staircase.

Two flights felt like a walk in the park compared to Drew's insane hike of a stairwell.

They took a deep breath and lightly rapped on the door.

As they waited, Drew thought they heard murmuring coming from inside the unit. Did she have Shan over?

But before Drew could get too wrapped up in that concern, the door was flying open to reveal Rose's stern face.

Drew opened their mouth to say hi.

But Rose lifted a finger and launched into her own tirade. "Listen, what you said yesterday was really out of pocket. Even as a joke. I don't know where you get off thinking your work is more valuable than mine, but it's not, okay? I make a living doing this just like you. So I expect a modicum of respect from you as a colleague."

Their heart was pounding in their chest as they watched Rose find her voice. A small smirk lifted in the corners of their mouth. A part of Drew wondered if they could push her farther, just to see how frustrated she'd get.

But before they could fight back, Rose lifted her finger again. "Now, I'm going to agree to do this other shoot with you. But I demand the respect I deserve, and I won't let you bulldoze me or belittle my work."

As she finished, she crossed her arms and sucked her teeth. Drew couldn't stop their eyes from darting down to her lips, pursing out as her tongue settled into place.

“Okay.” Drew could hardly speak, the throbbing in their boxers too strong to think. They had no idea why it was so hot to get told off by her, but they’d let her keep going for hours. They hardly cared that they had no idea what job Rose was referring to.

Trying to hide her surprise, Rose crossed her arms. “Great.”

Clearing their throat, Drew extended the manilla folder in their hand to Rose. “These are for you to look over.”

Rose took the folder and nodded.

“So, what other job are we taking?” Drew raised an eyebrow.

Rose sighed. “Fucking Fin. Maternity shoot, rates are up 20 percent. But I want to take the lead.”

Drew nodded, a charming smile taking over their face. “Okay.”

It was obvious that Drew’s sudden agreeableness was a shock to Rose. And they couldn’t blame her. When had they ever relented so easily?

The pair stood in the doorway for a minute. Drew peeked behind Rose’s figure, trying not to stare at her perfect curves. Her apartment was brightly painted and heavily decorated. It wasn’t their taste, but they liked how boldly “Rose” it was.

“Do you wanna go out?” Drew asked before they could stop themselves.

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Rose stammered, confusion washing over her face. “Like... on a date?”

Drew laughed. “No, like a bar. Right now?” They were surprised Rose would take it like that, since Shannon was supposedly in the picture. She was in love, after all.

Tapping her finger on her arm, Rose shrugged. “Yeah. Where?”

“Henrietta’s?” Drew offered. It would be a longer commute from here, but it would be fun. There was no chance for awkwardness.

“On a Friday night?” Rose laughed. She hadn’t been to the crowded sapphic bar in a long time.

Drew looked around. “Why not? It’ll be entertaining at least. Will Shannon be okay with it?”

A groan escaped Rose’s lips as she turned to head back inside, leaving the door open for Drew to follow her. Over her shoulder, Rose explained, “Shannon’s not an issue.”

“Right.” Drew tried not to let the smile teasing their lips come to fruition.

Why am I excited by that? This is about work. That’s it.

It was kind of funny, though. Rose made it seem like everything was awesome yesterday. As if they were going to get married and have twenty kids together. They couldn’t help but wonder why she’d suddenly decided to drop the act.

“Are you ready now, or do you need a minute?” Drew cleared their throat as they looked at Rose’s outfit. She looked cute: a simple tank top that showed her cleavage and a pair of baggy, plaid pajama pants that strangely framed her ass perfectly. But Drew knew she might want to get dressed up for her single debut at a sapphic bar.

Rose looked down at herself. “Yeah, give me five?”

Drew nodded, starting to wander around the apartment and evaluating Rose’s decor. Yet as Rose disappeared into the single bedroom of the apartment, Drew’s eyes couldn’t help but follow.

Her ass looked as amazing as they had pictured it the other day, but what really caught their attention was what they glimpsed inside the room. Just behind Rose was a nightstand where a light pink vibrator waited patiently.

Drew only got a quick glance, but it looked like it was still dirty.

They cleared their throat as excitement grew near their center. Drew could feel themselves growing slick at the thought of Rose in bed, pleasing herself. God, I would’ve loved to watch.

When Drew looked up, Rose was closing the door with a wink.

Fuck. Did she see me being a complete creep? Drew bit their lip. Maybe Diana was right. Maybe Drew wanted Rose more than they were willing to admit.

They shook their head and took a seat. If they had any hope of surviving the night without irreparably altering their work relationship, Drew needed to calm down.

The twenty minutes that they sat waiting in Rose’s living room was plenty of time to collect themselves. By the time the bedroom door swung open, the early summer sun

was finally falling behind the skyline. It was close to 9 pm.

Drew shot up, straightening their back as Rose walked out. The click of her heels on the hardwood guided Drew's eyes down to black pumps. Their eyes slowly lifted up Rose's toned legs to her thighs, which were hugged tightly by an emerald suede dress.

So much for calming down.

Drew tried to control their breathing and avoid a heart attack. But it was hard to focus on breathing when Rose looked like that.

They let themselves scan up her body; the dress cradled her breasts and dipped low on her collarbone. Her chest was stunning, smooth skin inviting Drew's lips to kiss her.

"Ready?" Rose's voice had gotten low and sultry.

Drew could only manage a nod. Looking down at their own outfit, they couldn't help but feel self-conscious. A plain t-shirt and jeans paled in comparison to Rose's ensemble.

Rose noticed their concern. "I would offer to let you raid my closet, but I doubt you'd find anything you'd like better."

Drew laughed. "That's alright. It's the price I pay for being impulsive."

"Well, if it makes you feel any better, I think you look great." Rose's eyes immediately darted to the floor; clearly she hadn't meant to reveal her cards.

Drew couldn't help but smile. "Thanks."

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They tried to shake it off. Though the compliment made their heart race, they shouldn't get carried away. Rose was probably just trying to be nice. Which was more than Drew deserved after acting like a complete dick the last couple of days.

Rose grabbed a black, shimmering handbag from the key hook by the door and gestured for Drew to come to follow her out.

As they walked down the stairs of the building, It was impossible for Drew to keep their eyes off her. They struggled to breathe as they watched Rose's ass tense and flex through the thick fabric.

If Drew didn't know any better, they would have thought that she was intentionally trying to show it off for them. And they loved every second of it.

14

ROSE

From the top of the stairs leading down to the subway, Rose and Drew could hear the sound of a train pulling into the station. Rose picked up the pace, able to run even in heels.

"Be careful." Drew laughed as they bounded down the steps toward the turnstiles. They both raced to swipe their cards on the scanner before pushing through the metal bars with their hips.

The grimy tile hallway led to another flight of stairs, and the duo were able to sprint

onto the platform just as the doors to the subway were sliding open, the familiar announcer's voice echoing down the tunnel.

Drew jumped onto the train, holding the door behind them. Rose caught her breath as the doors closed, scanning the train for open seats. But it was a Friday night L heading into Manhattan; it was a surprise there was even room for the pair to stand.

Rose looked up at Drew, who was smiling as they struggled to steady their breathing. Their heaving chest drew Rose's eyes down.

She could hardly look away from Drew's sharp collarbone, her mind immediately wondering what it would feel like to kiss the soft skin.

"Do you go to Henrietta's a lot?" Drew asked.

Meeting their gaze, Rose shook her head. "I don't really go out a lot. Do you?"

Drew shrugged. "I do, but mostly for Diana. She likes to party but never alone."

Rose nodded, nervously looking down at her outfit. Did I go too slutty? They can see everything.

Of course, a part of her liked knowing that Drew would have such an unrestricted view. She could feel their eyes drifting down her body as they stood on the train, and it sent a jolt of excitement through her each time.

"So, this will be your territory." Rose gulped. "We seem to meet on your turf a lot."

A charming smirk took over Drew's face, making Rose's cheeks flush. "Well what would you consider your turf?"

Rose's eyes wandered up toward the ceiling of the train. "Oh, I have no idea. A quiet library maybe?"

Drew nodded. "We'll go to a library sometime, then."

"It's a date." The words left Rose's lips before she could realize what she had said. Shannon had broken up with her just a few days earlier, she certainly was not in the place to be on any kind of date.

Raising their eyebrows, Drew searched for a topic change. "Where are you from?"

"Two hours outside the city. It's a tiny town, not really noteworthy." Rose watched as their train pulled into the next station. Only a few more stops before they could ditch the sardine-can train and walk to the bar..

The subways were already sweltering despite the weak air conditioning attempting to break through the wall of bodies crowding the car. The fresh summer air would be a welcome reprieve.

Drew nodded. "Really? Where?"

"You won't know it." Rose shook her head.

"Try me."

Rose giggled. "New Winford? It's kind of near Rosendale if you know that."

"I know New Winford." Drew smirked.

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“No you don’t.” Rose rolled her eyes. It wasn’t the first time someone vaguely familiar with upstate geography claimed to know her hometown. The impulse was sweet, she supposed – no one wanted her to feel like a country bumpkin. But it was pretty rare to find someone who actually recognized it.

With a stronger nod, Drew laughed. “No seriously. I do free headshots for the dogs in the New Winford Humane Society.”

A redeeming quality? Tucking her hair behind her ear, Rose shook her head. “No fucking way. So you know Dani?”

“Oh yeah, Dani’s great.”.

Rose lightly punched Drew’s arm. “Small world.”

As they talked, they both started to lose track of where exactly they were in their journey. Neither of them expected it when the doors slid open and the conductor announced, “Last stop, 8th Ave.”

“Oh shit, this is us.” Drew laughed as they put a guiding hand on Rose’s arm. Of course, Rose didn’t need to be guided, but she couldn’t pretend it wasn’t nice to be escorted by Drew. They were assured, confident. And they looked unbelievably sexy in their tight, white t-shirt.

Rose gulped down the excitement bubbling in her throat as they hopped off the train and walked up the steps.

It was getting late, close to 11 pm as they exited onto 14th and 8th. Drew led the way downtown toward the West Village.

There was a small line outside of Henrietta's, but it moved quickly. Before they knew it, Rose and Drew were pushing their way through the thick Friday crowd toward the bar. As soon as they walked in, Rose could feel the eyes turning to check Drew out.

And Rose couldn't blame them, Drew was super hot: tall and strong with thick, cropped hair and a gorgeous face. Rose had caught herself checking Drew out more times than she'd like to admit.

But a part of Rose hated watching Drew get this much attention. She sped up, trying to keep up with them. Drew came to a stop and turned toward Rose, slowly leaning into her ear. Their breath gently caressed Rose's ear as they asked. "Do you want a drink?"

Rose pulled away and met their gaze, their mouths mere inches apart. Swallowing the anticipation in her throat, Rose nodded. "I got mine."

Drew put their hand on Rose's as she tried to pull out her card. "It's cash only on weekends."

Lifting their chin to the sign above the bar, Rose followed their gaze and realized they were right. She had no choice but to let the hot masc buy her a drink. They owe you at least a drink, after all the bullshit they've put you through.

Drew nodded and leaned against the bar as they waited for the bartender. Rose watched their back flex beneath their shirt, a rush of blood going straight to her center.

Don't look too eager, Rose reminded herself. Instead of standing around ogling Drew,

she made her way farther into the crowd, edging toward the dance floor where dozens of sapphics grinded and moved together to the beat. Rose bobbed her head along as her hips started to find the rhythm.

With two drinks in hand, Drew appeared to Rose's right. They passed her a glass and lifted theirs for a cheers. As their glasses clinked, Rose smiled. "Thanks for the drink."

Drew shook their head and brought a finger to her lips, "You can't speak after cheersing, it's bad luck."

Rose raised an eyebrow, "You're superstitious?"

"Only about a few things." Drew shrugged as they brought their glass in for another cheers. This time, Rose behaved herself and took a drink after the clink of their cups. Drew smirked, "Good girl."

Fuck. Rose felt her clit throb at the praise. She tried not to show Drew just how much she liked hearing those words from their perfect lips.

After one sip, Rose realized she might need a little bit more to make it through the night. She brought the cold glass back to her lips and downed the small drink, feeling the burn of the vodka going down her throat.

She shook her head as she polished off the drink, sending her red mane flying around her face.

"Well alright then." Drew laughed, finishing off their own drink to match her.

Rose met Drew's gaze, their eyes instantly locking onto each other. Suddenly, the prying eyes of the other gorgeous sapphics around them disappeared; Drew was all

Rose could see.

Drew made their way back to the bar and returned with fresh drinks. After half an hour, they were both three drinks deep and beginning to feel a little looser. Rose's hips were rocking to the beat and Drew was beginning to let go of their rigid movements.

Their bodies had drifted closer and closer to the center of the dance floor as they drank. With their hands free of cups, Rose grabbed Drew's and led them into the heart of the dancing.

A drip of sweat was growing on Drew's temple. They faced each other as they moved, and with each step, Rose's body drew closer to Drew's. It begged to feel their heat. And who was Rose to deny it such a pleasure?

Rose slipped her leg between Drew's, allowing herself to grind on them. Drew's hand drifted up her exposed thigh, sending a shiver up her spine as their hands landed on her hips.

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Their long fingers pulled Rose in, letting her clit just barely graze their strong, muscular thighs. If the music was any quieter, Rose was certain Drew would've heard her moan. Not wanting to give all her cards away, Rose turned around and put her ass against Drew's center.

She let herself peek at Drew's face just once. Their mouth hung open as they looked down at Rose's plump ass. Drew looked hungry, like all they wanted was to pull up her dress and see what was hiding beneath it.

They brought their hands back to Rose's hips, pulling her into their thrust. Their bodies moved in sync, Drew's firm grip guiding Rose into place.

Her panties slickened with excitement from their touch. Rose let her head roll back onto Drew's shoulder. They lowered their head, their mouth mere centimeters from Rose's neck.

As her hips grinded against Drew's, Rose felt her center craving more: begging to feel Drew's hands, mouth, strap everywhere.

Rose whipped around, wanting to see their face while they moved together. She looked up at Drew's hungry eyes, which were busy watching her body move against theirs. Rose smirked up at them, liking how it felt to make them need her.

Putting her hands around Drew's neck, Rose let her body rock with Drew's. Their strong hand stayed on her waist, pulling her closer as the beat carried on. Rose's hands drifted up into Drew's short hair, feeling the fade lightly prick her hands as she ran her fingers into the shaggy top.

As Drew's leg pushed into Rose's clit, her dress riding up her thighs, Rose felt her grip tighten in Drew's hair.

"Fuck." Drew moaned under their breath, their eyes rolling back.

Something about the primal noise leaving their lips made Rose need to be somehow nearer to Drew. She brought her head in closer, just centimeters from Drew's soft, luscious lips. She couldn't peel her eyes away from them for more than a second as she flicked her gaze up to Drew's hazel eyes. But in this light, they were dark and mysterious, and Rose needed to know more.

She moved closer, pulling Drew's head in to close the gap with a tight grip on their hair. Drew pressed their lips into Rose's, their tongue teasing at hers.

Everything around them disappeared, the music silencing as their mouths met. Rose felt like she could feel Drew's heartbeat sync with her own. Maybe it was just her throbbing clit.

As they began to slip their tongue into her mouth, Rose bit down on Drew's lower lip, a light groan flowing from Drew's throat into Rose's.

But suddenly, everything came flooding back in. The booming music. The crowded dance floor. The heat of the bodies around them. Drew's rude comments.

Rose pulled away, her heart still racing.

Opening their eyes, Drew froze. "You okay?"

"I should go home." Before she waited for Drew to respond, Rose was pushing her way through the crowd. She couldn't bring herself to turn around and see if Drew was following her, instead desperate for the humid breeze of the Hudson River.

She shoved her way to the exit, throwing the door open. A rush of sobering air smacked her in the face as she stepped outside. The music faded as the door swung closed behind her. They didn't follow me.

Despite it being a hot night, anything would be cooler than the sauna that was Henrietta's in the summer.

Rose caught her breath, trying to quiet her racing mind and pulsing center. It was a bad idea to get involved with them. She'd been unceremoniously dumped only a few days ago, and she should really take some time to be by herself. A pretentious ass like Drew who needed to be convinced of her value certainly wasn't the best person to help her feel confident.

Drew was her coworker. Fuck, Drew knew Shan! This was a terrible idea.

She shook her head as she ordered her car home. Tapping her foot against the cement, Rose tried to lean into the calm quiet of the empty street. But then the door behind her opened, the blaring music from inside spilling out onto the pavement.

Turning her head slightly, Rose swallowed the lump in her throat as Drew's lanky figure approached. She grasped for something – anything – to talk about that wasn't the kiss. "Let me send you my share of drinks."

She looked down at her phone, opening Venmo.

Drew shook their head, a light chuckle escaping their lips. It was deep, almost a growl, and it sent a shiver straight down Rose's body to her slick center. They pressed closer, towering over her now. "You can get the next round."

Rose's chest tightened as she looked up into Drew's eyes, lighter under the streetlamps of Hudson Street.

With the exception of a few stragglers dipping into the bar, they were alone on the sidewalk.

Drew cleared their throat, steadying their breathing. “So?”

It was clear that they wanted an answer, some sort of explanation for Rose’s sudden interest in them. But Rose couldn’t answer that question.

So instead, she nodded. “I’ll drop by tomorrow so we can select the final pics for the engagement shoot and start discussing how to set up the maternity shoot.”

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Drew scanned her face, trying to understand what went wrong. Rose bit her lip and turned away. If she dared to look into Drew's eyes, she knew temptation would win out again.

"Okay." Drew relented, tucking their hands in their pockets.

"You can head home. I'm good." Rose crossed her arms, hoping she'd look tough.

Drew shook their head and laughed. "I'm not letting you wait here alone."

Her throat tightened. Why were they choosing now to be nice? Where was this at the start?

They waited for Rose's ride in tense silence. When the cab pulled up, Rose nearly leapt off the curb, giving Drew a wave as she ducked into the car.

"See you tomorrow." Drew offered a slight smile.

Rose gulped. "Tomorrow."

As soon as the car sped off for Brooklyn, she dropped her head into her hands. What the fuck am I doing?

Coffee in hand, Drew slid into their seat across from Diana, who was still rubbing sleep from her eyes as the bright, morning light seeped through the coffee shop windows.

“Okay, literally why so urgent?” Diana glared at Drew. “You’ve been very high maintenance lately.”

Drew rolled their eyes and tapped their finger against their paper cup. Biting their lip, Drew shrugged. “We kissed.”

“Who?” Diana wrinkled her forehead, unsure why Drew would assume she knew exactly what they were talking about. But as the words settled in her mind and Drew raised an eyebrow, Diana gasped. “Oh! Rose?”

Drew nodded.

Her head fell into her hands as she shook her head. “Drew. You have to stop getting with people you’re doing a project with.”

Raising a finger, Drew defended themselves. “She kissed me, first of all.”

“Bottom.” Diana took a sip of her coffee, pursing out her lips dramatically.

Drew wanted to fight her but instead took in a large gulp of coffee and looked down at the cup, already half empty. “I don’t even know how it happened. We went to Henrietta’s...”

“You went to Henrietta’s – a notorious hookup spot – and don’t understand how you ended up making out on the dance floor?” Diana could hardly look at Drew.

Ignoring her, Drew continued. “We were dancing and drinking, and after, like, two

hours, she put her hand in my hair and kissed me. But then she booked it out the door and hardly said another word to me.”

Diana winced. “Yikes.”

Drew raised their cup in agreement, each of them taking a drink. Still nursing a light headache from the shots and lack of sleep, Drew couldn’t understand where they had gone wrong. They watched as pedestrians walked past, minding their own business.

Suddenly opening her mouth, Diana said, “Well, maybe...” But she trailed off before she finished, leaving Drew to panic.

“What?”

Diana shook her head and curled her lips under her teeth. “I... nevermind.”

“Bro.” Drew raised their hands in surrender. “Come on, you know you can be honest with me.”

Eyeing them, Diana considered whether or not that was really true. And Drew couldn’t blame her. They hadn’t been the most receptive to her criticism in the past. But Drew was helpless; they couldn’t let this random kiss ruin an already tenuous working relationship.

With a deep sigh, Diana shrugged. “Maybe she thinks you’re hot but can’t get over how much of a dick you’ve been.”

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“I haven’t been that much of dick.” Drew crossed their arms, shaking their head at the accusation.

Diana laughed and raised an eyebrow. “I love you, Drew. But you’re off-putting on a good day, let alone when someone is encroaching on your territory.”

Drew couldn’t stop themselves from smirking. It was undeniably true. They had no ability to be warm right off the bat, especially with someone as bubbly as Rose. She was everything Drew didn’t like. But somehow, they couldn’t get her out of their mind.

The kiss was incredible. Drew hadn’t felt their chest burn like that... well, ever really. They wanted – no –neededmore. And they were prepared to do just about anything to have it.

“But I did apologize, and we agreed to work with each other on another shoot.” Drew was trying to convince Diana that it really couldn’t be that bad.

Diana hung her head. “This is ridiculous. There’s another project?”

Drew nodded. “Ellen and Finley insisted we help their friend with a maternity shoot.”

Laughing, Diana’s cup sloshed over, sprinkling her with coffee.

“Karma.” Drew wiggled their eyebrows.

“To be fair, you hate shit like that.” Diana dabbed at the light brown stain on the front

of her LAWSON t-shirt.

Drew shrugged. “I’d take a maternity shoot over an engagement shoot any day. At least those couples actually have something to celebrate.”

Diana rolled her eyes. “For someone who hates love so much, you’re kind of always looking for it.

“It’s good money, that’s all.”

The pair people-watched for another moment. The day was gorgeous, the warm summer sun just starting to heat up the cement. It was perfect weather for hiding inside Drew’s sunny, air conditioned loft. But Diana had dragged them to a coffee shop with the sweaty masses.

“And you want to work with her again, don’t you?” Diana eyed Drew suspiciously.

With a shrug, Drew grappled for an excuse. “I mean, she offered to handle all the logistics and take control, so I just have to show up and shoot. And it’s a huge bump on my current rate.”

“Bottom behavior.” Diana laughed as Drew kicked her under the table.

They bit their cheek as they thought about the job. “But the real question is: do I ignore the kiss or say something about it?”

“Tough call. When are you seeing her next?” Diana asked.

Looking at their watch, Drew did the math. “Like, three hours from now to decide on Ellen and Fin’s finals. And I think to go over the details of the next shoot.”

Diana thought for a minute, looking up at the paneled ceiling of the coffee shop. Drew's usual place didn't have much seating so they had to settle for a random coffee shop around the block.

"Well, I think it's best to leave it alone while you're doing a work thing. But if you're like grabbing a coffee or something, you could feel it out." A smirk appeared on her face. "That's assuming you want to kiss her again."

She raised an eyebrow as she watched Drew's face flush. A smile crept onto their face as they thought about kissing Rose again. It was all they could think about as they laid in bed last night, unable to fall asleep.

That smile told Diana knew everything she needed to. "Okay, then you know what to do."

"Fuck. I never need advice with this stuff. I always make a move when I want to." Drew shook their head, swishing their coffee cup. The oatmilk that had settled on the bottom mixed into the brew as they tried to get a handle on their racing thoughts.

Diana winced. "Uh-oh."

They both knew exactly what was happening. It had been years since Drew struggled with a woman. And if they didn't want to be alone forever, they might have to start being honest with themselves about what was happening between them and Rose.

After a brief catch up about Diana's dating life, Drew headed back to their apartment to get some work done. Hopefully they could make some progress on the grant application that was still looming over their head.

Sitting down at their desk, Drew opened the application. They had already filled it out with the basic stuff, including a personal statement and all of their biographical

details. All that was left was to attach their portfolio.

They'd pored over the photos for weeks, swapping one out for another every few days. As they scrolled through the folder now, though, they couldn't think of a single piece to change out.

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“Maybe I just have to submit it,” Drew whispered to themselves.

They dragged the folder into the application, reading over every last detail one more time.

If I ever want to shoot something that isn’t an engagement or a wedding, I’m going to have to submit it.

Lingering over the bright green submission button, Drew sucked a deep breath into their lungs. On the exhale, they let their finger hit send. With a brief whoosh, a pop up appeared:

Congratulations! Your application has been submitted.

Before they could second guess themselves, Drew stood from their desk chair and walked away from the computer.

Just as they were about to rush back to the desktop to try to unsubmit it, their buzzer blared out. The sound echoed off the brick walls of the loft, startling them out of their panic. They glanced at their watch and waltzed over to the door to buzz Rose in.

Punctual as always. Drew rolled their eyes.

As she burst through the door, Rose refused to leave any room for awkwardness. “Would you be able to print a digital photo on photo paper for me?”

Drew nodded as they shut the door to their studio behind her. “Sure.”

Her eyes scanned the apartment as she set her bag down on the work table. On the desktop’s screen sat an application confirmation. She raised a brow as she spotted it.

Drew rushed over to the computer and changed the tab. Even though they were trying to act normal about it, it was very obvious that they were trying to hide what they were up to.

“Sorry, I’d do it myself, but I don’t have a printer, and the printing shop is crazy expensive.” Rose cleared her throat as she offered Drew a gentle smile.

She had hoped that in the bright light of day Drew wouldn’t look as alluring as the night before. But she was brutally wrong. Somehow, Drew looked even sexier in a pair of green joggers and a muscle tee.

Swallowing the excitement building in her throat, Rose pulled a manilla folder out from her bag. If she could just avoid looking at them, she might be able to avoid the temptation.

“Yeah, no problem.” Drew nodded.

Holding out the envelope to Drew, Rose launched into her spiel. “So, I went through the photos you left at my place, and these are the fifteen I think are the most useful. I think I have about twenty of my own that would be ideal.”

Drew was confused. “No 50/50 split?”

Rose crossed her arms as she was forced to meet Drew's questioning gaze. "I'm open to it, but I'd like to hear your argument for why another five of yours deserve it."

Their mouth fell open, a slight smile at the corners of their mouth.

Do they like being demeaned? Rose tried to hide her surprise. It was hard to imagine Drew submitting to anyone. But here they were, looking hungry for Rose again.

"Fair enough. Should we talk about the maternity shoot?" Drew walked closer, their eyes drifting down Rose's body.

Rose felt her heart pound under their gaze, craving their hands on her hips again. But she knew now wasn't the time.

Taking a seat at her usual stool, Rose pulled a few drawings from her tote bag. They were rough, but as they rested on the table, Rose could tell Drew was surprised by how pretty the sketches were.

"You can draw." Drew nodded. It was more a statement than a question.

"I went to a fine arts school and shifted to photography after college." Rose swallowed the nerves in her throat. From the diploma hanging on Drew's wall, she could tell they were a traditionally trained photographer since the first time she came over. They had probably been fooling around with a camera since they were able to hold one.

Rose looked back down at the papers. "This is what I had in mind."

Drew flipped through the deck, scanning each page. It was a good concept.

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“I think the goal here is to capture Lauren’s connection to nature.” Rose explained as her nerves grew. “She’s having this baby by herself and loves the faerie vibes. Lots of people will have judgments about a woman raising a baby on her own, but we want her to look carefree and in her element.”

A smile was growing on Drew’s face.

Do they hate it? Rose tucked a strand of her red hair behind her ear.

Drew’s eyes caught on one image, their long index finger tapping it. “Does this one look too angelic for the forest elf vibe?”

“I mean, it may end up being cut, but I think the setup is so clean that it won’t cost us much to get the shot.” Rose shrugged. She couldn’t figure out why she wanted to impress Drew. They were a talented photographer, sure, but so was Rose.

Her body tensed as she nervously explained her vision. “To me, it reads as free. The whole sky...”

“Opening up to her and her child. I see that.” Drew nodded. It was near impossible to read their feelings on the shoot. Maybe they hated it. But if that was the case, they were doing a good job of keeping their mouth shut.

Rose let a smile leave her lips. “Exactly.”

Drew gently slapped the table with a flat palm, and Rose could almost feel the sharp sting it would’ve left on her ass. She wanted nothing more than to feel Drew’s hands

on her again.

“If this is your vision, then I think it’s a good place to start.” Drew nodded.

“What kind of film do you want to shoot on?” As Rose's green eyes met Drew's hazel, she knew she was fucked.

Something about Drew’s sleepy-eyed gaze and their newfound ability to compromise made Rose want to rip their fucking clothes off.

Drew raised an eyebrow, the question alone making them excited. “I normally would say black and white. But I think I want grainy color for this. I think it’ll give more *Midsummer Night’s Dream* that way.”

She couldn’t help but return Drew’s smile. Watching them get excited over something as dorky as film choice was endearing. And hot.

“Okay, I trust that.” Rose nodded. They locked eyes, electricity beginning to grow between them.

Rose felt like she could see Drew’s chest rising faster. But before she could really get a good look, Drew turned toward their kitchen to make more coffee.

“So, how are we getting to this mystical forest? Are we taking a witch’s broomstick or a magic carpet?” Drew peeked over their shoulder at Rose’s blushing face and winked.

“Very funny.” Rose shook her head. The corny dad joke should have been expected, but Rose couldn’t help but be surprised by the soft side Drew was suddenly sharing.

“Oh,” Drew asked, “have you checked for any scheduled events on those dates,

wherever we're shooting?"

Rose turned her stool toward Drew, watching them make coffee. Their arms flexed as they made slight, controlled movements. It still surprised Rose to see just how strong they were. She hadn't seen any workout equipment around their apartment. And it felt nearly impossible that they could be so muscular without even going to a gym.

Rose nodded. "There's a place just across the river to the north that has a perfect national park. It's pretty quiet, I've never seen anyone have an event there. Plus, I can always 'Shop them out if someone slips into the background."

She looked down at her hands. It wouldn't hurt to check with the venue later, but Rose wasn't about to surrender her hard-earned upper hand by admitting she should have asked.

Drew hesitated as they poured water into their coffee machine, clearly debating challenging Rose. But instead, they kept pouring and nodded. "Sounds good. So we'll drive?"

"Yep." Rose made a mental note to book a car rental.

But before she could pull her phone to check rental prices, Drew turned around. "Cool, I can borrow a friend's truck and take that. Save us the rental fee off our profit."

Rose smiled. "That would be great. We can leave from here, say at 10 am? That gives us two hours to get there, and plenty of shoot time. Since we'll be in late June at that point, we won't have to worry about the sun setting too early.."

Drew nodded. "Okay then."

Silence settled over the loft. Drew returned to the worktable with two coffees, taking a deep breath as they set one next to Rose.

Rose lifted her eyes to meet Drew's gaze as the cup settled in front of her. Her body responded before her mind could, excitement growing in her chest.

She knew the kiss had been risky. They had so many joint projects coming up, and if this went wrong, their careers might be collateral damage. But goddamn, look at that smile. Rose lightly licked her lips as she took a sip from the mug.

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An ear-splitting timer interrupted her thoughts, which grew dirtier by the second. Drew snatched it from the table and turned it off brusquely. With the awful noise silenced, they stood and picked up a black plastic tank from beside the sink, their fingers straining as they pulled off the lid. They tilted the tank upside down over the sink and began pouring liquid out from inside.

From the smell alone, Rose could tell it was one of the chemicals from the dark room. “How does that work?”

Drew whipped their head around, a little surprised Rose was still interested in learning about their process. “Basically, you have to reel the film through this metal spool in the pitch dark and place it in the tank. And then this lid has holes that allow liquid to seep through without light getting in.”

Rose nodded. “So basically what we did in the dark room, just in a smaller container?”

“And way darker. The reel of film is way more light-sensitive than the photo paper, so even the red light would ruin it.” Drew laughed as they poured more liquid into the tank and began flipping the canister around, letting the liquid fully coat the film inside.

Shaking her head, Rose wrinkled her forehead. “How in the fuck do you reel film onto a spool in the dark?”

Drew laughed. “A lot of practice and a lot of torn reels.”

Rose laughed way harder than she meant to. It was hard to imagine Drew – who was so put together now – ruining film and making a mess. She tapped her finger against the table. “Could you show me?”

A smile took over Drew’s face, a slight flush of pink rushing to their cheeks. They nodded and reached into a pull-out drawer near the sink. When they closed the drawer, they gripped a metal spool in their palm. With their free hand, Drew grabbed a cardboard box from next to their lightbox.

Rose wasn’t quite sure how they had even managed to carry so much at once. Not because of the weight but because the odd shape required a lot of grip strength. Their hands strained as they held the metal, a mess of veins and tendons that sent Rose’s mind straight back to the gutter.

They must be a climber or something because those hands are goddamn impressive. Rose shook her head as Drew set the supplies down on the messy table. They delicately collected Rose’s drawings into a pile and set it to the side, away from the demonstration zone.

Pulling up a stool next to Rose, Drew plopped down and got ready to teach. “So, the first thing you have to do is find the entrance of the spool, which is marked with this slight lip.” Drew ran their finger along the metal. Sure enough, the swirling metal stopped abruptly and left a sharp edge.

Drew grabbed a strip of old negatives from the cardboard box and placed the end of the film at the edge, gently feeding it into place. “Then you thread the negative through the lip and the rest of the spool. Once it’s about an inch in, you can just start twisting the spool, and it reels the rest for you.”

They spun the reel in, both of their hands twisting in sync. Rose was too busy watching their flexing forearms to notice the film quickly feeding itself between each

metal rung of the spool.

Drew set the finished spool down on the table, a perfect spiral.

“You do that in the dark?” Rose asked, clearly impressed.

Drew shrugged. “Give it a try.” They pulled the spool apart, the old negatives falling out of the spiral and cascading onto the table. With a light shake, the entire spool came undone. Drew reassembled the spool as Rose watched, her nerves growing.

They passed her the spool, their fingers lightly brushing as they passed off the metal cylinder. Trying to clear her mind, Rose grabbed the spool and the piece of film from the table. She tried to place the film on the reel. Drew watched along, diligently observing her movements. But she knew Drew was the type to let her fail rather than intervene.

Once she thought had fed enough film in, Rose started to mimic Drew’s twisting motion. But a loud crunch made her stop.

“That’s okay.” Drew nodded, smiling sweetly as Rose looked up at them.

Rose pulled the spool apart. With the film back in hand, she started the process over again. As she slowly slid the negatives into the lip, Rose noticed the film was used.

She leaned closer, trying to look more focused on the spool than the images themselves. The negatives are wrinkled and dented from years of use. But one image on the strip caught Rose’s eyes. An older couple, in their mid-fifties by Rose’s guess, posed perfectly with a picturesque smile.

Next to them, a lanky college student. Their softer face couldn’t stop Rose from recognizing them. Their jawline was duller, their cheeks rounder. But it was their

eyes that pulled Rose into the picture.

Even with usual grumpy demeanor, Rose had never seen their eyes look like that. Dim. Depressed. Rose clocked the pain a mile away, even through the fake smiles of the older couple and Drew's attempt to appear neutral at best.

Drew swallowed the lump in their throat as they realized what exactly Rose was looking at. "Those are my folks. We don't talk much anymore."

Rose lifted her head from the image to meet Drew's gaze. Their eyes were glassy. Rose couldn't help but notice how the shine brought more of the gold out of their hazel eyes. Even like this, they were beautiful.

"That sucks." Rose nodded, finishing spooling the film. She set the metal down and gave Drew her full attention. "Can I ask why?"

Drew laughed. "Why does any queer person not speak to their family?"

"Right." Rose bit her lip. She looked back at Drew, forcing herself into their line of sight. "You deserve better."

Before things could get any more serious, Drew let their hand smack against the table. "Now, do it with your eyes closed."

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Rose's head rolled back. "You've got to be kidding."

"I'm serious." Drew nodded, a smile creeping back onto their face. Her heart pounded as Drew's dimples made an appearance.. "You can't take actual film in there and try to reel it in the dark without testing it on something disposable first."

Rose couldn't help but wince. She had been fortunate that her parents were supportive of her. But hearing Drew call what she could only guess was one of the last pictures of them and their parents "disposable" was tough.

But it was clear from the dents in the film that Drew couldn't get anything else from the picture, and Rose couldn't blame them.

Rose sighed, avoiding Drew's eyes.

"What?" Drew asked.

Rose tilted her head, it was obvious. "It's embarrassing."

Drew scrunched their brows together. "Practicing?"

"No, closing your eyes when no one else is." Rose rolled her eyes. It was the shyest Drew had ever seen her. And their surprise that this was the line for her was clear.

Drew shrugged. "I'll close mine too."

With suspicion in her eyes, Rose studied Drew. But after a moment of nudging, she

relented and let her eyelids close.

She took a deep breath as darkness took over. A part of her knew Drew wasn't going to keep their eyes closed the entire time. But Rose kind of liked being vulnerable around them, letting them see her so open.

Once she got her bearings, Rose felt around the table and found the edge of the negative as well as the metal lip of the spool.

Okay, that's a good step. Rose took the negatives and shoved them into the spool, far less cautious than she was before closing her eyes.

She was immediately punished with the sound of crunching. "Shit."

She opened her eyes, wanting to evaluate where she went wrong. But she was bombarded with light, she saw Drew watching her.

"Liar." Rose shook her head, narrowing her eyes at Drew.

Drew raised their hands, surrendering. "I closed them for a minute. Try it again."

They wouldn't let Rose rip on them for too long, expertly shifting Rose's direction back to the spool.

Rose groaned.

"Come on, close your eyes." Drew instructed.

Rolling her eyes, Rose allowed her lids to close.

"Grab the spool." Drew's voice grew lower.

Rose did as she was told, holding the metal in her palm. She could hear Drew moving closer. Her breathing escalating, Rose fumbled around the table for the negatives. But no matter where she felt, she couldn't seem to find them.

Rose could tell Drew was smiling. She jolted as a hand touched hers. No, not touched. Grabbed. Drew pulled her hand in the right direction, letting her grasp the film.

Fuck. Rose gulped as she felt the heat of Drew's hand on hers.

"Let your finger find the lip." Their voice was almost a whisper, a low rumble that escaped their chest.

With a firm grip, Drew used their own hand to guide Rose's to the edge of the spool. Rose could feel their body beginning to press behind hers. It was the same heat and electricity she felt at Henrietta's the night before.

Blood rushed to her center, where she could feel herself throbbing and aching to be close to Drew again.

Drew's breath tickled against Rose's ear as they whispered, "Now, keep one finger on the lip and use the other hand to grab the negative."

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Rose fumbled with the negative, trying to find the edge quickly. But as Drew's body pressed against her back, she couldn't think. Reaching their other arm around her, Drew placed their left hand over Rose's. Their slender fingers threaded between Rose's, pulling her hand to the edge of the film.

Rose nearly jumped when her fingertips found the edge of the film.

Drew laughed in her ear, the deep rumble from their chest sending a wave of pleasure down to Rose's already throbbing clit.

"Let it slip into the spool." Drew lightened their grip on her hands. There was no way for Rose to hide her rapid breathing. If Drew was going to notice how hot this made her, there was nothing she could do to stop it now.

The film slid into place, this time with no resistance. A pleased hum almost escaped Rose's throat. But she swallowed the impulse.

"Now, twist." Drew grumbled into her ear. Their hands twisted together. Rose could feel Drew's arms flexing along with hers as they moved in tandem, slowly drawing the tail of the film into the spool.

Drew's biceps tense against Rose's skin, the warmth of their body a sharp contrast to the chilly air conditioning.

The spool made a shuffling sound once all the film was wrapped up. It was over. Drew stretched their finger from Rose's hand to the edge of the spool, the sharp metal familiar to the tip of their finger.

Rose expected Drew to pull away, to remove their arms from around her. But once they had confirmed the spool was rolled, Drew lingered. She could feel their chest rising and falling against her back. Their head fell slightly, their lips hovering over the exposed skin on Rose's neck.

Opening her eyes slowly to the bright light, Rose looked down at the strong hands holding hers. It was exactly what she had feared after Henrietta's: that all she would want was to feel Drew against her. To feel them touch her the way only they know how.

She took a risk, twisting her neck to peek at Drew, who was still gripping her hands.

When she met Drew's eyes, they were already open, looking down at hers.

Rose felt her throat tighten. Drew's eyes begged to fuck her. Begged to see her. And Rose wasn't strong enough to deny either of their desires.

Setting the spool down, Rose took a deep breath, giving her body one more chance to change its mind. But the rush of electricity to her clit was all she needed to whip around on her stool to face Drew.

Drew raised an eyebrow, asking Rose if she was sure with their eyes.

With a nod, Rose gazed up at Drew.

Placing their hand where Rose's jaw met her neck, Drew's long fingers sunk into Rose's hair. With a light tug, Drew brought Rose's lips toward theirs. Rose couldn't stop the moan from leaving her throat as she felt Drew's lush lips against hers.

A part of her had convinced herself Drew's lips weren't as nice as she remembered – that the alcohol was doing Drew some favors.

But sitting in Drew's loft, in the bright light of day, Rose knew it was exactly how she remembered. Which is why she was so scared of it.

She stood from her stool, unable to pull her lips from Drew's. Wrapping their spare hand around her waist, Drew pulled Rose closer. Their fingers desperately gripped at Rose's head and waist. It felt like they didn't ever want to let Rose go.

Their eyes close to level, Drew paused and pulled away to meet Rose's gaze. "Are you sure?"

Rose licked her lips as her eyes flitted from Drew's warm, earthy eyes to their full lips. "Shut up and kiss me, please."

"Well, at least you have manners." Drew laughed into Rose's mouth as they allowed their tongue to tease her lips.

Rose stepped forward, prompting Drew to follow her lead. She looked for the bed, trying to figure out how to get in it without taking her hands off Drew. Drew got the message and started lightly pushing her toward the bed.

They guided her body around the work table and across the open floor of the studio. Before she knew it, Rose could feel the platform bed frame pressing against her calves. She moaned as the wood pushed into her skin.

Drew's hands had drifted down to the hem of Rose's shirt, their fingers lightly lifting the fabric to meet her soft skin.

"I want this off." It wasn't quite a question: more so a request.

Rose smiled and laughed as she pulled Drew in for another kiss. Drew pulled the t-shirt over Rose's head, their jaw dropping at the sight of her body. A simple pink

bralette with a lacy trim cradled Rose's breasts as she watched Drew look at her.

Drew shook their head. "Wow." They brought their lips from Rose's lips to her jawline, slowly making their way down... down... down to Rose's sensitive neck. She felt the hair on her body stand on end as Drew gently pressed their lips into the exposed skin.

But after a moment, their kiss grew rougher. Rose felt their teeth starting to nip at her neck.

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“Drew,” Rose whimpered at their touch. They left one hand cupping the back of her head and the other pulling at her waist. She could feel herself growing slick as she fell into their touch.

Drew lifted their head to Rose’s ear and lowered their voice. “Yes, Rose?”

Rose groaned and rolled her head back, the low rumble of their chest forcing a shudder through her body.

“I want to see you,” Rose finally managed to whisper. She put her hands around Drew’s waist, wanting their muscle tank off of them.

With a laugh, Drew gripped the fabric behind their own neck, toned triceps flexing as they pulled the shirt over their head. Rose eyed their body hungrily. She couldn’t get enough.

“Fuck.” Rose gulped as she saw Drew’s toned stomach and wide, sculpted hips.

Drew’s breath caught in their chest at Rose’s excitement. Taking advantage of Drew’s distraction, Rose let her mouth explore their skin. She turned their head, bringing their ear to her mouth. She licked their neck, letting her tongue trace the ridge of their ear down to the lobe. Nibbling, Rose grinned as Drew began to grind their hips against hers.

Rose let her hand tug at Drew’s green joggers. She needed more, and she couldn’t wait any longer.

Meeting her gaze, Drew smiled. “You’re eager.”

“You’re an asshole.” Rose rolled her eyes as she started to undo the button on her own pants.

Drew laughed. “And that gets you going?”

Rose glared at them, lightly punching their exposed stomach. “You know, I can take this away.”

“Please fucking don’t.” Drew pulled her closer, apologetically kissing her cheek as they undid the strings holding their joggers up.

Getting on their knees, Drew’s fingers looped into Rose’s belt loops and began sliding the loose pants down her legs. Rose widened her stance as Drew caressed her legs, guiding the fabric down to the floor.

Rose’s knees trembled at Drew’s touch. As their lips grazed the sensitive skin of her inner thigh, the pulsing of her clit was no longer avoidable. She’d never wanted anyone the way she wanted Drew.

Drew worked their way up Rose’s thighs toward her center, where a sleek black thong was waiting for them. They let the fabric slip into their mouth, pulling at it with their teeth.

“Ask nicely.” Rose winked as their eyes met.

Drew made a pained sound. “Please, let me fuck you like you’ve never been fucked before?”

Rose hesitated, playfully rubbing her chin as she considered it. Her body was begging

for Drew's touch. But they had tortured her enough; she wanted to make them work for it now. Besides, they looked pretty on their knees.

"Hmmm. Fine." Rose giggled as Drew's mouth hovered over her center.

Drew moaned as they breathed in her scent. "I mean, I don't have to." Drew pulled away, watching Rose's shocked pout.

Rose shook her head, a desperate groan escaping her mouth. "I didn't say that."

She slipped her hand into Drew's hair and pulled them toward her; the short, brown strands gave her surprisingly good leverage. Drew let their mouth meet the fabric, lightly pushing their lips into Rose's clit through her soaked panties.

"Shit." Rose rolled her head back as her hand flexed in Drew's hair. She hated how hot Drew's indignant smirk was, how sexy they looked kneeling for her.

Their fingers slipped under the waist of her thong, lightly gripping the sensitive skin of her hips.

Rose lowered her hands from Drew's hair to the panties, rocking her hips as she slipped them down her thighs. Drew grabbed them from Rose, pulling them to her ankles. As she stepped out of them, Drew balanced her with a firm hand.

Fuck. So they do have manners? Rose licked her lips as Drew returned their lips to her center, now completely exposed. Still standing, Rose spread her legs for Drew's tongue. They eagerly began to kiss and lick Rose's center, right at her clit.

Rose immediately shuddered under the touch, blood rushing to the sensitive bundle of nerves. Drew smirked as they let their tongue softly slip into her folds, finally tasting her.

“Oh god. You taste incredible.” Drew mumbled, their face buried deep between her legs. They brought their hand around to her ass, pushing her hips into their mouth.

Rose whimpered as they moved her into position. Drew knew exactly what they wanted, and Rose loved that it was her. Aided by Rose’s slick excitement, Drew’s warm tongue slid smoothly from her clit down toward her entrance.

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Drew pulled away for just a minute. “Just so you know, your thong is probably ruined from the mess you’ve made.”

“The mess I made? It's your fault.” Rose rolled her eyes as her hands tugged at Drew’s hair, a light moan escaping their lips and vibrating her sensitive clit.

Looking up at her as they pressed their tongue under her hood, Drew laughed. “Then do I get to keep my prize?” They pointed to the pair of slick, stained underwear on the floor next to them.

Rose laughed. But as Drew pressed their tongue deep into Rose’s slit, licking up the excitement dripping out of her pussy, her laughter turned to a throaty moan.

Drew needed more of that sound. They gave her asscheek a firm pat before sliding their palm over her hip and toward her center, teasing her slit with their fingers. Their own excitement threatened to boil over as they felt how wet she was.

“More.” Rose begged.

Drew smiled and nodded. Pressing their tongue into her clit, they traced small, slow circles around her clit. They built up the pressure as their finger teased her entrance, lightly pressing inside her for a moment.

Rose moaned as she felt the strong finger lightly spreading her. She was so wet the single finger wasn’t enough.

“Don’t fuck with me, Drew. I need more.” Rose almost growled.

Drew froze, a devious smirk plastered all over their face. “Oh, so you don’t want me to fuck you?”

Rose tugged on their hair. “Not what I said.”

“Then stop interrupting me.” Drew plunged their tongue back into her folds, this time gripping her hips tightly as they sunk their fingers into her wet entrance.

Rose moaned as Drew gave her what she wanted, shuddering against their mouth and hands.

“Fuck.” Drew whimpered as their fingers grew slick with Rose’s pleasure. Their eyes clenched shut as their own anticipation took over.

Looking down, Rose watched as Drew began to rock their own hips, their clenched thighs gently squeezing their own clit as they ate her out.

Rose’s grip on Drew’s hair tightened as their tongue worked in sync with their hand, bringing Rose closer to climax. They kept their pace steady, despite Rose’s body twisting against them.

Rose threw her head back as she let herself sink into the pleasure.

“Oh god.” Rose moaned, clenching her jaw and searching for something to grab as the pleasure grew in her center. “I’m going to pull your hair out.”

Drew laughed as their tongue played with her clit. “I’ll still look hot bald.” It was all the motivation Drew needed to finish her, thrusting their fingers deeper into her pussy, finding her perfect spot and massaging it.

As promised, Rose’s grip on Drew’s scalp tightened. It sent a jolt of pain down

Drew's spine, making their own clit throb harder and letting a moan escape their mouth.

Rose would have been more surprised by just how much they liked the tug if she wasn't mid-orgasm, her body shuddering against Drew's mouth and fingers. She couldn't hold it in any longer; a scream rose from her throat as Drew's kept the perfect pressure.

"Oh god!" Rose's body tensed, her legs weak. If it weren't for Drew's free hand on her ass, she would have fallen over by now.

When Rose's body stuttered and released, Drew lightened their pressure on her, gently lapping at her slit as they pulled their fingers out of her.

Rose tried to steady her breathing, releasing her grip on their hair. She let her hand fall to Drew's shoulders, lightly pulling them up toward her.

But Drew chuckled. "You think I'm done with you?"

Rose whimpered as Drew sat up straight and pushed her down on the bed, spreading her legs and burying their head in her thighs again.

What have I gotten into?

17

DREW

Drew couldn't get enough of Rose. They felt like they could stay between her legs for hours. Even now, on top of her with their fingers buried deep in her entrance, Drew only wanted more.

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Rocking their hips, Drew pushed deeper inside Rose as she brought the air-pulse vibrator to her own clit.

Rose pulled Drew's ear closer to her lips. "I want to fuck you, if you'd like that."

The words forced a smile to Drew's cheeks. Whenever they hooked up, Drew hardly ever received. Not because they didn't want to, but because a lot of the femmes they brought home seemed to think Drew was uninterested.

But they weren't uninterested now. Their slit was soaked from playing with Rose, begging to be touched.

With a nod, Drew pulled their fingers out of Rose.

Moaning, Rose arched her back. "What do you like?"

Drew laughed. "Being fucked."

Rose rolled her eyes and glared at Drew.

"I like riding it." Drew bit their lip, suddenly shy.

Raising an eyebrow, Rose couldn't hide her surprise. "Really?"

Drew nodded, avoiding her eyes. Sensing Drew's nerves, Rose smiled and put her hand on their chin, guiding their gaze back to her green eyes.

“Look at me.” Rose watched Drew’s anxious face. “I want to touch you how you want to be touched. Understood?”

Swallowing the lump in their throat, Drew nodded.

Rose bit her lip. “Now, I want to watch you ride it. So you should pick what you’d like inside you.”

An excited smile took over Drew’s face as they launched themselves toward their nightstand. They grabbed the box that sat under the bottom shelf, setting it on the bed as they began parsing through it.

“An entire box?” Rose raised an eyebrow.

Drew laughed. “I like being prepared.”

Shaking her head, Rose watched as Drew pulled out a wide variety of sex toys. Before she knew it, paddles and chains were being set on the bed too.

Noticing her eyes widening, Drew placed their hand on Rose’s thigh. “Those aren’t for this time.”

“Oh so, there’ll be a next time?” Rose giggled, a cheeky smirk on her lips.

Drew rolled their eyes, finally selecting the toy they had been looking for and pushing Rose back down against the bed. “We’ll see.”

Pulling the strap on, Rose tightened each of the clasps. She looked undeniably hot with the dildo on, her beautiful breasts still perky as she laid down.

Rose moaned as Drew straddled her, their warm, wet center hovering over hers. Drew

could hardly remember how they had ended up completely naked at this point. All they knew was they had never seen a more gorgeous figure in their entire life. Rose's body was perfect, and fucking her was an absolute pleasure.

Drew grew excited again at just the thought. But now, all they could think about was how Rose would feel inside them.

They lifted their hips and guided the strap into place, feeling it slip deep inside their center as they lowered themselves toward the mattress.

"Oh god." Rose moaned as she felt the strap push inside Drew's entrance. "You're soaked for me."

Drew nodded, unable to find the words to reply. Pleasure took over their body as Rose began to slowly thrust the toy deeper and deeper into them.

Rose licked her lips as she watched Drew bouncing on the toy, picking up the pace as the toy slid in easier and easier with every push. "You take it so well."

"Fuck." Drew whimpered at the words. Their usually neat, quaffed hair began to drape onto their forehead. They tried to look at Rose, meeting her eyes just as the toy hit their g-spot.

When their eyes met, Rose moaned back at Drew.

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Drew bit their lip as the pleasure rushed from their center to the rest of their nerves. “Can you feel it?”

Rose nodded, her breathing punctuating every word. “I can feel every inch of you.”

Unable to hold themselves up, Drew’s hands slammed down to the mattress, gripping the plush sheets between their fingers as they grinded their hips against Rose’s strap.

Just when Drew was starting to near their climax, Rose brought a hand to their pulsing clit, massaging as Drew rocked against her.

“Oh god.” Drew’s eyes clenched shut under the weight of their ecstasy. It was rare for Drew to feel this comfortable with someone, to enjoy themselves quite like this. Rose watched with hungry eyes.

When Drew managed to open their eyes, there was Rose: hands gripping Drew’s grinding hips and eyes glued to Drew’s euphoric face.

Their bodies began to fall into perfect sync, Drew rocking their hips in time with Rose’s thrusts. Rose’s fingers pushed into their clit as they moved.

It wasn’t long before Drew’s whimpers turned to screams, their usual low grumble giving way to a high-pitched shriek of ecstasy.

“Oh, Rose, please!”

Rose smirked. “Please what?”

Drew was hardly even thinking, out of their mind with pleasure. “Let me come.”

“Oh baby, you can come whenever you like.” Rose giggled as she kept her pace, enjoying the submissive Drew that had been revealed to her.

It was all Drew needed to let go. Their body shuddered and their fast, long motions turned to short, deep grinding. Their mouth dropped open. Rose expected a scream and was surprised by the single, soft whimper that accompanied the full body tensing.

But after a moment, Drew’s throat roared with excitement as they slammed their hands into the mattress.

“That’s it, just like that.” Rose smirked, guiding their hips with her firm hand.

The sight of her green eyes sent one last wave of pleasure through Drew. As they came, their body began to slow along with Rose’s thrusting.

They let their hips rock along the strap a few thrusts longer. “I feel like I could have you in me all day.”

“We could arrange for that.” Rose licked her lips, sitting up from her position on the bed. The strap stayed inside Drew as Rose brought her hands from Drew’s thighs and up their ass to rest on their back.

Drew looked down at her, a laugh escaping their mouth. “Oops.”

Rose giggled back, resting her sweaty forehead along Drew’s dewy chest. “We definitely weren’t supposed to do that.”

“But did you like it?” A massive smirk took over Drew’s entire face.

Raising an eyebrow, Rose glared at Drew. “Was it not obvious?”

Drew brought their lips to Rose’s, letting them gently press together. They could feel their breathing slowing and syncing with Rose’s. After a moment of holding each other like that, Drew lifted themselves off the strap and laid next to Rose.

Turning onto her side, Rose tucked her arm under a pillow as Drew spooned her. Their bodies fit together like a puzzle, somehow perfectly intertwining. Resting their face on Rose’s shoulder, Drew caught their breath.

“How was that for you?” Rose asked, sleep teasing at her voice.

Drew smiled, their mind racing at the thought. “I really enjoyed it. How about you?”

Rose giggled. “Me too. Other than the professional complications.”

“Eh, but who ever cared about that?” Drew’s laugh came out a low rumble, vibrating Rose’s sensitive back. They planted a kiss on Rose’s neck, who squirmed with desire under Drew’s touch.

They held each other in silence for a long time. Drew wouldn’t have known for how long if it weren’t for the sun moving past their floor-to-ceiling windows. After a while, Rose turned to face Drew. She was barely awake, and Drew wouldn’t have minded seeing her doze off.

Rose broke the silence as she cleared her throat. “Are you going to the party tomorrow?”

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“What party?” Drew asked, running their index finger from Rose’s hips to her ribs and back again.

“Ellen and Fin’s?” Rose scrunched her brows together, her eyes barely open.

Drew dropped their head low, resting it on Rose’s shoulder. “I wasn’t planning on it. I thought I was invited as a formality. I don’t really know them outside of the shoot.”

Thinking for a moment, Rose shrugged. “Come with me.”

Drew raised an eyebrow, studying Rose’s sleepy face for some hint of an explanation. Shaking their head, Drew turned, their back pressing against the mattress. Their sweaty skin stuck to the sheets as they adjusted, and a part of them loved how dirty it felt.

“Don’t you think it’s a little fast?” It wasn’t entirely clear how Rose intended the invite to come off. Did she want them to go as a couple?

Rose laughed and lightly punched Drew’s shoulder. “Not like that. Come as a friend. They have a lot of cool contacts. If nothing else, maybe a new gig could come of it. Plus, I don’t think either of us are looking for anything serious.”

Sucking in a deep breath, Drew nodded. “Okay.”

Of course they weren’t sure exactly what they were looking for. Especially when it came to Rose. Everything Drew knew about themselves went out the window when Rose was around, and they weren’t sure what that meant.

But hooking up would be casual. Simple. Uncomplicated.

“We could get pizza or something beforehand? Or are you, like, not a pizza person?” Rose avoided their hazel eyes, but her hand stayed planted on Drew’s chest.

“That’s absurd.” Drew lifted their head from the pillow to get a good look at Rose. “Who the fuck isn’t a pizza person?”

Lightly tickling Rose, Drew sat up and repositioned over her. With their faces mere inches apart, Drew’s shaggy hair draped down over Rose. “Okay, I’ll go. As friends.”

Rose brought her lips to Drew’s and wrapped her arms around their neck. The electricity came back to their bodies as their mouths met again. Drew’s stomach turned at the feeling of Rose’s tongue slipping between their lips. They hadn’t felt this giddy for a long time.

Before they could get too wrapped up in what the actual fuck was going on between them, Rose broke away from their kiss, her eyes still heavy with sleep. “I don’t think friends kiss like that, Drew.”

Drew’s breathing got heavier as their lips found each other again. Maybe they don’t.

They laid in bed like that for hours, only getting up for food and bathroom breaks. But the next morning, Drew had to get some work done, and so did Rose.

Drew’s fingers clacked against the keyboard as they finished sending an email to a client, one hundred photos attached. They were well-dressed: a pair of dark blue trousers with an orange button down tucked into them.

Ellen and Fin’s party was that night, but Drew had a corporate client pitch beforehand. Luckily, Ellen and Fin lived in Drew’s neighborhood and were hosting

the party at a bar down a few blocks away, so they would be able to stop in at Drew's place to get changed before the party.

Their computer made the familiar whoosh as Drew clicked send. They grabbed a sleek, black portfolio bag from the worktable and headed for the door, where they slipped on their black Chelsea boots.

As they bent over, their back strained. Rose had really worn them out; their entire body sore from a long night of pleasing each other.

The memory brought a smile to Drew's face. But they had to chill. It was casual, and neither of them had any intention of ending up in something super serious. Odds were, this would end as soon as the maternity shoot was finished.

Shaking the feeling, Drew grabbed the door knob and hurried out of the apartment. They jogged down the steps and out the front door, the wide portfolio swinging as they walked. The meeting was in Midtown, and they didn't want to be late.

For once, the train was shockingly fast, and before they knew it, they were sweeping into the lobby of a grand old building. They got checked in with the nice security guard at the front desk and then headed up to the 27th floor.

As the elevator ascended, Drew's chest started to heave with anxiety. Their foot tapped against the faux wood paneling. They hadn't done a pitch like this in a long time, and corporate jobs were a luxury: higher pay and clearer terms than a wedding or an engagement.

But it also meant way more accountability. Drew knew their work was the product in a corporate campaign.

The doors of the elevator slid open to a cheery assistant immediately flagging Drew

down. “Drew Hudson?”

With a nod, Drew plastered on a polite smile and extended their hand. “Hi, how are you?”

“I’m great, thank you. And yourself? This way to the conference room.” She smiled back at Drew and turned on her heel, heading into the fancy – albeit sterile – office.

As they approached the conference room door, Drew saw a few other photographers leaving. Corporate jobs were always an uphill battle. Film was expensive, and very few marketing executives found it worth the cost.

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But Drew went out for them anyway. The paycheck was far too enticing.

Once they reached the conference room doors, the assistant waved Drew inside.
“They’re ready for you.”

Trying to steady their breathing, Drew nodded and headed in.

18

ROSE

Rose winced as the bobby pin scraped her scalp.

“I just completely bombed.” Drew shook their head into the mess of pillows.

“I’m sure it wasn’t that bad.” Rose raced across the loft from Drew’s bathroom to the bed where her bag was torn open. She placed her hand on Drew’s back as she used the other to dig for her makeup.

Drew mumbled into the fabric, “No, seriously. They laughed, dude.”

Rose chuckled, trying to straighten her face when Drew whipped their head around.
“Sorry.”

Groaning, Drew threw their head back down. Rose went back to the bathroom, perfectly lit by the strangely modern LED lights hidden behind the mirror. It was probably the nicest lighting Rose had ever done her makeup in.

“Do we still have time for pizza?” Drew called from the bed, desperation in their voice.

Rose squinted as she polished off her mascara. “We should! No one is ever on time for these things.”

She set down the mascara and looked into the mirror, checking her face. She wasn’t sure why she was going so hard. It was just Ellen and Fin’s engagement party. But a part of her wanted to make Drew swoon again, to get them desperate.

Even a day later, Rose wasn’t sure how they had ended up in bed together. It felt insane to be in their apartment getting ready for a party together. But here she was, putting her makeup away in her go-bag and rushing out into the loft.

She hadn’t seen the place at night yet. It was somehow more beautiful. Drew’s floor lamps brought a warmth to the space that the bright sunlight and white walls wouldn’t have let on.

She had a hard time not stopping to look at the downtown skyline every time she walked past the loft’s huge windows.

“Ready?” Drew sat up, wiping their bad day from their face.

Their legs slung over the side of the bed and as Rose tossed her bag onto the bed, she slipped a thigh between Drew’s. She grabbed their face and tilted it up toward her.

“It’s going to be okay. You’re allowed to bomb every once in a while.”

Drew put their hands on her waist, groaning as they let their head fall onto her warm, soft stomach.

“There’s going to be other jobs, I promise.” Rose ran her hand through their soft hair, feeling each strand on her fingers. The light tack of pomade reminded her that she wasn’t supposed to touch it.

“Sorry!” She pulled her hands away.

Drew lifted their head and laughed. “That’s okay.” They ran their fingers through it, all of the hair falling instantly back into place. It was all too easy for them to look perfect.

Offering her hands to Drew, Rose helped them out of the bed, and they walked to the door. Drew had changed into a black button down, the top three buttons open to show their chest.

They both threw on their shoes. Rose gained a few inches from her heels, making her just about level with Drew. Drew looked her up and down, raising their eyebrows.

“Damn you look good.” Drew let their hand rest on Rose’s hips, their eyes still exploring her figure. She wore a simple black dress, accidentally matching with Drew. They had debated making Drew change, but it hadn’t seemed worth the effort.

Besides, they were just friends... who really liked fucking each other.

Drew planted a kiss on Rose’s lips, but quickly felt the slightly sticky gloss. “Sorry, I forgot.”

Rose smirked as she leaned down to grab the floral, craft-paper wrapped gift leaned against the door. “You’ll just have to keep your hands off me.” She straightened the twine bow before fixing her own flyaways.

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“I can’t promise that.” Drew flashed their charming smile. “Are you going to tell me what’s in there?”

Shaking her head, Rose pursed her lips. “Nope, you’ll have to wait.” She had stayed up late the night before getting it wrapped and went to all the trouble to carry it through the subway. She certainly wasn’t going to let Drew have a hint.

But before they stepped out into the hallway, a flash of realization lit up Rose’s eyes. “Fuck, I forgot my bag on the bed!”

She was about to walk toward the bed, but Drew stopped her and jogged across the loft themselves. They grabbed the bag, which was open, from the bed. Looking down at it, their head tilted. After a second, they brought their gaze back to Rose, sauntering across the apartment toward her.

Just a few inches from Rose, Drew opened the bag under her chin. “Rose Miller. Did you pack a vibrator in your bag for your friends’ engagement party?”

Rose’s face flushed pink at the question, delicately tucking a hair behind her ear. “I mean, it doesn’t hurt to have.”

With a smirk, Drew pushed Rose against the wall. When her body slammed into the brick, a moan pushed out of her lungs. The gift her hand made a light thump against the stone. Drew went in for a kiss but Rose lifted a finger to their lips.

It was a challenge. Could Drew manage a whole night without putting their lips on hers?

Drew put one hand on the brick just past Rose's ear, the other gripping her waist. "You want me to fuck you at this party?"

Rose shrugged. It took everything in her body to speak. "If I let you."

"You're a dirty, dirty girl." Drew's chest heaved with excitement, barely able to resist the temptation to kiss her then and there. Instead, they brought their lips to her exposed neck, dragging their tongue up toward her jaw. Rose's skin rose into bumps at their touch.

Their mouth worked its way down her neck to her collarbone, dropping lower and lower toward her cleavage. Rose felt herself getting lost in Drew's touch, a moan lingering in her throat.

But she grabbed Drew's chin and brought their gaze back to hers. "You have to be patient."

"I'm not very good at that," Drew confessed, their eyes darting between her face and her exposed chest.

With a playful shrug, Rose opened the front door and started walking out. Drew followed suit. The pair were slow on the stairs, making sure Rose didn't trip over her heels on the way down.

Drew was sure to let her go first so she could set the pace. Rose felt their eyes on her ass the entire descent and loved knowing that their clit would be throbbing by the time they reached the bottom.

"Do you want me to carry that?" Drew asked, gesturing to the gift.

"Nope!" Rose shook her head, she was too proud of it to let it go.

Just from the way they walked, Rose could tell they were excited. Clearly, the thought of fucking Rose somewhere they could get caught was doing something for Drew.

They led Rose to a pizza shop down the block, just a few minutes from the bar hosting the party. When they approached the outdoor counter, the heat from the pizza shop leaked out onto the street. Rose realized it must be boiling in there if she could feel the heat from the late June street. The concrete absorbed all the heat from the summer sun and let it slowly seep into the air overnight.

Worried her makeup would run, Rose was grateful for the gusts of air drifting out of the subway vents beneath them – probably the only time someone was grateful to be blasted with stinky subway air.

“What do you like?” Drew asked.

“Just two plain cheese, please.” Rose smiled. “But I’ll pay!”

Drew wrinkled their forehead. “Why would I let you do that?”

“Let me?” Rose rolled their eyes. “What, you pay because you’re masc?”

Drew shrugged.

“Yuck.” Rose faked a retch. “Besides, whoever invited the other pays. That’s the rule.”

“Says who?”

Before she could answer, the cashier appeared in the window to take their orders.

“How ya doing, dude? Can we do three slices of cheese and a pepperoni?” Drew nodded at the guy, who clearly recognized them.

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He disappeared into the shop and got to work heating up their slices.

Rose picked up where they left off. “It’s the first rule of sapphic dating. Since the whole ‘the man pays’ thing is archaic and not very useful for us, what makes the most sense is for whoever made the plan to pay.”

Drew shrugged. “That actually makes sense.”

“Thank you very much.” Rose winked as she pushed past Drew, letting her eyes take in their figure. They looked unbelievable dressed up. Yesterday, she couldn’t have imagined a world in which she found Drew more irresistible than she already did. And yet...

The cashier returned with their slices. Rose, tucking the gift under her arm, passed Drew’s back to them while sliding the man her card. She could tell Drew was trying to find a way to take something off her hands. But Rose rebalanced herself and took a bite of her slice. They stood and ate for a minute before Drew checked their watch.

“We’re so late.” They started scarfing down their food.

Rose giggled as she took the biggest bite she could. She couldn’t remember the last time she was on time.

As Drew wolfed down their slice, they mumbled through their food, “You owe me a proper pizza date.”

“You have masc privilege, I don’t wanna hear it. It takes time to look this good.”

Rose joked as she polished off her first slice.

Drew feigned offense. “What? I don’t do anything? I think I look particularly nice.”

Rose couldn’t argue that point. Their exposed chest made her heart race, not to mention their plump ass. “Buttoning a shirt and throwing pomade in your hair does not count as ‘getting ready.’”

“Yeah, yeah.” Drew smiled as they worked on their second slice.

They laughed together as they ate, standing on the curb. After a minute, Rose looked at her feet. Her nerves were taking over. “So... you want to go on a date with me?”

Rose knew Drew wouldn't casually mention a pizza date if they weren't genuinely interested, but a part of her did fear they wouldn't want anything beyond casual sex and work.

But a wide smile took over Drew’s face. “I think it would be nice.”

Wiping her face of pizza sauce, Rose giggled and planted a kiss on Drew’s cheek before tossing her paper plate into the garbage on the corner. As soon as she was done, they started walking toward the bar on Avenue B: Rose leading the way while Drew kept taking bites of their last slice.

A few blocks later, Rose stopped abruptly in front of the familiar restaurant. She did one last pizza-flour check and smoothed out her dress. “This is us.” She took the gift out from under her arm and held it in her hands.

Drew nodded and shoved what was probably four bites worth of food into their mouth. Holding the empty plate in their hand, they scanned for a trash can.

Rose snatched the plate and tossed it in the garbage can chained to the front railing of the neighboring building. Before Drew even swallowed, Rose was pulling open the large, glass door to the venue. The sound of its patrons and rumbling music leaked out onto the street

“Slow down, Rose.” Drew covered their mouth as they stepped up the small step leading inside with a mouth full of food.

“Not what you were saying earlier.” Rose winked, laughing at her own joke. The door swung open, and Rose zipped inside, forcing Drew to race after her.

“You’re a little bastard.”

They stared into the bustling crowd of the bar, a few signs pointing them to the back garden for the engagement party. Rose could tell from Drew’s face how much they dreaded pushing through the sea of people.

“Ready?” Rose took in a deep breath, draping her arms around Drew’s neck.

With a nod, Drew leaned in to kiss her. As their lips met, Rose felt a bolt of electricity shot from her mouth to her center, grazing her heart on the way down.

Hearing the approach of familiar voices, Rose pulled away from Drew and turned toward the crowd. Drew wiped the light gloss from the corners of their mouth just as they started to push through. Using her elbows to protect the perfectly wrapped gift, Rose led the way to the back of the bar.

Rose smiled at a mutual friend. “Hi, good to see you!”

The back room of the bar was crowded, full of sapphics flitting from table to table.

Rose scanned the party for the happy couple, but the constant shuffle of party guests obscured them from view.

After a second, her gaze landed at a circle toward the back of the patio. At its center, Ellen and Fin welcomed guests and talked about their wedding plans. A smile immediately took over Rose's face.

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From the corner of her eye, Rose could see Drew smiling back at her. She tried not to blush, still intoxicated by their attention.

They made their way through the crowd toward the new fiancée's, greeting a few familiar faces on the way. Despite hardly knowing the couple Drew found a few acquaintances among the guestlist. In the small, sapphic world, it was almost impossible to not have at least a few overlaps.

Eventually, Rose and Drew were able to make it through to Ellen and Fin, who stood up and squealed at the sight of their best friend at the edge of their circle.

"Congratulations!" Rose cheered as she wrapped an arm around her friends, the other carefully guarding the present.

Ellen squeezed her tight. "You're so sweet. I love you."

"Thank you, Rose! You're the best." Finn patted her back.

When they pulled apart, Rose lifted the brown package she had been hauling around all night.

Ellen and Fin took the gift and added it to the growing pile, eager to find out what their dear friend had gotten them. Before they could interrogate her for hints, Fin turned to Drew and shook their hand. "Thanks so much for coming, Drew. We're so happy to have you!"

Drew grinned. "Thanks for having me."

It made Rose smile to see Drew get along so well with her friends. The more she got to know them, the more she admired their ability to fit in anywhere. Drew could get dropped in the VIP section of an upscale club or in a Midwestern sports bar and still find a friend.

As Fin and Drew broke off into their own nerdy conversation about film, Ellen looped her arm in Rose's.

She lowered her head to intercept Rose's gaze. "Um, hi, what is that?"

"Hm?" Rose tried to play it cool, pretending like she missed something elsewhere in the party. "What was what?"

But she knew her face was bright pink. All she could do was pray the dim lighting of the outdoor patio would make it hard for Ellen to notice.

Ellen raised an eyebrow, examining Rose. She spotted the blush almost instantly.

"No! You didn't."

"Didn't what?" Rose tried to play innocent, scanning the party desperately for a diversion.

Ellen lowered her voice, smiling through a scandalized grin. "You slept together."

As soon as the words left her mouth, Rose knew there was no point trying to hide it. Ellen knew her too well to let her get away with a lie like that.

"Okay, yes. But don't make a big deal out of it. We'll talk about it later." Rose smiled at her, hoping she wasn't drawing any attention from Fin or Drew.

Rolling her eyes, Ellen leaned in. “Fine. But you have to answer one thing.”

“What?”

“Was it good?” Ellen smirked.

Rose hardly processed the question before her fist was pushing Ellen’s arm. “You’re a dick.”

Ellen winked as Fin came closer, pretending to be a protective bulldog. “No fighting my fiancée! I’ll kick your ass.”

Lifting her fists, Rose laughed. “I could snap you like a twig!”

Fin burst out laughing. They were basically a muscle mommy, absolutely ripped from the gym. But Fin loved her energy and brought her in for a tight hug.

It wasn’t long before new arrivals pulled the couple’s attention, leaving Drew and Rose to fend for themselves.

Drew leaned into Rose’s ear, their voice a familiar low grumble. “Do you want something to drink?”

Rose nodded. “Dealer’s choice.”

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With a smile, Drew disappeared into the crowd.

As she watched them go, all of the noise of the party rose. She hadn't realized how quiet everything felt when Drew was around. She felt lonely in their absence.

She wasn't sure when she had started searching for Drew in every crowd. But even now, all she could do was wait for them to come back to her.

19

DREW

They parted the crowd as they headed toward the open bar. Drew wasn't entirely sure what Rose drank on a regular basis, but they would have to guess.

"What can I get for you?" The bartender asked as Drew landed at the bar.

Resting their elbow on the slick wood, Drew looked up at the menu. "Can I do a whiskey ginger and a..."

Their eyes struggled to find something to settle on. Sensing their floundering, the bartender smiled. "We've got a signature mojito for the engagement party."

"That will work," Drew laughed as they started making the drinks. Drew tapped their finger on the bartop as their gaze wandered the party. It was a nice crowd, everyone dressed up and happy.

Their gaze landed on Rose; her red hair was a beacon in the dull crowd. A smile took over their face watching her talk until they realized who she was talking to.

Fucking Shannon. Drew's temple tensed as they stood taller. Of course she was here.

"Here you are." The sound of two glasses meeting the wood broke Drew's trance.

"Cheers." Drew nodded to the bartender and set a five dollar tip on the counter. With a deep breath filling their lungs, Drew parted the crowd to meet Rose.

Drew lightly tapped Rose's exposed biceps with the cool glass. She jumped lightly, a blush setting in as soon as she saw Drew.

"For you," Drew smiled back, forgetting for just a moment that Shannon was still lingering.

She took the drink in her hands and took a sip. "Oh, that's a good mojito." She snapped her fingers. "Drew, look who's here!"

Drew nodded. "The infamous Shan. Small world."

They shook hands, and Shannon eyed the duo carefully, sensing something was going on between them.

Shannon shook her head. "So, you two still hanging out?"

"Well, we still have a lot of work to get done." Rose cleared her throat.

Getting the message, Shannon nodded. "Right, right. Cool. I'm gonna grab a drink." Placing a hand on Rose's forearm, Shannon smiled at her. "I'll catch you later?"

Rose only offered a slight smile as Shan disappeared into the crowd.

That was bold. Drew rolled their eyes. Shannon was messy, always trying to stake a claim to someone that wasn't hers. As ridiculous as she was, though, a part of Drew kind of admired her confidence.

"That was..." Drew shook their head.

"No kidding." Rose let her hand graze Drew's, sparks flying as their skin touched.

But Rose's words lingered in their head. Was this only about work for her? Because it may have started that way for Drew, but the longer they hung out, the less certain Drew was that this was just casual.

"Just work, huh?" The words left Drew's mouth before they could stop them. They took a sip of the whiskey ginger, sucked their teeth as the warm, bitter liquid heated their throat.

Rose turned to look at them, her eyes narrowed and burning with desire. "Did it bother you?"

Drew opened their mouth to answer. But Fin's loud voice boomed. "Rose, Drew! I have someone you need to meet!"

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Fin wrapped their arms around the duo and nodded toward a tall, well-dressed woman. “This is Tommy, she’s an agent at SDO Management.”

Drew immediately extended their hand. “Nice to meet you, I’m Drew Hudson.”

After a firm shake, Tomy turned their attention to Rose. “And you must be Rose.”

“Rose Miller.” She extended her hand and smiled.

After the brief introduction, Fin was called to a different corner of the party, leaving the trio to chat.

“So, what’s it like being an agent?” Rose asked, tucking her hair behind her ear.

Tommy laughed, scanning the crowd as she spoke. “Exhausting. This is my first night off in a few months. But you gotta love the grind.”

Drew nodded. “What kind of clients do you represent?”

She thought about the question for a few seconds. “Kind of everything, but I’m moving more into sports management. We need more sapphics representing women athletes.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” Rose smiled. “I love basketball so much, but the WNBA players aren’t managed very well. They deserve more exposure.”

“Absolutely.” Tommy smiled. “So, Fin tells me you’re both photographers. What’s

that like in this economy?”

The duo looked at each other, trying to find the words. Of course it wasn't easy; Drew had learned that first hand. Transitioning from photojournalism to portrait photography was a hard loss for them, but it made ends meet.

Rose shrugged. “It comes and goes. But I love it.”

“No one becomes a photographer for the money, I suppose.” Tommy laughed. “Well look, I represent Mackenzie Bennett, and she's just coming off a serious Wimbledon win. We're looking to get her some exposure so she can compete with some of the older, more established stars before the U.S. Open. I'd love to see your portfolios.”

Holy shit. Drew smiled, stepping forward. “Absolutely, let me grab your email.”

Rose gulped, eyeing Drew. “Is this a solo gig or a joint gig?”

Tommy looked at her, their blue eyes chilling her spine. “That's up to you, I'd be happy to see anything!”

“Awesome, I'll send you my work first thing tomorrow.” Drew was already shaking Tommy's hand.

Rose offered hers too, and before they knew it, Tommy was off chasing after a gorgeous blonde.

They stood in silence for a moment as Drew and Rose put the agent's information into their phones. Drew could hardly believe it, the power of sapphic networking was unmatched.

“Oh my god, that's awesome. That agency is no joke, they represent fucking

LAWSON.” Drew shook their head.

Rose nodded. “No kidding. Do you think you’d want to do it together?”

It was the question Drew had hoped she wouldn’t ask. Of course, working together had turned out better than Drew could have imagined. But they weren’t ready to make that their schtick. Drew had their own career goals and didn’t want that attached to someone they weren’t sure would even be around in a few months.

“I’m not sure, maybe we think on it?” Drew offered, running a hand along her arm.

Rose smiled. “Yeah, sure.”

She looked like she might say something else, but before she could, Ellen shouted across the party. “It’s present time, y’all!”

Most of the party kept mingling, but Rose grabbed Drew’s hand and beelined toward the back table where Ellen and Fin had collected their gifts.

Rose found a table to sit on, getting a good view near the front of the crowd. Drew sidled up next to her, resting their hand on the rough, metal table. The hair on their arms stood on end as their skin brushed against Rose.

Her eyes were glued to Ellen and Fin as they scanned the pile of presents, and she was brimming over with excitement for her gift to be opened. Drew’s eyes wandered her face. Her beauty still surprised them. Normally, they couldn’t stomach bubbly personalities, but Rose was different. She was bubbly and sweet, but she called them out on their shit.

Ellen clapped when she spotted the floral craft paper. “This one’s first!”

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Rose smiled eagerly, leaning toward Drew. “That’s mine.”

“Oh, I know, you were very proud of it.” Drew laughed. Their body was angled toward Rose, their lips desperate to meet hers. But now wasn’t the time; Ellen and Fin didn’t know they had started seeing each other.

And they still hadn’t had time to discuss what exactly this was.

Fin smiled as they took a seat near the present pile. With each of them holding an edge of the present, they started ripping into the paper together, slowly exposing the gift. Ellen kept her eyes up, not wanting to ruin the surprise until the present was fully visible.

Trying to unwrap the gift together took twice as long. And despite how cringey it was, Drew – for once – thought their love was kind of sweet. From Drew’s seat, they could tell it was a frame.

The couple had opened the gift with the backing facing them, leaving the image face down. As they flipped it over, they both gasped. Ellen covered her mouth, tears springing to her eyes.

Ellen met Rose’s gaze before and mouthed “thank you, my love” before turning the frame for the crowd to see. Drew’s eyebrows lifted once the photo was revealed.

It was perfect: a beautifully framed portrait of Ellen and Finley touching foreheads together and smiling on the day of their engagement. The setting sun cast a beautiful glow on their faces. Ellen’s hand, resting on Fin’s jaw, perfectly displayed the

engagement ring.

Drew shook their head as the crowd collectively awed. They hadn't seen this shot in the hundreds of images Rose had sent. Even without this perfect image, Rose had delivered a perfect engagement package. But this was a shot only their best friend could get.

Rose teared up at Ellen and Fin, who were still shocked by the photograph.

Drew wrapped an arm around Rose's waist, letting the pressure of their arm comfort her. Leaning into her ear, Drew asked. "When did you get that shot? I don't even remember seeing them do that."

Rose wiped a tear from her cheek and looked into Drew's burning, hazel eyes. "You were reloading, they kind of forgot I was there. It was just, like, the first real moment they could tell they would spend the rest of their lives together."

"It's beautiful. Really, stunning." Drew felt like they were dreaming. They couldn't look away from her eyes, even as Rose turned her attention back to Ellen and Fin. But as she did, she let her hand drop down to Drew's on the table.

Lifting their hand, Drew let their fingers intertwine with Rose's. It had been a long time since they'd held someone's hand. They couldn't remember if it ever felt like this – so electric.

Surely it couldn't have. Because if it had, it would have felt possible to live without Rose's hand in theirs. Drew couldn't imagine why they would've ever let go.

The party carried on, Ellen and Fin slowly working their way through the pile of presents. As they unwrapped a gifted garter belt, a loud wave of hooting and hollering tore through the crowd. But Drew's eyes couldn't peel away from Rose's

unadulterated glee as she watched her friends.

Once the presents were done, the party moved into its next phase: complete, horny, sapphic chaos. The DJ turned the music up, and the dance floor opened. After a minute of eyeing Drew, Rose stood and guided them toward the dance floor.

But she didn't stop there, pulling Drew past the collection of grinding queers.

"Where are you taking me, Ms. Miller?" Drew's face was overtaken by a giddy smile, remembering what Rose had slipped into her bag.

Rose turned and looked behind her. A simple wink was all it took to set Drew's entire body on fire with desire. It had already taken far too much self control to keep their hands off each other the entire party. The anticipation had grown too strong for Drew to resist.

The bathrooms were just inside the bar, a few feet from the door to the patio where the engagement party was in full swing. Rose deflated when she saw the small line. "Crap."

Drew flexed their jaw. "What? Can't wait just a few more minutes?"

"No," Rose rolled her eyes. "They're going to see us go in together."

Leaning into her ear, Drew laughed a low rumble. "And people knowing is going to stop you?"

Rose licked her lip, turning her head to meet Drew's gaze. Her emerald eyes began to flick between their lips, neck, and eyes. "Well I didn't say that."

Drew smiled. "Good, because I want you."

Rose wrapped her arm around Drew's neck. "You okay with everyone at this party finding out we fucked in this bathroom?"

"That's speculation. Maybe we're just helping each other with our makeup." Drew laughed as the line moved up, two bathrooms opening at once. Another partygoer fell into the line behind them, offering a polite smile.

Drew nodded back, trying to calm the throbbing in their boxers. It was almost painful to resist Rose.

Soon enough, a bathroom door swung open. And Rose and Drew were up. Without hesitation, Rose strutted into the bathroom, the swing of her hips inviting Drew to watch.

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And they were happy to oblige. Her ass looked unbelievable in her black dress. Drew swept in after her, aching to undress her.

As they reached the doorway, Drew lifted their eyes from Rose's tantalizing body for just a moment, meeting the questioning gaze of the woman in line. She tilted her head as she watched them enter the bathroom together. A sly smile took over Drew's face as they shot her a cheeky wink.

The second Drew crossed the threshold, Rose slammed the door behind them. She pressed her body against theirs, pushing their back roughly into the overly-stickered bathroom door.

A moan fell from Drew's mouth as their body made impact with the flimsy wood. They let their hand drift down Rose's body, pulling at the slick fabric of her dress as Rose pushed her leg against Drew's center. She spread Drew's legs with hers, lightly rubbing her leg up against Drew's clit.

"Fuck." Drew moaned, letting their head roll back and bang against the door. They brought their lips to Rose's, only breaking the kiss to say, "We've gotta stop smacking against the door, they're going to kick us out."

Rose laughed, a little maniacal, as she sank her teeth into Drew's neck. "I'd love to see them try."

Their body felt like it was on fire, lust infecting every cell of their being. They grabbed Rose's hips and pushed her toward the sink, just a foot away. Rose whimpered as her ass slammed against the cold porcelain.

Drew lowered their body, wrapping their arms around Rose's luscious thighs. With one swift motion, they lifted her onto the counter, her legs opening to Drew.

The moan that Rose released made Drew ache for her touch. They gripped the fabric of Rose's dress and lifted it enough to reveal her center, exposing her ass to the cold counter in the process.

"Drew, I need you to fuck me." Rose begged as she wrapped her hands around Drew's neck.

With a devious smirk, Drew nodded. "Like that wasn't the plan anyway." They reached their hand into Rose's bag and fumbled to grab the rabbit toy inside. Once the silicone was in their grip, Drew kissed Rose. Their tongue slipped past Rose's plush lips, teasing her tongue with theirs.

Rose rocked her hips in anticipation, her body begging for Drew's touch.

With their free hand, Drew's hand rubbed over Rose's underwear. They let their finger lift up the edge of the orange panties.

"Wait," Rose moaned. She brought her hand over Drew's, which had stopped moving. "Here." Rose guided their hand to the center of the panties, helping it part the fabric.

Drew's eyes rolled back into their head. They're fucking crotchless.

Licking their lips, Drew's fingers met Rose's slick center. "I never would have imagined you were a dirty whore."

Rose whimpered at the insult. She gripped the back of Drew's head, lightly tugging on their hair as she brought their ear to her lips. "And you fucking like it."

And that was the one thing Drew knew for sure. They were loving every second of this. Drew still wasn't sure what about Rose captivated them quite this much, but they knew they couldn't get enough. It made their chest hurt how desperately they wanted her.

Their fingers teased her entrance, lightly thrusting inside just to pull them out a second later. Rose grinded along their hand, trying to get their fingers to slip back inside.

When she seemed just desperate enough, Drew brought the toy to her center and rubbed it from the top of her slit to the bottom, letting the round tip tease her entrance just as their fingers had.

Rose tightened her grip on Drew's hair as the anticipation grew. "If you don't get inside me right now, I'm going to have to..."

"To what?" Drew looked into her eyes, dark with lust.

"Punish you." Rose opened her eyes and met their gaze, a playful smile on her lips.

Drew laughed, though it was more like a low growl. "I'd love to see you try." They tightened their grip on her hips, looking into her eyes as they continued to tease her pussy.

When Drew felt like she was good and ready to take it, they allowed the toy to slip inside her. Rose moaned at the sensation, her body rocking against the vibrator. She moaned with every thrust.

"Thank you." She whimpered through gritted teeth as she took the toy.

Drew smiled back at her. "You're welcome, darling. You're so good at taking it. You

must have been excited for a long time.”

“I haven’t stopped thinking about you since yesterday. I’m desperate.” Rose whispered as she grinded.

Drew smirked. Her moans were growing loud, loud enough to start overpowering the rumbling bar music outside the bathroom. Placing their hand over Rose’s mouth, Drew laughed. “You need to quiet down.

“Make me.” Rose quipped. Drew loved when she got bratty.

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With a smirk, they tightened their grip around her mouth. Rose nodded her enjoyment as she kept moving along with the toy.

Thrusting deeper and deeper inside Rose, Drew rocked their hips to guide the toy in their hand. Their arms were throbbing from fucking her, but they refused to stop. Rose brought her hand to Drew's bulging biceps, squeezing them as they fucked her.

She whimpered at the feeling of Drew's raised veins and strong muscles. Against Drew's hand, Rose moaned, "Oh god."

Drew smirked at her. "Can you be trusted to be quiet?"

"Yes." Rose nodded.

Taking their hand from her mouth, Drew placed it on the vanity top gripping it for leverage as they grew more excited.

Rose tried to keep herself quiet as her body grew closer and closer to orgasm.

Just as a moan of ecstasy was about to rip through her, a loud banging on the door shut her up. "Yo! There's a line out here." An annoyed voice came from outside.

They giggled together for a moment as Drew continued to fuck Rose. Her laugh turned back to moans in a matter of seconds.

"Let's not be rude. Be a good girl and come for me fast so we can let these very polite people use the restroom." Drew smirked.

Rose nodded as she let pleasure take over. Drew kept their pace, pushing the toy deep inside her.

Her movements grew more dramatic as Drew found her perfect spot, letting the rabbit massage her clit and her entrance. Rose started moaning louder, lowering her head to Drew's shoulder to muffle the sound.

With her forehead resting in the crook of Drew's neck, Rose brought her hands around their back. She pushed closer to Drew, angling her hips so that her ass was also pressed against their center.

Drew moaned at the pressure, rocking along with their thrusts.

Rose's grip on their back tightened, balling up the black button down in her fist. She brought her hand to Drew's chest and undid the top few buttons, kissing along their collarbone.

Another loud bang shook the door.

"What did I say?" Drew reminded her.

Rose nodded and rocked faster, her body beginning to shake as she neared her peak. Her moans were getting too loud. Drew brought their hand from the counter to her chin, forcing her to look at them. "If you're going to scream, I want you to bite me instead."

The suggestion alone forced a moan from Rose's mouth. But she nodded and let her head fall back down to Drew's shoulder.

Her body rocked faster and faster until it seized up, almost stopping completely as Drew kept their pace, thrusting deeper into Rose's soaked pussy.

“Fuck,” she whimpered, lightly nipping at Drew.

But as the thrusting continued, she bit down harder and harder.

Drew tightened their grip on the counter as their sore arm kept pushing into her. “Jesus.”

Losing all restraint, Rose clamped down on Drew’s shoulder as she came. The bruising pressure forced a grunt from Drew as Rose’s body released and her hips slowed.

After a second, the pressure let up, and she laughed. “I’m sorry, are you okay?”

Drew chuckled back, meeting her gaze as they slipped the toy out of her. “More than okay. I fucking loved it.”

Rose giggled, her face completely flushed from her orgasm. She caught her breath as she fixed the straps on her dress. Drew helped her down from the counter before rinsing the toy off in the sink, Rose’s excitement completely coating the silicone.

“Oh my god, I was so wet.” Rose covered her mouth as she realized just how desperate she’d been.

Drew’s devious smile returned. “You really were. Probably still are.” Placing the toy back in Rose’s bag, Drew straightened their hair and quickly checked out the mark on their shoulder. It would bruise for sure, deep teeth marks still visible.

Rose fixed her dress, pulling it down over her ass and clearing her throat. “Oops.”

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With a laugh, Drew pulled her in for a kiss. “I like being marked by you.”

“Well shit.” Rose moaned. “We have to get out of here.”

Drew nodded and cleared their throat. They opened the door quickly and walked out as normal. Rose wasn’t quite capable of looking “normal.” She swayed as she tried to get her bearings in her heels.

As they left, the whole line rolled their eyes at them.

But as they reentered the engagement party on the patio, Drew couldn’t stop thinking about how gorgeous Rose was.

This is going to be a problem.

20

ROSE

Rose no longer needed her navigation for the journey from to Drew’s apartment.

It had been a few weeks since they had started hooking up, and as she lugged her camera down the block toward Drew’s building, Rose thought it couldn’t be going any better.

She buzzed up, waiting a moment before the loud buzzer signaled the door unlocking. She pushed it open and headed upstairs.

I will never get used to these stairs. Rose shook her head as she made it to the landing at the top, where Drew leaned against the doorframe.

“Hey, gorgeous.” Drew flashed their charming smile. Their arms were crossed, their forearms flexing.

Rose smiled back. “Hi, hottie.”

Pulling her in for a kiss, Drew moaned as their bodies collided.

After a moment, Drew stepped back to let her into the apartment, giving her ass a light spank as she passed by.

Once inside, Rose set her stuff down on the work table and looked back at Drew, who was still doing all the locks on the door. They were barefoot, their jeans just grazing their ankles.

It was hot. Hotter than she would have expected.

As Drew walked closer, Rose grinned, “Miss me?”

“In the two days we were apart?” Drew raised an eyebrow and then smirked. “Maybe I did.”

Rose laughed and wrapped her arms around Drew’s waist. “So, what’s the plan?”

Drew took a deep breath. “I’m thinking work until seven, head out for a little Chinatown excursion? Then back here to sleep. You can leave for your job from here?”

Rose nodded, “Sounds like a plan.”

They both got set up at their respective spots: Drew at their desk answering emails and Rose at the work table with her laptop, back to back with Drew. When Rose glanced over her shoulder, she saw Drew typing up an email to Tommy, the agent they had met at the engagement party a couple of weeks ago.

She turned back to her work, clearing her throat. They hadn't had a chance to talk about how they would handle it. But Rose hoped they'd pitch together as another joint project.

"So, have you heard from that agent?" Rose asked, trying to play dumb.

She could hear Drew sit up straight. They hesitated before they answered. "Yeah, I sent her an email the day after the party and told her I'd get my portfolio to her before the end of this week."

Rose nodded, turning in her stool to look at Drew. After a moment, Drew met her gaze. "What's up?"

She shrugged, shying away from Drew's gaze. "Well, how would you feel about pitching it as a joint project?"

Drew bit their lip as they considered it. "Hm. I mean, I'm not sure they'd go for it."

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“I mean, Fin introduced us as a package. So maybe she’s down for that.”

With a shrug, Drew rubbed their forehead. “It’s possible.”

Rose laughed. She couldn’t understand why Drew was so suddenly being short and cagey. They talked about work all the time, and working together had proven to be lucrative and fun for both of them. Wasn’t it?

“Would you want to do it together?” Rose took a more direct approach.

Drew sucked in air, holding it in their lungs for a minute before letting it out. “I’m not sure.”

Rose nodded; it was the closest to an answer she would get right now. “Cool, well if you decide either way, just let me know so I can put my name in, too.”

“Sure.” Drew cleared their throat and headed back to their own work.

They spent the next few hours toiling away at their separate work. The air felt heavy for a while, but once they took a break to discuss the swiftly approaching maternity shoot, the tension seemed to ease.

Before Rose knew it, the sun was starting to lower in the sky, and the clock read seven. She closed her laptop and smiled. “Ready?”

Drew nodded, a soft look in their eyes. “Very. I’m hoping you haven’t been to the place I’m taking you.”

Forbidden from asking any follow-up questions, Rose followed Drew down the stairs into the Lower East Side. As they walked downtown, they took turns asking each other about their past. The sun turned the sky a beautiful orange as the signs above the stores abruptly switched to Mandarin in Chinatown.

Drew turned them down a narrow street, passing a small crepe shop before stopping in front of a small store. The white awning overhead read “Chinatown Fair” in red letters.

Rose’s eyebrows wrinkled together as she stared up at the sign.

After a minute of waiting for recognition to hit her face, Drew explained, “It’s an arcade.”

“Oooh!” Rose laughed. “That’s sick.”

Drew shook their head and opened the door for her. A cacophony of music and electronic beeps invaded her eardrums as soon as she stepped foot in the arcade. The room was packed to the brim with more games than such a tiny space should allow. Bright, colorful lights from Dance Dance Revolution and Skee-ball flashed across her face as she took in the room.

“Is it lame?” Drew asked as they scanned Rose’s face for some sort of emotion.

Rose shook her head. “Not at all. I haven’t been to an arcade since I was like... thirteen.”

With a smile plastered on their face, Drew grabbed her hand and led her to the kiosk at the end of the prize counter. They pulled a black Chinatown Fair card from their wallet and slid it into the machine.

“Oh, so you’re a regular?” Rose giggled as Drew followed the prompts with ease.

Rolling their eyes, Drew nodded. “Maybe I am, would that be so terrible?”

She stepped closer to them, letting her hand glide from their shoulder blades down to the divet in their lower back. It rested perfectly there as she said, “Not at all. I just wouldn’t expect it.”

Drew grabbed the card form the kiosk, taking the receipt with them. “Why is that?”

“Well, if you look at your apartment and then take one look at this place, it seems like your worst nightmare.” Rose laughed, pointing to the bright, flashing lights, various video game explosions sounding off behind them.

The place was relatively empty; only a few teenagers lingered around with whatever pocket money their parents had given them.

Drew shook their head. “I have two ways of existing: extreme sensory deprivation or complete overstimulation. There is no in between.”

It did make sense. From everything Rose had seen, Drew loved to be in overwhelming situations, so long as they were by choice.

“So, what first?” Drew nudged her.

Rose took a deep breath. The options seemed endless for such a tiny store, a mix of classic arcade games and new additions making the decision even harder.

“What’s your favorite?” Rose couldn’t decide.

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“Cop out.” Drew winked. “Air hockey?”

It was the first game she saw when they came in, and basic enough that she stood a chance at winning.

With a nod, she started walking toward the long, blue table. “I’m in.”

Drew swiped their card at the table’s built-in reader, and the puck unlocked. Placing it on the table, Drew grabbed the black striker closest to their goal.

As Rose lowered her hand to the table, she felt the light rush of air coming from the tiny vents. It tickled her wrist slightly, sending a shiver up her arm. She needed to focus. Losing to Drew’s pompous ass would be far too embarrassing.

She leaned down, letting her elbows rest against the rough plastic. With a loud bell, the game started, and a vicious competition ensued. Carefully eyeing the puck, Rose geared up for Drew’s first attack. They sent the puck over the center, light enough for Rose to block it from her goal. Pushing it back to Rose with more force, Drew raised an eyebrow.

“I’m not playing around.” Rose winked.

It was all Drew needed to hear. Once the puck found itself back on their side, they whacked it back at Rose, effortlessly sliding it into the goal. It was all downhill from there, and after a tough battle, Rose had no choice but to admit defeat.

“Get wrecked.” Drew winked across the table. “Wanna go again?”

Rose shook her head. “God no, you rigged it.” Her eyes scanned for a game she was confident about. A devious smile took over her face as she spotted something she knew she was good at.

“Follow me.” She demanded, grabbing Drew’s hand as she led them toward her game of choice.

Drew’s face scrunched up with confusion as they realized what Rose had in mind. “Basketball?”

“Yep.” Rose licked her teeth as Drew swiped their card.

With a scoff, Drew shook their head. “You have no idea what you’re getting into here.”

Rose shrugged as she grabbed the nearest ball. The timer began and without hesitation Rose fired off a barrage of perfect shots. One after another, the balls slipped through the small net and rolled back down to her for another shot.

“What the fuck.” Drew laughed as they tried to keep up, their balls bouncing wildly off the rim.

She couldn’t help but gloat. “You doubted me, you bastard.”

Frantically grabbing balls as soon as they rolled down the slope, Drew’s head flicked between Rose’s perfect form and their own basket. “You tricked me, woman! How are you so good at this?”

“High school basketball. I was a guard.” Rose couldn’t stop herself from laughing at Drew’s shattered confidence. In a lot of ways, they had proven Rose wrong about their attitude problem. But Rose loved putting them in their place anyway.

Drew shook their head. “Silly me, shouldn’t have assumed the femme wasn’t a sports sapphic.”

Rose winked. “You’re goddamn right about that.”

Before they knew it, the timer rang, and the game was over. Rose had absolutely demolished Drew. It wasn’t even close.

Resting her arm on the metal bar that held the nets up, Rose lifted an eyebrow. “You should be able to get yourself a pretty prize with all those tickets, sweetheart.”

“Oh, so you are an asshole.” Drew laughed, stepping closer to her. As their eyes wandered to her lips, their face was lit up in flashing neon lights: purple, then blue, then green, then red. It took Rose back to the darkroom. That first day when she could hardly keep her hands to herself.

She put her hand behind Drew’s head, pulling their lips toward hers. An action game explosion sounded behind them as their mouths met. Rose laughed in Drew’s mouth.

“A little on the nose,” she teased.

But when she pulled away, Drew was just looking at her. A sweet smile, one Rose had just become familiar with, played at Drew’s lips.

Clearing her throat, Rose tucked a hair behind her ear. “Next?”

Drew nodded. “You’re screwed now.” They rushed over to another game, swiping their card before Rose could even get set up.

They continued like that for a couple hours. Rose had no idea how much money they had spent chasing each other across the arcade. Both of them kept trying to find a

game they could win. In the end, they had no choice but to call it a draw.

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Walking back outside, the heat of the July night smacked them right in the face.

“Thank god that place is air conditioned, because I was sweating my ass off in DDR.”
Rose laughed, looking down nervously at her worn Vans.

Even though they had spent the entire day together, something about standing in front of the arcade felt big. All Rose wanted was for Drew to want her... no... to need her. To beg her to come back to their place. Another night in their bed was all she could think about.

Drew closed the gap between them, letting their fingers lightly run down her shoulder to her hands. The slight touch raised her skin, goosebumps rising all over her body. She felt the wave of excitement pass down her back, right down to her center.

Their eyes were soft as they looked at her, flicking from her green eyes down to her lips.

“Would you want to come back to my place?”

Rose nodded. It was a silly question – all of her stuff was still on the work table in their apartment. But something about it made Rose’s body yearn for Drew. “I’d love to.”

Drew smirked and leaned closer to her, their warm breath grazing her lips. They hesitated for a second, opening their eyes to look at her. She wasn’t sure what they were waiting for, but her heart raced faster with every second that they held back.

After a moment, Drew pulled her in and let their lips collide.

So much for casual.

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DREW

Drew's eyes drifted open to the warm, golden light pouring into their loft. They squinted as they checked the time on their phone: barely 7 am. But as they rolled over and saw Rose's sleeping body, perfectly lit by the sun, they had an idea.

Placing a gentle kiss on Rose's back, Drew shifted out of the bed. They did their best not to wake her. She was posed perfectly, her curves cradled by the mattress like a cloud.

Drew padded across the wood floors on bare feet, scanning the apartment. Once they spotted their camera next to their desktop, they grabbed it and brought it back to the bed.

They knelt by the side of the bed, peeling the lens cap off and turning the dial to manual. The film inside clicked into place, running itself through the internal spool. Drew winced at the noise, hoping it wouldn't wake the gorgeous redhead in their bed.

Looking through the viewfinder, Drew's breathing hitched in their chest. Somehow, Rose looked even more incredible on camera.

Their fingers pulled focus, bringing her figure into crisp vision.

Drew lingered over the shutter button, the round plastic rubbing against their fingertip. Once they framed the shot – Rose's red hair pooled against the plush

pillow, and the crisp white sheet draping over her hips – Drew pressed down on the button.

The camera clicked, capturing her defined shoulder blades forever. The curve of her spine led Drew's eyes down to the sheet, just barely covering her ass. It left a lot to the imagination; even Drew, who was starting to feel like they knew every inch of the woman in their bed, couldn't help but wonder what was beneath the sheet.

They couldn't stop themselves from taking more, adjusting the frame slightly with each picture. After a few shots that came in quick succession, their model began to shift. Rose took in a deep breath, her back flexing as her lungs filled with air.

She lifted her head off the pillow and turned to look behind her when she felt the empty space where Drew should be.

“Drew...” Her voice was groggy as her eyes opened slightly.

Once she saw Drew, squatting on the floor in just a pair of boxers, her eyebrows raised.

“What are you doing?” she asked, opening her eyes wider as she noticed the camera in Drew's hands.

Drew cleared their throat. “You can go back to bed. The light was just beautiful, and I wanted to capture it. I'll get rid of the film, if you'd prefer.”

Rose smirked, beckoning Drew to come back to the bed with her fingers.

Doing as they were told, Drew crawled into the bed. They put their hands on either side of her head, towering over her.

“You are a very nasty person, Drew.” Rose sleepily giggled, her chest vibrating as she did. “But if you get rid of those photos, I’ll kill you myself.”

Drew smiled, planting a kiss on her chin.

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Rose groaned. “Where do you want me?”

Eyes widening, Drew could hardly hide their excitement. “Seriously?”

“I mean, if you want the shot, I might as well help you.” Rose winked, waking up more and more with every second.

Drew nodded. “Can I lower this?” They lightly tugged on the draped sheet.

Rose bit her lip, realizing that Drew wanted to take a completely nude photo of her. After thinking about it for a moment, she nodded.

Gripping the fabric in their hand, Drew lowered the sheet to her thighs. A shiver ran up Rose’s body as the fabric grazed her sensitive skin. Drew planted another kiss on her back before climbing out of the bed and returning to their position.

The sun streamed in from the east, casting perfect light on Rose’s back as she faced west.

Drew could feel their own body growing excited, certain that their entrance was slick with pleasure. They lifted their camera back to their eye, closing the other. Framing her again, Drew snapped a few shots of the new position.

“Turn your head toward me.” Drew instructed.

Rose turned her head to look at Drew.

“No.” Drew stopped her. “Not that far. Like you’re hearing me move around but not trying to find me.”

Something about the description made Rose inhale sharply. She turned back toward the window, letting her chin lift slightly toward Drew. Her eyes just barely looked across the room, more so gazing at the ceiling.

Her back shifted, toned muscle peaking through as she held herself in place. Drew hadn’t noticed how strong she was. But they snapped out of it, swallowing their excitement as they took more pictures.

After a few like that, Rose rolled onto her stomach, turning toward Drew. Her hair draped down her shoulder, a strand covering her face.

“You’re stunning.” Drew shook their head as they captured her like that. They could feel their clit throbbing with anticipation, the cotton boxers creating some friction against their center.

A sexy giggle rumbled from Rose’s chest as she eyed the lens. As Drew looked at her through the viewfinder, they felt like she was fucking them through the camera, as if every dirty thought she’d ever had was being whispered to the lens.

“Sit up.” Drew said as they clenched their jaw, trying to stay focused on the incredible shot and not the all-too-enticing body on display before them.

Rose did as she was told, grabbing the top sheet as she shifted up. She tucked the fabric between her arms and her ribs, just barely covering her hard nipples. Lowering her chin, Rose looked to her right. The sun made her emerald eyes shine. Drew knew just how electric they would look on the color film in the camera.

Drew got closer to them, keeping the camera low to the bed. They clicked the shutter

button a few more times from slightly different angles. But after they pushed down the button, the film inside began to rewrap itself.

“All full, I need to change it.” Drew licked their lips as they pulled the camera from their eye and met Rose’s gaze.

Rose nodded. “Do you want more?”

Drew smirked. “I’ll take as much as you’ll give me.”

Getting on her knees, Rose got closer to Drew. She wrapped her arms around Drew’s neck, their bare skin meeting. Rose winced slightly at Drew’s cold body. They had been out of the bed, completely exposed for a few minutes, and the air conditioning had done a good job of keeping them cool.

“I have an idea. And you can say no.” Drew prefaced.

Raising an eyebrow, Rose squinted. “Tell me more.”

Drew stood and walked to a drawer by their desk. They grabbed a length of rope from inside and brought it back to the bed. Tossing it down at Rose’s knees, they explained, “I’d like to tie you up for a few shots.”

Rose smirked, biting her lip with excitement. “I knew you were a dirty little freak.”

“What can I say? I think it’s hot.” Drew shrugged, blushing as their nerves started to take over.

Sitting up on her knees, Rose held her hands out. “You just have to promise to kiss me after.”

With a nod, Drew unwrapped the rope. They took the end of it and began wrapping her hands. “If it feels too tight, say the word, and I’ll loosen it.”

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Rose nodded as Drew pulled on the rope. Watching Rose's hands, Drew could see the rope slightly imprinting on her skin, creating small dips where it pressed. They were a bit surprised that she was okay with it being that tight. After a few loops around her wrists, Drew tucked the rope through the loops and let it fall down to the bed.

"Not your first time, I see." Rose giggled, a moan slipping out when Drew pulled the cord taut.

"Not quite." Drew winked at her. "Lay down on your back."

Falling back, Rose gasped as her back hit the plush sheets. Drew brought the other end of the rope down to Rose's ankles. The cord lightly rubbed against her legs.

She looked too gorgeous as she started to squirm. It was obvious she was getting sensitive, excited to feel Drew. As Drew began making loops around her ankles, Rose began to tense and rock her hips.

Taking in a breath, Drew could already smell how soaked she was. "You like it?"

Rose bit her lip as she nodded. "Yes."

It wasn't long before Drew was tying off the end near her feet. The rope was the perfect length. "Well that's convenient."

"Did you buy it just for me?" Rose winked as she watched Drew admire their own work.

With a shrug, Drew put their hand on Rose's hips. They pulled lightly, signaling for Rose to flip onto her stomach. "I guess we'll never know, will we?"

Something about it made Rose whimper as she found herself on her hands and knees.

Drew eyed her up and down. Her hands and ankles were bound, and the single cord connecting them tightened and loosened as she moved, giving her limited mobility. Just enough for Drew to put her into whatever position they wanted.

They placed both of their hands on her hips and lifted her ass toward the edge of the bed.

"Fuck." Drew moaned as Rose fell into place, in the perfect position to take Drew's strap. They swallowed the lump in their throat. With every second, the sun was rising higher in the sky, and they would lose the shot.

And she was too goddamn pretty all tied up to not get the shot.

So Drew stepped away from the bed after giving her luscious ass a squeeze. Rose moaned, her body leaning back toward Drew, craving their touch.

"A little desperate, aren't you?" Drew laughed as they picked their camera up and changed out their roll of film. They had hardly considered how much film it would take to shoot her, not caring about the cost.

Rose whimpered as she looked back at Drew. "It's your fault. You did this to me."

Lifting the camera to their eye, Drew smirked. Of course she was right, and that was just how they liked it. She knew they would take her out of the restraints the moment she asked. But she wouldn't, because she was a good girl and knew what was best for her.

Drew framed the shot, Rose's head laying on the bed. Her auburn locks splayed over her obscured face, contrasting with the stark white sheets and the light brown of the rope. Her ass caught the light beautifully, the plump cheeks creating a strong shadow down her thigh. It slightly obscured her slit, leaving just enough to the imagination.

Walking around her and looking for the perfect angle, Drew's mouth watered. Even from a few feet away, Drew could see exactly how wet her pussy was. It was almost dripping with excitement.

"So you like being on display like this?" Drew clenched their jaw as they tried to hold back from her.

Rose licked her lips. "I like being watched by you."

After taking a few shots of her looking away, Drew climbed onto the bed by the headboard. On their knees, they let their hand run through her hair. She lifted her head to meet Drew's gaze.

From head on, Drew started snapping pictures. Rose's emerald eyes glowed in the lens, the bright light making them the centerpiece of the photo despite her tight waist and wide hips in the background.

"Oh god." Drew moaned as they took photos of her. It was impossible to imagine how someone could be so stunning. Drew almost couldn't breathe looking at her like this, tied up and obedient.

She looked like all she wanted to do was devour them. And Drew just might let her.

Rose bit her lip as she lifted torso toward Drew, bringing her mouth closer to Drew's boxers. Trying to bring her hands closer, Rose met the resistance of the tight ropes wrapped around her wrists. A small whimper escaped her throat at the tugging.

As Drew snapped a few more pictures, Rose met their eyes. “I want to taste you.”

An electric shock pulsed from Drew’s chest straight to their already throbbing clit and wet center. Who were they to deny such a good girl a little treat?

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Smirking, Drew set the camera down on the bed and leaned backward to pull off their underwear. Rose grabbed the camera and used her limited to mobility to take a few pictures of Drew.

They laughed at the sneaky move. “Who told you you could do that?”

“It’s only fair; you’ve got dozens of salacious pictures of me. I deserve a few as payment, don’t you think?” Rose winked as she passed the camera back to a now-naked Drew.

Drew sat up on their knees. “We’ll see if I print them for you.”

“I think you will.” Rose reached her tied up hands to Drew’s sensitive thighs. Their skin rose at her touch. Something about watching her and not touching her made Drew’s skin feel like it was on fire. Almost as if touch was forbidden and Rose was breaking every rule.

Rose brought her lips to Drew’s knees, placing a gentle kiss. “Can I please?”

Looking down at her hungry eyes, Drew nodded. “You’ve behaved enough.”

It was all Rose needed to hear to keep going. She licked up Drew’s thighs, letting her tongue make its way to their center. Even Drew could smell their own scent. They were certain Rose was getting a full barrage of their excitement.

“My god, you smell amazing.” Rose groaned as her mouth teased around Drew’s bush. Just hearing her excitement was enough for Drew to shudder with anticipation.

Rose pointed her tongue sharply, perfectly pushing it into Drew's clit.

"Fuck." Drew cried out in pleasure at her precision. She had managed to find their clit in a matter of seconds. Their eyes rolled back into their head as Rose buried her tongue deeper into their folds.

Rose whimpered as she let her tongue slide from Drew's hood to their entrance, where Drew's excitement had pooled. "You were just waiting for me to clean you up, weren't you?" The rumble of her voice vibrated against Drew's clit, sending a pulse of pleasure through them.

All Drew wanted to do was capture just how beautiful she looked while pleasing them. Lifting the camera to their eye, Drew pushed down on the shutter.

Rose's hourglass figure.

The rope around her hands.

Her tongue just centimeters from Drew's folds.

Drew's body ached watching her please them through the lens. She looked up from their center into the lens. It felt like she was fucking Drew through the camera, not just licking them clean.

As she pushed her tongue against Drew's entrance, Rose's hair fell into her face. With their free hand, Drew collected her soft locks and gathered them at the back of her head. It was a messy collection of hair, not as neat as Drew would have preferred but they loved having the control.

Using the makeshift ponytail, Drew guided Rose's head and tongue to the perfect spots. Each tug sent a moan to Rose's lips.

“Rose, fuck.” Drew cried out as her tongue went flat, applying a wide pressure across Drew’s clit and folds. She pressed hard, letting Drew’s hips rock against her mouth. As she lowered her head to Drew’s center, dipping her tongue inside Drew, she let her nose press into Drew’s clit.

With each thrust, Drew felt their body grow more and more tense. Before they knew it, the camera fell from their eye, resting beside them on the bed. Their hand balled into a fist full of sheets while the other gripped Rose’s red hair.

“I want you to come in my mouth.” Rose lifted her lips from Drew’s center just long enough to speak before going back to their slit.

Drew nodded as they felt themselves nearing their peak. Feeling the ropes on Rose’s hands rub against their thighs, Drew whimpered. They opened their eyes, looked her body up and down.

Rose’s figure was unbelievable and seeing her tied up like this felt like everything Drew had ever dreamed of. She moaned into Drew’s folds as she fucked them with her tongue. Drew watched as she rocked her own hips along with her movements, trying to use her own leg to touch herself.

“You’re so desperate to come, but won’t until I let you.” Drew laughed as Rose met their gaze, a lustful look in her eyes that begged to be satiated.

It wasn’t long before Drew was shaking under her touch, their hips grinding fast enough for Rose to hold her tongue in place and apply pressure without having to move.

Their body tensed, squeezing Rose’s head between their thighs as they released onto her tongue. Without stopping, Rose kept licking them. Somehow, she still hadn’t gotten her fill.

As soon as their body finished tensing, Drew lifted themselves away from Rose's mouth.

"No, please." Rose whimpered. "Don't take it from me."

But with a smirk, Drew stood on shaky legs. They swooped up the camera as they walked away from Rose.

Her eyes desperately followed Drew across the room. "This is so mean."

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“Do you not like it?” Drew asked, a smirk playing at their lips.

Shaking her head, Rose swallowed. “I didn’t say that.”

Drew laughed as they went behind Rose. Their excitement was dripping down their leg, making the skin of their thighs slick as they walked. “I want you on your back.”

Rose nodded obediently and rolled over, her soft stomach facing the ceiling as she squirmed. As Drew’s eyes scanned her body, the writhing intensified. With each movement, she moaned a little more.

Her body made a slight S-shape. It perfectly captured her figure, every curve accentuated by her positioning. Drew watched the rope connecting her hands and ankles tighten across her stomach as she moved.

Even from across the room, Drew could tell the rope was tickling her skin. It was overstimulating her with every jolt, sending pleasure to her core.

Drew snapped a few more pictures of her desperate struggling. She was almost on the verge of an orgasm just from Drew watching her. Though, come to think of it, the lingering taste of Drew on her lips was certainly a contributing factor.

Coming in closer, Drew took a few closeups of her tied hands. The red ring around her forearms got darker by the second.

“Drew, please.” Rose begged.

But Drew raised an eyebrow. “Please what?”

Rolling her eyes, Rose resisted the restraints. The rope tightened under her pulling. “I need you to fuck me. I’m soaked for you.”

It was a hard request to ignore. Drew's own center was still pulsing from Rose’s tongue. With the camera in hand, Drew brought their mouth to her tied arms. The hairs on her arm began to rise, a jolt of anticipation carrying from her arm to her throat.

“This is getting cruel.” Rose whimpered.

Looking out the window, Drew knew their perfect light was limited. They only had a few more shots. And it would be a damn shame to waste the opportunity. Shaking their head, Drew laughed. “Not yet, gorgeous.”

Drew lowered down as Rose squeezed her thighs together. She squirmed against them, hiding her beautiful pussy from Drew’s lens. Pushing their finger down on the shutter button, Drew captured the desperation.

They stood up, moving on top of Rose, letting themselves tower over her. “Bring your hands up over your head.”

Doing as she was told, Rose cried out with pleasure as the restraints on her hands and ankles tightened, pulling the center cord taut against her body. “Fuck.”

Drew brought their camera to their eye just as Rose’s mouth gaped open. The click of the shutter came just as Rose was whimpering for more. Her teeth bit into her lip, a deep imprint visible in the picture.

It was framed perfectly: Rose’s red locks splayed out behind her head. The rope

strained, dividing her face in half. The bottom of her breasts, just barely keeping her hard nipples out of view.

The camera clicked, the film inside rewrapping itself as the roll finished.

“Just in time.” Drew smirked as the sun moved just out of the window. It took everything in their body to not just throw their camera to the ground. But instead, they set it down and walked to the bedside box full of sex toys.

Reaching inside, Drew pulled out their favorite black harness and pulled it on. They turned around, letting Rose admire the way it framed their ass. Rose had turned onto her side to watch Drew move.

As the harness was clipped into place, the straps wrapping under Drew’s ass and lifting it slightly, Rose couldn’t stop herself from moaning. “Fucking finally.”

Drew raised an eyebrow and whipped around. “Oh, I’m sorry, did I make you wait too long?”

“No fucking shit.”

With a shrug, Drew leaned down and grabbed the pink strap from inside the box. It was bigger than average, a lot for Rose to take. But by now, Drew knew exactly how much Rose could handle. “If you’re going to be brat, I won’t bother touching you.”

Rose winced as she squirmed. “No, please. That’s not what I said. I’ll take whatever you’ll give me.”

Drew smirked and came back to the bed, slipping their hands under Rose’s hips and flipping her onto her stomach. Positioned behind her on the edge of the bed, Drew lifted her hips toward themselves.

“That’s what I like to hear.” Drew growled as they bent over her, their lips a few inches from her ear. As they moved, their strap lightly pressed against her entrance.

A moan ripped from her throat as she felt the silicone separate her wet folds.

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Drew laughed. “You weren’t kidding, you are soaked.”

“I wouldn’t lie.” Rose smirked as she looked back at Drew.

Shaking their head, Drew grabbed the base of the dildo. They moved the tip up and down her slick center, teasing her entrance with each movement. Rubbing her clit with it, Drew watched her body shift to try and slip the toy inside.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself. I’ll fuck you when I’m ready,” Drew quipped, letting their hand spank her soft ass cheeks.

Rose whimpered at the light crack of her skin. “Yes.”

Before they entered her, Drew grabbed the air pulse vibrator and slipped it between their strap and their hood. Turning it on, Drew groaned with pleasure.

“I want to come with you.” Drew licked their lips.

With a nod, Rose lifted her hips and lowered her head. She was ready to submit to Drew. As the vibrator massaged their clit, Drew guided the strap into Rose’s entrance. They thrust it inside her, letting it sink in deep. It spread her easily, her slick center taking the toy effortlessly.

Drew groaned with pleasure, feeling how well she took it. With each thrust, the dildo pushed into their own vibrator and sent waves of pleasure through their body. After a few pushes, Drew pulled out of Rose’s pussy.

They wiped a finger along the slick toy, covered in Rose's excitement. Looking at it, they shook their head. "You're so nasty."

Rose nodded as she turned her head to watch what Drew would do with her pleasure. Slowly, Drew brought their finger to their mouth, letting their tongue trace along it before plunging their finger deep into their mouth. Their lush lips wrapped around the finger, sucking the taste off.

"Oh, Jesus, Drew." Rose gulped as her pussy pulsed with excitement.

Without hesitation, Drew plunged themselves back inside her. This time, they pulled out after one thrust. The dildo was soaked again. But after running their finger along it once more, Drew brought their finger to Rose's mouth.

Holding it just a few inches from her pink lips, Drew asked, "Do you want to know how good you taste?"

Rose's eyes were pleading with Drew for more. "Yes please." Opening her mouth to accept the treat, Rose locked onto Drew's hazel eyes.

Drew moaned as Rose's plush lips wrapped around them, a jolt of excitement rushing straight to their throbbing clit. With their finger still in Rose's mouth, Drew thrust back inside her.

She moaned on Drew's finger, her teeth lightly biting down on the skin.

Unable to hold back any more, Drew began sliding in and out of Rose quickly. They took their hand back and grabbed her hips, pulling her in as they thrust further inside her. Her moans quickly turned to screams as Drew's strap rubbed her g-spot.

Still tied up, Rose couldn't move or adjust. She was completely at Drew's will, and it

was clear how much she loved it. Drew brought their hand to her soft stomach and grabbed the loose rope, pulling on it.

“Fuck.” Rose winced as the rope dug in. Her body began to tense with each thrust.

“Do you want to come for me?” Drew growled as their own body grew closer to climax. Their clit was firmly pressed into their toy. As Rose’s ass slammed into their pelvis, their toy pushed harder into their clit. It was pure ecstasy, their bodies falling into perfect sync as Drew brought Rose to her peak.

Rose screamed. “I can’t wait, baby. I have to come.”

Drew laughed. But as the words left her lips, the excitement of making her orgasm was enough for Drew’s own body to near climax. Doing their best to keep their rhythm as their own body lost control, Drew continued to fuck Rose as deep as they could.

Tensing against the tight ropes, Rose shook with excitement. For a moment, Drew wasn’t sure she would stay tied up. The pure force of her body might snap the cords.

But it didn’t – instead, she shuddered against Drew’s strap, her ass quaking against them.

Drew could hardly believe how fucking hot she looked while she came. It sent them right over the edge. The anticipation of the morning photoshoot finally came to a head as Drew orgasmed, their body seizing up as they thrust into Rose.

Their screams bounced off the brick walls, surely waking their neighbors. But they couldn’t care less as they collapsed against Rose’s back.

“Fuck.” Rose cried out, her body finally releasing under their touch.

After a moment, Drew pulled their dildo out of her. They released the clasps and let the harness fall to the floor. Collapsing into the bed, Drew caught their breath as their chest heaved.

Rose rolled over, holding her arms up for Drew to untie her. Sitting upright, Drew quickly undid the knots, releasing the tension from her arms and legs.

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“Considering how easy it was for you to undo that, I have no idea how it kept me so tied up.” Rose gasped as she rolled into the sheets. She stretched out her legs and arms, letting her body level out after such an intense orgasm.

Watching her, Drew let their hand rest on her sweaty back. How is she this beautiful? They couldn't stop the eager grin from taking over their face.

Rose whipped her head around and groaned. “What now?”

Drew giggled. “I've never fucked like this.”

Rolling her eyes, Rose shook her head. “You can't say shit like that.”

“Why?” Drew asked, clenching their jaw. Somehow, their body wanted more. Even after all of that, they wanted to take every part of her.

Rose licked her lips. “Because I'll have to fuck you again.”

“Oops.” Drew laughed, rolling over and placing a deep kiss on Rose's shoulders.

They didn't know how this would end. But it certainly didn't feel all that casual anymore. It was starting to become difficult for Drew to imagine what their day would look like without Rose in it. But the maternity shoot was just around the corner, and after that, who knew if Rose would have time for whatever this was.

ROSE

Rose shook herself out of her haze as she packed her camera bag. It felt like she was still asleep even a week after their dirty photo shoot. Everything she had done with Drew felt like a complete dream.

All that was left was to hope that they would be able to take a back seat for the maternity shoot the next day. Rose clipped the buckles on her camera bag, having charged all four of her batteries and formatted all of her SD cards. It was one of the biggest shoots she'd ever done. And certainly the most she'd been paid.

Placing her hands on her hips, she scanned the room for anything she might be missing. It was unlike her to be so prepared so early. But as she waited for Drew to text that they were downstairs, Rose couldn't think of anything she'd missed.

Her eyes were still half closed from sleep but she was already almost through her first coffee. It would be a long drive to the State Park across the river where they would meet Lauren for the shoot.

She set her mug down on the counter. I have to be forgetting something. Rose scoured her apartment for something that she might leave behind. Maybe a spare pair of underwear. She jokes to herself.

There had been a remarkable increase in the amount of laundry she had to do every week since she and Rose had started seeing each other. Maybe even a few pairs that found their way into the garbage can.

"Where are they?" Rose checked her phone, anxious to get on the road.

Still no text. Her finger hovered over the call button.

But before she could press it, her doorbell rang. “What?”

She walked to the door. “Hello?”

Laughing at her confusion, Drew’s voice came through the intercom. “Are you gonna let me in or what?”

“Where’s the truck?” Rose asked, holding her finger over the “talk” button.

“Parked, I’m coming up to help you bring stuff down.” Drew was so matter-of-fact there was no point in arguing.

Rose clicked the enter button, hearing the front door click open through the intercom. Despite her ability to be ready on time, Rose hadn’t bothered cleaning up after herself. She had assumed Drew would wait in the car and would never know her shame.

But before she could even put her dirty plates in the sink, a knock vibrated the door. There was no point pretending this wasn’t who she was. Drew would find out eventually.

Taking a deep breath, Rose swung open the door. Her face lifted into a smile as soon as she saw them. Their arm rested on the door frame and they wore a tight, white t-shirt with the sleeves rolled just over their biceps.

“Hi, gorgeous.” Their voice was a sleepy rumble.

Rose felt herself melt. At this rate, Drew would have to scoop her off the creaky wood floors to get out of here.

“Hi, handsome.” Rose blushed.

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Wrapping their arms around her waist, Drew kissed her firmly. They took in her scent as they embraced.

“You ready?” Drew nodded to the pile of gear behind her.

She walked toward it and started slinging straps over her neck and shoulders. “You didn’t have to come up, I didn’t mean to make you park.”

Drew laughed. “You didn’t make me. I wasn’t going to let you bring down this much shit by yourself.”

Rose put her hands on her hips defiantly. “Don’t think I’m strong enough?”

“Of course not,” Drew smirked as they grabbed some of the bags. “It’s just silly.”

Between the two of them, they were able to collect all of the gear. It would be a massive first trip, but a first trip nonetheless.

Collecting her keys, Rose scanned the apartment. “Sorry it’s such a mess.”

“That’s okay, I hadn’t noticed.” Drew smiled. It was the most obvious lie they could have tried. Her place was objectively a nightmare. The other times Drew had come over, she had managed to hide most of her unorganized tendencies in her closets.

But this was what her place looked like on a regular basis, piles of clothes on the couch, dishes on the counter, a layer of dust on the TV.

Rose tapped her pockets, making sure her keys were there. “Okay, let’s boogie.”

“Boogie? Jesus woman, we need to get you out of the house more.” Drew laughed, leading the way downstairs. They made their way downstairs and loaded the bed of the truck quickly.

Without saying a word, they effortlessly placed each piece of gear into the covered bed. Rose extended her arm to push the camera bag into the bed, her sleeve pushing up as she did.

Drew’s eyebrows raised. “Are those?”

With a nod, Rose met Drew’s burning hazel eyes. “From your ropes? Yes. And now I have to wear a long sleeve overshirt in the middle of July.”

Smirking, Drew shrugged. “Do you dislike it?”

“I didn’t say that.” Rose bit her lip, the anticipation of their touch soaking her panties already. She grabbed another case of equipment and placed it in the bed.

Drew sighed. “You can’t tease me like this when there’s now time to fuck. Because now I’m excited and have to keep it to myself.”

Rose balled her fists and brought them to her face, mimicking an exaggerated cry. “Boo-hoo, poor Drew has to wait to come until after work.”

With a smirk on their face, Drew slammed the tailgate closed. It was a perfect fit.

“Close call.” Drew shook their head, raising their hand for a high-five.

After their hands met, Drew hopped into the driver's seat and Rose took the passenger

seat. As she buckled her seatbelt, Rose asked, “Did you thank Diana for the truck loan?”

Fiddling with the music, Drew mumbled. “I did indeed. She said anything for you... and nothing for me.”

Rose laughed. She had met Diana once or twice in passing and had nothing but nice things to say. Especially considering she and Drew were exes, Diana was nothing but welcoming to Rose.

They pulled off the FDR in Drew’s neighborhood, passing Tompkins Square Park. Throwing on the hazards, Drew double parked and hopped out. They pulled the handle on the passenger door to help Rose out.

Holding their hand out, Rose grabbed it to get down from the shockingly tall truck.

The car beeped behind them as Drew locked the car and sped toward C&B around the corner. But their face immediately wrinkled when they saw the doors closed. It was unusual for them to not leave the door wide open in the summer.

Drew pushed on the door, but it didn’t budge. “Crap.”

Catching up to them, Rose caught sight of the sign on the door: CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS, SEE YA MONDAY!

Drew started rubbing their forehead, feeling the day beginning to spiral out of control already. But Rose lowered her head and caught Drew’s gaze. “Hey, it’s okay. We’ll stop somewhere along the way up. I built in a bunch of time.”

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Sucking in a deep breath of air, Rose tried to urge Drew to follow suit. Eventually they relented and allowed the warm July air to fill their lungs.

“Thanks.” Drew said as they exhaled.

Rose gently kissed their cheek and grabbed their hand, guiding them back to the truck. Once they were back in the car, Rose started looking for places to stop along the route.

It wasn't too long before the car was lurching out of its parking spot and pulling onto the road. Drew seemed to be used to driving the city street, even in a massive truck. Weaving between the plethora of terrible drivers, Drew got them to the George Washington Bridge in a quick thirty minutes.

Rose stared out the window after adding a few songs to the queue on Drew's phone, curating the vibe for the first leg of their drive.

She loved watching the landscape shift from the skyscrapers to suburbs to the country. A part of her would always yearn for the woods despite knowing that she belonged in the City. Looking over the water, it was easy to see the divide between the tall, rock Palisades that line the West bank of the river and the city skyline.

As they drove, Rose added a coffee stop to the navigation. Drew followed the instructions. And after they crossed the Hudson River, Drew quickly pulled off into a small commuter town where the navigator pulled them into a small parking lot.

“You've got to be kidding.” Drew shook their head as they put the truck in park and

turned off the ignition. Looking up at the familiar green mermaid, Drew sighed.

Rose giggled as she hopped out of the car. “Okay, to be fair, it was the only place on the way that was open.”

Eyeing her, Drew shook her head. “I’m not sure I believe you.” Their grumpy demeanor took over as their caffeine withdrawal set in. Veering toward Rose, Drew nudged her with their broad shoulders.

Rose grabbed the door handle to the Starbucks. A rush of cold air slapped them in the face as they stepped inside.

“Do you need a minute with the menu before we order?” Rose looked up at the picture menu. Hardly any of the items they actually served were up there. Besides, Rose was almost certain Drew would just order a black coffee.

But Drew shook their head and headed up to the counter where they greeted the cashier. “Hey, how are you?”

“I’m good, thanks. What can I do for you?” The teenager in a green apron smiled back at Drew.

Drew looked up at the menu before launching into their order. “Can I get a venti, caramel macchiato with soy milk, two pumps of chocolate syrup, whipped cream, extra drizzle, and double the espresso, please?”

Hardly able to process what she was seeing, Rose’s mouth fell open. She hardly noticed when the cashier turned their attention to her. “And for you?”

Stuttering, Rose shook her head as she tried to recover. “I’ll just take a grande iced coffee with oat milk.”

“Any syrup?” The teenager asked as they tapped away at their POS.

“Uh sure, just two pumps of the classic syrup please.” Rose pulled out her card, scanning her rewards card before paying for the drinks. When the cashier disappeared behind the counter, Rose walked over to Drew who was already by the pick-up area.

Before Rose could ask any questions, Drew smiled. “How much do I owe you?”

“Business expense, don’t bother.” Rose winked.

Their eyes scanned the generic decor of the store. It looked the same as every other Starbucks they had ever been in. And that was kind of the point. Rose scanned their face, still in complete shock. “That was... a big order. Especially for someone who never comes to Starbucks.”

Raising a finger, Drew corrected her. “I never said I wouldnevercome here.”

Rose raised an eyebrow, unsure what exactly they were getting out. Their face flushed with what Rose could only assume was a slight embarrassment.

“First of all, I do love supporting local shops. That is still true. But I had to force myself to stop coming here because I was getting this shit like everyday and it was costing me a small fortune on top of concerning my doctor.” Drew confessed, barely able to look at Rose.

Understanding washed over Rose as she nodded. “A-ha. So you aren’t justsooocool and special that you’ve never been here. You’re actually obsessed with it.”

Drew rolled their eyes. “If you want to simplify it, sure.” Crossing their arms, they looked down at Rose.

Meeting their hazel eyes, Rose giggled. “Do you go to SA?”

“SA?” Drew’s face wrinkled.

“Starbucks Anonymous?” Rose’s whole body shook with laughter.

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Just as the cashier called out their order, Drew lightly punched Rose's arm. She approached the counter and grabbed the drinks. "Thanks!"

It would be a lie to pretend like Drew's obsession wasn't validating. For all of their grumpy bullshit, they were just like everyone else. Taking a gander at Drew's massive, sugar drink, she giggled.

They head back to the car together, bumping into each other as they walk. Wearing huge smiles, each of them climbed into their respective seats and slammed the doors behind them. The sun illuminated Drew's golden eyes as they looked to Rose in the passenger seat.

She felt her breath hitch in her chest. Neither of them could look away from each other. Rose shook her head. She knew she shouldn't want more of Drew, that she should spend some time alone. But how could she say no to this? Say no to the fire in her chest?

23

DREW

The reel of film slid into place in the back of Drew's camera while they watched Rose guide Lauren onto a large boulder. Glowing from her pregnancy, Lauren delicately made her way up the rockface. She was careful to move around her new baby bump, a feeling she still hadn't gotten used to.

Drew couldn't complain about the shoot so far. Even with a few stops, Drew and

Rose had arrived with fifteen minutes to spare. They put together their equipment in the parking lot and, after a brief chat with Lauren, got to work.

“Set your arm on your hip.” Rose directed from below the boulder. “Perfect. Just like that.”

Now a familiar sound, Rose’s camera clicked a few pictures in rapid succession. With their own camera ready to roll, Drew hopped in and started taking shots from almost the same angle.

The duo were careful to not just stay out of each other’s way but to make sure they actually got good shots. Maybe they were getting better at this whole compromising thing.

Lauren, positioned in front of Awoosting Falls in the Minnewaska State Park, stood strong as a heavy breeze flew off the water. If it weren’t for a few years of field photography, Drew would have been more worried about the spray coming off the waterfall damaging their cameras. But they were pretty familiar with just how far back they needed to stand to avoid soaking their camera.

But the sun, which peeked over the top of the waterfall, created a golden halo around Lauren’s blonde hair. Drew clicked the shutter button as the drops of waterfall spray landed perfectly in her hair, glowing from the shining sun.

They continued like this, making minor pose adjustments for fifteen minutes before Lauren raised her hand. “Could I sit for a minute?”

In unison, Drew and Rose replied, “Of course!”

As she sat to take a break, both photographers saw the perfect lighting and refused to waste it. Getting into position, Rose started taking more pictures.

Lauren lifted her head from her water bottle, confused. But when she realized they were just going to continue, she laughed. But as they kept working, Drew couldn't stop themselves from keeping an eye on Rose in their periphery.

She looked beautiful, wearing a long sleeve chambray shirt with a simple black shirt underneath. It was simple but sexy. And adorable at the same time. Turning their camera toward Rose as she got closer to Lauren, Drew snapped a few pictures.

With a wide smile, Rose gave Lauren some light direction. She looked strong and in control. But it was her smile that Drew still felt the need to capture even though they had been trying to capture it for weeks at this point.

After a rest, Rose moved them up the hill toward the lake's overlook. The landscape was perfect for what they were going for. Large mountain peaks left endless sky for Lauren to be framed within.

"Perfect," Rose snaps a few while Lauren holds her bump over the lake. From Drew's estimate it was at least five hundred feet from the cliff face to the water's surface. It took everything in them to get down on the edge and take the shots of Lauren from below.

But as they shot, Drew noticed a small red tent lingering in the background. It was easy for Drew to frame out of their shot but they weren't sure how Rose would be able to from her angle.

Taking a few photos, Drew considered whether she was aware of the tent or not. She had said there wouldn't be any events that day but Drew was certain a tent that massive must be an event of some kind.

Either way, Rose was continuing as normal.

I guess she thinks she can just edit it out? Before they could say anything, Rose was shifting Lauren's positioning and carrying on with the shoot.

Though Lauren was a good sport, it was clear how exhausting the grueling posing was for her. So Drew pressed off their own concerns, knowing that Rose would be more than able to get a tent out of a couple shots.

From overhead, a loud crack sounded as gray clouds rolled over the mountain. Rose giggled, sending a blush to Drew's cheeks at the familiar sound, "Well, that's a wrap, I guess!"

Lauren hopped down from her mark and grabbed her rain jacket from the picnic bench behind them. The clouds were coming in fast, in typical summer storm fashion. Jogging over to their bags, Drew and Rose started packing up, throwing their cameras inside their bags as quickly as they could before moving on to the huge, white bounce boards.

As sprinkles began to fall, Rose turned to Lauren. "You should head out, there's no need for you to hang around while we fumble with gear."

"Are you sure?" Lauren was eager to accept the offer but didn't want to ditch them.

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Drew nodded. “Absolutely. You’re pregnant and this is only going to get nastier.” They gestured to the storm brewing overhead as the thunder boomed.

Giving each of them a hug, Lauren said goodbye and thank you before hustling to the parking lot down the hill.

Rose and Drew packed the rest of their stuff and slung the bags over their shoulders, desperately juggling the insane amount of gear. It wasn’t as perfectly packed as Rose had it that morning but it would do the trick.

The rain grew heavier as they jogged to the parking lot. Feeling their hair start to soak, Drew smirked. It had been years since they were caught in a summer storm like this. By the time they hit the parking lot, the entire park was making a mass exodus from the hiking trails.

Drew packed the trunk as Rose passed them things to throw inside. Even though everything still fit, the bed was nowhere near as gorgeous as it had been after their morning packing.

Once the bed was closed, Drew turned to Rose. Their chest rose and fell rapidly as they looked at her. Maybe it was the jog. But more than likely, it was just Rose and the way she looked at them.

“Am I driving or you?” Drew smirked.

Rose threw her hands over Drew’s neck, pulling them in for a deep kiss. The rain soaked both of their lips, the kiss immediately sloppier than their usual makeout

sessions. Even so, Drew's heart raced at the touch of her soft lips.

The rain smacked down on the truck, the metal clanking with each drop.

"You. I'm not driving in this shit." Rose laughed just centimeters from Drew's mouth.

24

ROSE

Rushing to their respective sides, Drew threw open the driver's door and slammed it just as fast. They tried to catch their breath as Rose climbed in next to them. She was soaked, her hair flatter than a piece of paper as it plastered to her head.

But she wouldn't have guessed she looked so rough from the way Drew was staring at her. She felt her chest tighten under Drew's gaze. It felt special to be seen by them even if Rose knew that was silly.

Breaking their eye contact, Drew grabbed their coffee cup from the morning. All of the ice and whipped cream melted into a sloshy liquid that hardly resembled something edible. But Drew twirled the cup, trying to reincorporate the insane amount of sugar, before lifting the cup to their lips and taking a massive gulp.

Rose winced. "God, Drew. That's vile. It has to be so watery and, like, warm from the heat."

Nodding, Drew was clearly disgusted with themselves. "It is. It's disgusting. But I can't help myself."

"We could just get you a new one." Rose's face scrunched up as Drew downed more

of the drink.

Drew shook their head and laughed. “Let me live in shame.”

Drifting her gaze out the window, Rose watched the heavy raindrops smack against the windshield. It was coming down way harder than she had expected. The forecast had barely even mentioned rain and here she was staring out into the sudden storm.

“Do you think it’s safe to drive?” Rose brought her gaze back to Drew.

After a quick scan, Drew shrugged. “Hard to say, maybe we wait for a minute?”

Of course, the parking lot was already empty. As much as rain could be dangerous, it wasn’t a hurricane. They would have been fine. But Rose didn’t want to leave just yet.

She nodded and her chest started to grow tight looking into Drew’s eyes. The hazel was darker than usual, the gray darkening them.

Looking over at her, Drew could read her mind. They leaned in toward the console and placed their firm hand along her jawline, pulling her face closer to theirs.

As their lips pressed together, Rose could feel her body ache for Drew. At this point, she felt like just looking at Drew was enough to get her excited. They had barely stopped touching each other in the last few weeks, both of them desperately searching for excuses to spend more time together.

Slipping her tongue into Drew’s mouth, Rose put her hand on Drew’s thigh. The touch elicited a moan from Drew’s chest. As soon as they moaned, Rose felt her center pulse with excitement. She needed to get closer to them.

Moving her leg clumsily over the center console, Rose straddled Drew. As she moved, her sleeve rolled up her forearm, exposing the black and purple skin. Drew looked at her wrists and groaned. She felt their warmth as soon as she lowered herself down.

“Rose Miller, you dirty dog.” Drew laughed as they pulled her face in for more. As Rose got into position, a loud honk startled them.

They both scanned the parking lot before laughing. “My ass is just too thick.”

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Bringing their hand around her back, Drew squeezed her ass. “No such thing as too thick.” Rose began to rock her hips as Drew guided her with their strong hands.

With their spare hand, Drew fumbled for the lever on the side of the Driver’s seat to push the set back. It wasn’t normally this difficult to find but Rose was sure her lips on their neck wasn’t very helpful for their focus. Eventually, they found it and sent themselves flying backward. “A-ha!”

Rose giggled as she leaned down with them, keeping their lips pressed together.

Her body still ached halfway through the drive as sleep started to take over. Slowing after they touched each other, the rain was more of a light patter on the windshield as Drew careened down the highway.

Rose had spent most of the drive watching Drew’s arms flex as they handled the wheel. But even then, Rose was exhausted and as the car rumbled she couldn’t stop her eyes from drifting closed.

Every time she opened her eyes, they were closer to the city. She wasn’t sure when exactly but at some point Drew’s Carhart had ended up on her shoulders. It was a warm jacket. Its best feature was Drew’s scent drifting into Rose’s nose as she slept.

She was startled awake by Drew’s parallel parking.

“Are we back already?” Lifting her head, Rose blinked the sleep from her eyes. Sure enough, they were parking on her block in Brooklyn.

With a nod, Drew finished their parking job and rubbed her knee. “Ready to go upstairs?”

Rose smiled and grabbed the jacket over her shoulders, trying to pass it back to Drew. But they shook their head and nodded for her to put it on.

Doing so, Rose felt like she could fall back to sleep right there. But Drew opened the Driver’s door and headed to the bed of the truck. They started pulling gear from the trunk and loading it onto their body.

Sleepily walking to the back of the truck, Rose smiled as she squinted. The street lights had come on and the sun was still hidden by clouds as it set. Not able to take much, Rose grabbed what she could and left the rest. Drew left their own gear in the truck with the exception of their film canisters.

By this point, Rose knew enough about film photography to know that leaving a bunch of film in the bed of a truck in mid-Summer probably would end with a bunch of unusable negatives.

Rose fumbled with her keys as they headed upstairs, dumping their stuff right inside her apartment. But from behind her, Rose heard the crinkling of a takeout bag.

She whipped around and her mouth fell open. “When did you do that?”

Laughing, Drew set the heavy bag of Chinese food down on the kitchen counter. “While you were sleeping. I just stopped at the place we tried last week.”

“I have no idea how the car door didn’t wake me up.” Rose shook her head.

Flashing their charming smile, Drew winked. “I was very quiet about it.”

They gestured to the couch for Rose to sit down and relax as they grabbed plates from Rose's cabinets. The smell of the Chinese food filled Rose's apartment fast, making her stomach growl.

As Drew plated their food and popped it into the microwave, they started to hand wash the dishes scattered around the kitchen.

"You do not need to do that." Rose groaned, hiding her shame. "I was going to do them before you came up but I didn't know when that would be..."

Drew shushed her as they scrubbed a pan. "I know I don't have to. But I'm here and I want to help you."

Who was she to say no to help? She tried to settle into the couch, letting the day wash away as she watched Drew clean up as she put *When Harry Met Sally* on the TV. It had been longer than she could remember since she dated someone who would do something like this, take care of her.

And it felt really nice to let them.

Once the microwave beeped, Drew carried the plates over and set them down in front of Rose. Her mouth watered at the sight of food. Drew had piled each plate with a few different dishes, a couple they had tried the week before and one or two that Rose had mentioned wanting to try.

"Thank you." She smiled up at them.

With their own goofy grin, Drew plopped down on the couch next to her and dug in. They looked up at the TV and smiled. "A classic."

Rose nodded. "It's my favorite." As she watched, she made her way around the plate,

sampling each of the meals one by one. Each bite felt like heaven after such a long day.

“That’s a good choice.” Drew smiled at her before turning their attention back to the TV.

They only got to the Kat’s Delicatessen scene before Rose’s eyelids were too heavy to hold open. Drew stood from the couch and leaned over her, placing a gentle kiss on her forehead.

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“I literally don’t know if I have the energy to make it to bed.” Rose let out a massive sigh.

With a smirk, Drew hooked their arms underneath Rose’s knees and back. Effortlessly, they lifted her in their arms, forcing a squeal out of Rose as she clung to their neck.

Holy fuck, they’re strong. Rose felt her entire body warm at Drew’s touch surrounding her. It was a short walk to the bedroom and Drew took it easily, slowly setting Rose down in her bed.

The quilted comforter was already peeled back from her rushed morning. Not that she would have made the bed any way. Sitting up, Rose peeled off her shirt and pants. Eventually pulling off her bra and underwear too.

Drew wandered to the other side of the queen mattress, pulling their own shirt over their head. As they did, their stomach flexed. When Rose looked at their faint six pack, her surprise faded. Of course Drew could whisk her away to bed, they were shredded under those loose clothes.

Slipping into the bed next to her, Drew groaned at the relief of the plush surface. “Your couch is terrible.”

“Maybe I’ll buy a new one with the wedding money.” Rose grumbled as her eyes closed.

Drew’s forehead wrinkled. “The what?”

Jolting open, her eyes met Drew's. "Fuck. I meant to mention this earlier today but we got... carried away. Ellen and Finley want us to shoot their wedding together. Like plan it as a collaborative from the beginning instead of just accidentally."

She knew it was less than ideal to talk about now, after an incredibly long day that included over four hours of driving.

"Right." Drew nodded, their gulp visible from across the bed.

Resting her hand on Drew's waist, Rose shook her head. "We can talk about it more tomorrow. You don't have to say yes. But we probably shouldn't get into it right now."

A deep breath flooded Drew's lungs with stale air-conditioning. Rose wiggled closer to them and placed a kiss on their cheek. Rubbing her thumb along their skin, she smiled up at Drew. "I really appreciate you taking a back seat on the shoot today. It meant a lot to me."

Drew nodded, their face flushing under her recognition. "You did a great job running the set. You thought of everything."

The sound of the rain pattering against Rose's windowsill put both of them to sleep. Each raindrop made their eyes heavier and breaths deeper. Rose wasn't entirely sure when she actually fell asleep. But she knew she was warm and safe in Drew's arms, their bodies pressed together.

25

DREW

Drew got a late start the next day, enjoying a slow morning with Rose before finally

heading to Diana's to return the truck. But if it had been up to them, they probably would have stayed with Rose the rest of the day.

They had promised Diana the car would be back before she went out the next night so there was no better time to bring it across town.

Situated in Park Slope, Diana's apartment building had its own private garage. She may have been a mess in her personal life, but her professional life was at an all-time high.

Drew rested their back against her bedframe as Diana groaned. "Ew, seriously? In the truck?"

With a shrug, Drew laughed. They couldn't stop their face from turning bright pink. Just the thought of touching Rose again made their stomach flip.

"I would be grossed out but honestly that's so hot." Diana shook her head as she held a patterned top up to her chest. After a second, she held up another hanger in her other hand, this one a plain, black blouse.

Drew rolled their eyes. "Don't be a creep."

Diana shrugged, changing the topic. "Do we think black top or patterned?"

Without hesitation, Drew answered, "Pattern."

It was obviously the correct choice, Diana ripped off her pajama shirt and threw on the blouse while Drew picked at some grapes in a bowl.

"So it must be serious?" Diana squeezed herself into the shirt.

“Expressly not serious, actually.” But they knew that wasn’t entirely true. Of course, that’s what had been said a few weeks ago. Rose had just ended things with Shannon and Drew... well god only knew what they wanted.

The only thing they knew for certain was that they loved being around Rose. She was funny and smart. But most importantly she wasn’t afraid to put Drew in their place when they were being a dick. It was a new feeling for Drew to want to impress someone, to want them to be proud of their growth.

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Diana took a deep breath. “From your face, it sounds like maybe that should be revisited.”

When they didn’t respond, Diana asked, “What about the fucked up maternity pictures? Did you tell her about it?”

Drew shook their head. “No, honestly it was such a small thing that I forgot about it until I was telling you how it all went down. Plus, it’s supposed to be the benefit of digital that it should be easy to remove.”

Lowering her head to meet Drew’s gaze, Diana chuckled. “I guess it wouldn’t have been great to doubt her vision in front of the client. It’s probably fine, like you said.”

“But there’s a problem.” Drew winced.

“I love problem solving.” Diana sat on the edge of the bed.

Taking in a deep breath, Drew rubbed their face. “Ellen and Fin want us to shoot their wedding together.” Before Diana could jump in, Drew lifted their finger to silence her while they finished talked. “And there’s this tennis job for Mackenzie Bennett that we’re both up for. She wants to pitch us as a team but I’m not crazy about it.”

Diana’s eyebrows squished together. “Why?”

Sinking into the bed, Drew groaned. “What if my whole career just becomes this schtick comparing Film to Digital? Like I’ve won awards for photojournalism but my rate is rising for some gimmick?”

“Some things never change.” Diana laughed and patted Drew’s leg. “Look, I think it’s totally fair to not want every job to be tied to this casual situationship...thing. But, money is money and I say don’t kick a gift horse in its very lucrative mouth.”

With a nod, Drew crossed their arms. “But am I evil for telling her I want to go out alone for the tennis gig? Like we’d be competitors.”

“Maybe that makes it hotter?” Diana joked. Ripping a grape from the vine, Drew pegged her with it. “And you might want to talk about just how casual this whole thing is.”

Before Drew could launch into a tirade about how annoying she was being, Diana stood and got out of arms reach. As she finished her outfit, Diana started shaking her head.

“What?” Drew questioned from the bed.

Whipping her head to face them, Diana wagged a finger at her friend. “In my goddamn pickup truck. You’re the biggest lesbian I’ve ever seen in my life.”

They stuck out their tongue and winked at their friend before going back to their pile of grapes. Even now, all they could think about was Rose. They’d be lying to pretend like they didn’t like working together. It was fun and they made a good team. Drew had been feeling more inspired, trying new shots again for the first time since coming back to the states permanently.

But their chest tightened as they thought about relying on her. Relying on anyone. Shaking off the feeling, Drew sighed. It’s just one more job.

ROSE

She had gotten used to the sound of Drew typing away next to her after about an hour. It was comforting to look up and see them staring intently at their screen. Almost like a game, Rose couldn't ever quite figure out what they were up to.

They had spent the week after the maternity shoot working on their individual shots, comparing every few days. Drew had even let Rose develop some of the most important shots from their reels, admitting that she was getting much better at handling the film.

And there may have been quite a few nights in bed together too. Rose's heart pounded at the thought, still wanting Drew every chance she could get. But her phone rang with a text from Ellen.

Any confirmation for Drew yet? Trying to plan plates for dinner.

Rose bit her lip. It was the one thing they hadn't talked about, that and the shoot for Tommy and Mac Bennett. But Rose hadn't wanted to pressure them.

Convincing herself that they had plenty of time to think, Rose nodded to herself before closing her laptop and turning to face Drew on the opposite side of the couch. "Did you get a chance to think about the wedding? Ellen and Fin need to plan their budget stuff."

Drew raised an eyebrow, slowly turning their head from the screen as they finished what they were doing. "Uhh... yeah actually."

Clearing their throat, Drew set their laptop on the circular coffee table. "I am down for the wedding. I can't say no to the rate increase and I think it will be fun to do it together."

“Really?” Rose’s face lit up. Before Drew had come over, she had talked herself through what would happen if they said no. It would have been understandable. But god, she had gotten used to having Drew’s steady hand on shoots with her. “So you do like compromise.”

Drew nodded with a chuckle. “Yeah, but on that note.”

“Nooo.” Of course there was a catch.

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With a smile, Drew inched closer on the couch. “I would like to go out for the Tennis job alone. I’m just a little hesitant to wrap up all my work in,” they gestured to the space between them. “This.”

Taking in a deep breath, Rose shrugged. “Okay. I can live with that.”

Drew smiled and leaned in, planting a kiss on Rose’s soft lips. “Thanks for understanding.

It was fair. Rose knew it was a risk to tie work to someone you were seeing. As she opened her laptop, she tried to remind herself that it was a normal boundary. But her brain wouldn’t shut up. “Okay, can I ask something crazy?”

Drew laughed, looking up from their laptop again. “Of course you can.”

“It’s not because you hate me?” Wincing, the words left her mouth before she could stop them.

A smirk grew on Drew’s face, reaching a hand out to her knee. “I do not hate you. I think you’re very talented and a tough competitor. And I really, really, love... hanging out with you.”

Rose tilted her head. Was that hesitation a slip? She tried to go back to her work, not wanting to alert Drew. But just as Drew was back to typing, Rose interrupted them again. “Have you heard from Tommy yet?”

“No,” Drew laughed. “But she’ll reach out to whoever’s portfolio she likes best. And

if that's you or me, I'll be happy with that."

It was a little hard to believe. Drew was one of the most competitive people Rose had ever met. But, maybe they really would just be happy for Rose. Even if that was hard for her to understand.

"Now I have a question for you." Drew turned their attention to Rose.

With a giddy smile, Rose nodded. "Shoot."

"Are you going to let me work?"

She pretended to consider the request for a second but slowly shook her head. Getting closer to Drew, she wrapped her arms around their neck. Their hazel eyes looked up at her, something soft in them that Rose was getting used to seeing. "But, I will tell you all the details for the wedding."

Closing their eyes, Drew sighed and closed their laptop. Why fight it?

"So, the wedding is in about two months... really a little less. Around mid-September. So I think maybe a mix of Color and Black and White. The leaves will be changing around then. They'll be a separate videographer but they're just shooting the wedding and the reception." Rose was like a fountain that just got turned on for the first time in a decade, pouring out details.

Doing their best to keep track of everything, Drew made mental notes as much as they could. But as Rose talked, their smile grew. With every word, their lips curled further.

After a minute, Rose blushed. She must have said something strange. "What?"

Drew shook their head, “Nothing.”

Getting closer, Rose shook her head. “No, come on. What?”

They placed their hand under her chin, leveling her eyes with theirs. Feeling a pulse of electricity through her core, Rose waited to hear what they might say. Eventually, they shrugged. “You’re just really pretty.”

Rose covered her face, somehow embarrassed by the compliment. “I’m just giving you details”

Grabbing her hips, Drew pulled her onto their lap. “And you look adorable while you do it. Now, tell me more. Why are they so rushed?”

“This is a great question!” Rose sat up slightly and kept talking. Something about the way Drew watched her made Rose feel as if she was allowed to gab for as long as she wanted. That no matter how much work they had, they would close their computer to listen.

The more Rose thought about it, the more she realized she’d never had that in a partner. Not that she had been in many, if any, long term relationships. But still. They were just seeing each for a few weeks and Drew was better to her than anyone else she had been with.

After she explained why Ellen and Fin just couldn’t wait any longer to get married, Drew planted a kiss on her, tugging on the fabric of her sweatpants.

“Make me an audiobook explaining your friend group’s complex dynamics, and I’ll listen to it while I go to sleep.” Drew whispered into her ear.

The breathy words sent a shiver down her spine. “I think you should take me to bed.”

It was all Drew needed to hear, grabbing her legs and throwing her over their shoulder. Rose squealed as Drew lifted her, her center throbbing with anticipation.

“What the lady wants, the lady gets.” Drew winked as they brought her to the bedroom

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“Rose.” Ellen’s voice snapped Rose out of her daydream. “Rose, what do you think?”

Standing before her, Ellen twirled around in a flowing, white dress. It was a strapless piece with a low back. Rose raised her eyebrows as she looked the dress up and down. “It’s beautiful, but I don’t think it’s the dress.”

With a nod, Ellen groaned. “I thought the same thing.”

As she returned to the dressing room, an attendant brought her another dress. Through the curtains, Ellen called out to Rose. “Why are you so distracted today?”

“Just thinking.” She was glad Ellen couldn’t see her face because all she could do was blush. Her mind had been consumed with Drew. It was probably a good thing that they’d work on the Tennis shoot separately.

Ripping the curtain back, Ellen revealed another dress. “Uh-huh. Just thinking? Liar. You’re thinking about your sex fiend... situationship.”

Before she answered, Rose scanned the dress. This was closer. It was sleek, hugging her body perfectly with a simple lace overlay. The train was long but she wouldn’t need someone to carry it. And one thing Rose knew for sure: it would photograph beautifully.

“I’m sorry, they’re just... kind of everything I want.” Rose confessed. Her chest felt lighter as the words left her lungs.

Smiling at her friend, Ellen took a seat on the white, suede couch. “Can I be honest

with you?”

Rose bit the inside of her cheek. Ellen’s honesty was a mixed bag. On the one hand, it may be why Rose survived college. But on the other, she could be a real fucking buzz kill. But here she was, in a wedding dress to tell Rose the truth.

“Fine.”

With a deep breath, Ellen shrugged. “A month ago you said the same thing about Shannon. And before that, you said the same thing about Alexandra. And Kim. And Ash.”

Rose opened her mouth to fight her on it. But Ellen squeezed her leg. “I’m not saying you’re wrong this time. But maybe you should take it slower. Really get to know them, listen to their signals.”

“You are annoying.” Rose grabbed a chocolate covered strawberry from the snack table. “I’ll try but can I just say, once, I really have a good feeling about them.”

Smiling back at her, Ellen nodded and patted her leg. “And I hope you’re right. Because you deserve the best.”

Without hesitation, Ellen stood up. “Now before this wrinkles, what do you think?”

“Closer, but not quite.” Rose pointed back into the dressing room. While Ellen tried on the next dress, Rose had no choice but to pound back snacks as she thought. Ellen knew her better than anyone else and had seen her at her worst.

Of course she was right. Rose had a tendency to dive way too deep, way too fast. And as much as Drew was everything she’d hoped for, they weren’t perfect. They were rude when they first met. And she wasn’t even sure she’d processed the breakup with

Shan.

Her mind was racing as the room got quieter, only the sound of Ellen's shuffling and faint pop music playing over the speakers breaking Rose's thoughts.

Besides, Rose had noticed a red tent in the background of her pictures and she couldn't be sure that Drew hadn't noticed it and not mentioned it to her on the spot. It was just a hunch, but Rose did need to be better about noticing the little things.

She took in a deep breath as Ellen came out.

A gasp escaped her throat. "Oh, Ellen."

"Really?" Ellen blushed.

A tear came to Rose's eye. "That's it. It's perfect."

Looking at her friend, Rose still craved a love like theirs. And if she was lucky, she might be on the right track for the first time in her life.

As Rose sat in Drew's loft, looking at the picture of Ellen's dress on her phone, she tried not to get carried away with thoughts of her own wedding.

Luckily, just as she was about to, Drew walked back in from the bathroom.

"How's it going over there?" Drew asked as they got closer, looking at the black canister next to Rose.

Grabbing it, Rose gave it a twirl to mix the liquid with the film spooled inside. "Good!"

“How are your pics going?” Drew smiled, looking at Rose’s open laptop.

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Looking up from her laptop, Rose raised an eyebrow. “Actually, I was gonna ask you about that.”

Taking a seat on the stool, Drew nodded. “Sure.”

“So I was looking through some of the shots at the picnic bench at the top of the cliff...” Rose started. Recognition immediately washed over Drew’s face.

Rose took in a breath. “So you knew it was there?”

“The tent?” Drew asked.

Nodding, Rose rested her head on her chin. It was hard to imagine why Drew wouldn’t bother mentioning something so small. Maybe Ellen was right, maybe she was ignoring their orange flags.

Drew sighed. “Yeah I did. And I wanted to tell you but I didn’t want you to think I was trying to backseat drive you. I really thought it’d be easy to Photoshop if I was wrong.”

Well that’s annoying. Groaning, Rose pursed her lips. “So the tent isn’t in any of your shots?”

Simply shaking their head, Drew shrugged. “I know it was dumb, I just know how important it was for you to have the lead on this.”

Rose nodded. “Yeah but that doesn’t mean you have to cost me hours of work in

post.”

“You’re totally right.” Standing from their stool, Drew walked closer and met her eyes. “I’m really sorry. I thought it was dumb in the moment and I didn’t even think it through. I won’t do that again.”

“Okay, fine. But just to be clear, good collaborators and partners can talk... about anything.” Rose eyes Drew, watching their face carefully.

Smiling, Drew leaned in and kissed her cheek. “Partners?”

“Creative partners.” Rose winked, not wanting them to get the wrong idea.

They stood abruptly. “Want to help me in the dark room?” The smile plastered to their face was too charming for Rose to ignore. How could she? They looked incredible and she couldn’t have asked for a better apology.

Rose followed behind them, bringing the canister with her.

Inside the darkroom, the red light had already warmed up. Drew had set up the baths while Rose was working on her laptop. They grabbed the photo clamps and set Rose up at the enlarger.

Watching her work, no longer having to guide her, Drew leaned against the steel table next to the baths. As she worked, Rose couldn’t stop her eyes from wandering to Drew’s toned arms.

She licked her lips as she turned on the enlarger’s timer, having set focus already. In the seven seconds the white light was on, Rose turned to look at Drew. Their eyes were hungry for her.

“Does watching me print photos turn you on?” Rose shook her head.

With a shrug, Drew smirked. “Would that be a problem?”

Looking around the room, Rose settled on, “No.”

Drew raised a finger. “Actually, I’ve already printed most of Lauren’s pictures. But I do have another roll that needs to be printed.”

Her interest peaked as Drew headed to a drawer and pulled out a string of negatives, already cut perfectly into sleeves and placed them on the table as the enlarger clicked off.

Placing the finished photo into the development bath and letting the liquid wash over it. Rose used her spare hand to hold the sleeves up to the red light. Her mouth dropped open as she realized what they were.

“Drew Hudson, you’re sick and twisted.” She swallowed the excitement that rose in her throat. “You want me to develop my own nudes?”

When her eyes met Drew’s, Rose’s center pulsed. She had almost forgotten about the photos but it was a thrill to see them now. Just from the vague shapes in the negatives, Rose could tell just how well Drew had shot her.

Drew leaned closer and whispered. “I’d like you to choose which ones you like the best and develop them for me.”

A moan caught in Rose’s throat as Drew’s warm hand pressed against her back. It was maybe the hottest thing anyone had ever asked her to do. And as she looked through the images, she finally saw exactly how hot Drew thought she was.

She selected a few of each pose, the ones of her on her back the clear favorite. Just looking at them brought back the feeling of the rope burning against her skin as Drew touched her. Before she knew it, her slit was slick with excitement.

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Delicately pulling one of the negative strips out, Rose placed it in the enlarger and turned on the light, letting it project the image onto the table. Behind her, Drew moved the print from bath to bath. But they stopped when the print hit the fixer, instead, standing behind Rose.

Wearing a tanktop, Rose's shoulder was completely exposed. Drew let their lips touch her skin. Looking at the image while Drew's mouth explored her chilled skin, Rose whimpered. It was nearly impossible to focus with that kind of attention on her.

She turned the focus dial, a sharp image of her naked body projected down.

"Do you see how stunning you are?" Drew whispered into her ear, letting their tongue lick her lobe.

Rolling her head back onto Drew's chest, Rose groaned. "Not fair to ask me to make the prints for you and tease me while I do it."

Before they bothered to answer, Drew slipped their hands around Rose's front. Starting at her hips, they moved inward.

Rose tried to stay focused, adjusting the contrast ever-so-slightly. After all, they were near perfect images. And seeing them now, Rose could understand why Drew had woken up to take them. If she had seen them looking like this, she wouldn't have been able to keep her hands off of them long enough to have a photoshoot.

"Do you like what you see?" Drew asked as their hand pushed into her center, over her denim shorts.

With a nod, Rose shuddered. “They’re really nice.”

Drew smirked. “You get to decide how many of them I can keep and what I get to do with them.”

Rose’s mind was already working away at how she could tease Drew with them. She turned around in their arms, their faces just inches apart. “Excuse me.”

“Oh you have manners,” Drew teased, letting her through.

She walked to the photo paper drawer and pulled out a sheet. Placing it in the clamp, she set the timer without asking for Drew’s advice. As soon as she was back in the enlarger, Drew wrapped their arms around her.

The light illuminated one of the shots of Rose’s back, the sheet just barely covering her ass. Rose knew it was probably the most sensual picture of herself that had ever been taken. Her heart pounded knowing this is what Drew saw.

Drew unbuttoned the top button of Rose’s shorts, letting their hand slip between the denim and the lace of her panties.

“Fuck.” Rose moaned as she tried to stay focused. Once the photo finished, she turned in Drew’s arms again and placed the photo in the bath. As she moved it through each tray, Drew massaged her clit through her underwear.

Her grip tightened against the metal sink where the trays lay. She let the liquid wash over the image, with every second more of her body appeared. First, the part of her back illuminated by the sun, then the sheets grazing her ass. Eventually, her red hair draped down on the pillow. The more it developed, the louder Drew’s groans became.

“I can’t believe how gorgeous you are.” Drew’s chest heaved with excitement as

Rose moved the photo along. "Pick another."

Rose nodded and headed back to the negative sleeve, she already knew which one she wanted. She was on her hands and knees, tied up in Drew's ropes. The contrast was already perfect on the image when she checked the focus.

But when she set the timer and the image projected down, Drew grunted. "God I love seeing you like that."

Rose felt her clit throb at the memory. Her wrists ached, her center was dripping. All she wanted was to feel Drew and then they put themselves in front of her. Teasing her with their own wet pussy.

Looking at the image, Drew slipped their hand beneath the lacy panties, touching Rose's warm slit.

"You're already soaked." Drew could barely get the words out as their own excitement bubbled in their chest. Their fingers spread her lips easily, making way for their touch. Moving up and down her center, Drew's hand took its time massaging her.

The light clicked off, Rose turning to put the photo in the correct bin. Already moved to the fix bath, the other print of her was clear as day. She looked at it as Drew followed her.

"I want you to put this one on your wall." Rose turned her head toward Drew, their mouths just inches from each other.

With a nod, Drew let their tongue lightly lick her lips. Rose moaned, letting her mouth open to welcome their tongue. Turning her head forward, Rose set the new print in the developer. She leaned over the sink, pressing her ass against Drew's

center.

It wasn't hard to get Drew going, a simple wiggle of her ass against them was enough to make them groan with excitement. As Rose let the liquid wash over the image, Drew's hand found its way around her front and back inside her panties.

"Oh Drew." Rose winced as she felt them go straight for her clit. From how much Drew slipped around, Rose could tell just how soaked she was. She let her hips rock against them, the pressure making Drew moan.

Her forearms leaned against the metal sink as she watched the image of herself appear. Her body remembered the feeling intimately, just how good Drew's gaze felt. It had surprised her how much she liked being watched by them. Her entire mind had been polluted with thoughts of fucking Drew in all-too public places.

Once the photo started to appear, Drew peeked over her shoulder and eyed it. "God, you look incredible."

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Rose looked at herself. The image was so crisp she felt as if she was still there, still able to feel the ropes digging into her skin. “I want you to keep this in your nightstand and I want you to touch yourself every time you see it.”

“You’re so nasty.” Drew whimpered as they brought their hand lower, teasing her entrance.

Rose stood upright, letting her hand dig into Drew’s scalp. She tugged on their thick hair. Turning around in their arms, Rose pushed her ass against the metal behind her. Drew’s damp fingers grazed her hips, lightly gripping at them.

Before she could figure out where they could even go, Drew grabbed her thighs and lifted her into their arms. Wrapping her legs around their center, Drew carried her to the counter that leaned against a wall. They weren’t careful about setting her down, letting her drop onto the hard metal.

“Fuck,” Rose whimpered at the sting. She wished she hated how it felt. But it was pure ecstasy. As the pressure released on her legs, Rose let her hands fall from Drew’s neck down their arms.

Their biceps were bulging from lifting her, the veins in them rising to the surface. Somehow the fabric of her denim shorts was already in Drew’s hands, being pulled down her legs. Rose gasped as the skin of her ass met the metal. Using their body to spread her legs, Drew gripped her hips and pulled her closer. They brought their spare hand to her neck and pulled her in for a deep kiss.

Rose grunted into their mouth. She still hadn’t gotten used to how good it felt to be

kissed like it was their last night on Earth.

“Do you want me inside you?” Drew whispered into her mouth, between kisses.

With a nod, Rose answered, “Only if I can touch you too.”

Drew smirked, a devilish grin taking over their face. It made Rose melt. But as Drew plunged their hand toward her center, Rose brought her own hand down to Drew’s loose trousers. She unbuttoned them and let her hand slip inside and she pushed against Drew’s fingers.

The red light surrounding them left them in mostly darkness. But Rose could see Drew’s mouth fall open as her fingers met their clit, rubbing against the wet folds of their center. Their flexing forearms. The sweat dripping down their forehead.

With a light push, Drew’s fingers slipped inside her. “Oh.” Rose whimpered, her whole body relaxing under their touch. But she knew she needed more, that just two wasn’t enough. They had spoiled her with their thick strap, and now all she wanted was to feel Drew fill her completely.

Gripping their shoulder, Rose leaned in. “I need more of you.”

She hadn’t thought it was possible for their smile to grow wider but somehow it did at those simple words. Pulling out slightly, Drew added a third finger to their thrust.

Rose’s ass tensed as she accepted Drew inside her. “That’s it baby.”

Feeling Drew play in her excitement, Rose needed to feel Drew around her own fingers. She let her hand drift down, sliding in their pleasure as she neared their entrance.

Drew whimpered, their head falling onto Rose's shoulder. "Oh god, Rose. Please."

With a deep laugh, Rose did as they asked. She thrust her fingers into Drew, using her arm to pull Drew into her hand. But after a moment of feeling Drew's fingers inside themselves, Drew used their hand to pull their shirt over their head, exposing a cotton sports bra.

"Wow, you're hot." Rose moaned as she looked at Drew's chest. With their spare hand, Drew lifted the hem of Rose's shirt, lifting it over her head.

Drew's eyes rolled back at the sight of her chest. "Fuck you have gorgeous tits."

Rose giggled, grinding her hips along Drew's hand.

As they rocked together, the table shook, creating a loud bang with each thrust. Drew squeezed her ass with their free hand, letting their head lower to her chest and kiss the sensitive skin on her breasts.

Rose pushed their head down toward the tip of her breasts, where Drew's lips began to kiss her sensitive nipples. Feeling them harden in Drew's mouth. It sent a pulse of pleasure down her stomach and to her clit, where the palm of Drew's hand gently massaged as they pushed deeper inside her.

Peeking over Drew's shoulder, Rose spotted the developed picture of herself. It forced a moan from her throat. She had never been looked at like that, never been made to feel so desired and lusted after.

"Drew, I want you to come on my fingers." Rose whispered into their ear. Her breathing was getting hard to control, feeling her muscles tense as she neared her climax. Meeting Drew's dark eyes, the amber completely gone in the red light of the darkroom, Rose felt herself losing control.

“Wait for me.” Drew commanded.

Unable to answer, Rose nodded. She tried to refocus on Drew’s pussy, applying pressure on their G-spot as they rocked along her hand.

Bringing her lips to Drew’s neck, she plunged her fingers deeper. Her palm began to push on their clit, making a point to let it massage their clit.

“Oh yes.” Drew groaned, their mouth dropping open. They picked up their own pace, bringing Rose inches from orgasm.

As they did, Rose lightly bit Drew’s neck. “Sorry.” She moaned as she pulled her mouth away from their skin.

Drew laughed. “Baby, bite me as hard as you need. I like it.”

Meeting their gaze, Rose nodded and let her mouth go back to their neck. She kissed them, letting her lips drag on their skin. But as they pushed deeper inside her, Rose whimpered and bit down.

“Just like that.” Drew groaned, the pain turning them on.

Rose could feel Drew’s pleasure dripping down her fingers, forcing a moan out of her throat. She couldn’t hold back any more as her body tensed. As she did, she felt Drew’s channel tighten around her fingers, flexing as they neared their own orgasm.

Their moans had grown into screams, both of them unable to stop themselves from grinding faster and faster.

Drew gripped Rose’s ass as she bit harder into their neck.

“Fuck, Drew.” Rose whimpered as her body released onto Drew’s fingers.

“Oh god, Rose.” Drew followed, their body seizing under her touch.

Both of their muscles released with a loud groan, their breathing heavy as they slowly pulled their fingers out of each other. Rose moaned when Drew fully pulled out, the absence more noticeable.

Rose rested her forehead on Drew’s shoulder, trying to catch her breath.

Drew brought their finger to Rose's chin and lifted it to meet their gaze. "Are you okay?"

With a nod, Rose smiled and wet her lips. "More than good. You're fucking incredible."

Laughing, Drew kissed her cheek. "You're one to talk."

As Drew collected their clothes from the darkroom floor, Rose felt her whole body relax in their presence. She hadn't imagined they would be such a good fit. Even if Ellen was right that she should take a step back, Rose couldn't seem to keep herself away from them.

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DREW

Having Rose nestled into the crook of their shoulder had become the norm for Drew. And as they sat together at the cafe on Third Ave, Drew planted a kiss on Rose's head. The wedding was just about a month away now.

"You guys really have to stop being so disgustingly adorable in public. We're gonna get hate-crimed at this rate." Diana rolled her eyes as she sipped her mimosa.

It was still a little odd to have Rose at a brunch with Diana. Even though they were very close friends, Di was still Drew's ex from a million years ago.

"We're at a gay brunch, I think we're good." Rose laughed.

With a nod, Diana looked around. "Yeah... and you're being too gay for that, which is saying something."

They all erupted with laughter. Turning to Diana, Drew waved toward her. “Finish your story about the femme top.”

“See, you always want the gory details.” Diana wagged her finger at Drew in shame.

Before Drew can push her and distract from the story even further, Rose jumped in. “So, she takes you to the fancy place?”

That was all the reminder she needed to get back on track. “Yeah, we’re at this beautiful, uptown place. I’m so underdressed it’s not even funny. I think I was wearing a strappy tank top and light-wash jeans. I’m feeling like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*.”

Diana’s eyes were jumping from Drew to Rose as she told the story. Rolling their eyes, Drew interrupted. “To be fair, you’re like one step away from being a prostitute at this point. No shame.”

Used to Drew’s antics, Rose kept her eyes on Diana as she continued, “We sit down, the waiter is like at her beck and call. We get to the end of dinner, like a five course meal. And she asks me, “So what rate would you be comfortable with?””

Rose covered her mouth to stop herself from outright laughing, a luxury Drew did not afford Diana as a cackle erupted from their chest. Shaking her head, Diana quieted the audience of two. “And I am completely lost. I asked, “Like for my job?” And she goes, “If that’s what you call it.””

It's the kind of story only Diana could tell, never just going on a date with some normal girl. But they’re both too interested to stop the story. “So I get insulted and I’m like who the fuck are you to judge my career, that’s fucked up. And she stops me and says, “No, your rate for this date?” And I realize she thinks she’s hiring me to be there.

“She wants a sugar baby.” Rose giggled, sitting up from Drew’s arms.

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Pointing at Rose, Diana nodded. “Literally yes. So she ends up saying that’s what she wants, and I’m like “lady, I’m a little old to be a sugar baby. I’m a thirty year old woman.”

Rose can’t believe it. “You said no?”

“Of course she did!” It wasn’t a shock to Drew. They had known Diana long enough to know she loved her “independence” too much to let someone else be accountable for her income. Which always made Drew laugh considering she was essentially just a cog in the wheel of a massive corporation.

“I have my own damn money.” Crossing her arms, Diana sat back in her chair.

Drew rolled their eyes. “But she would’ve paid you to eat a fancy dinner and talk with her.”

Finishing off her mimosa, Diana shrugged. “I didn’t know what else she would have wanted.” The insinuation made Drew laugh, like if she had asked for sex that Diana wouldn’t have been able to say no.

But Drew countered. “If she hadn’t asked, would you have slept with her?”

“Hell yeah, she was hot as hell.” Diana gestured obviously. “Do you guys want anything else from the bar?”

Both of them shook their heads and she left them to talk. Rose’s gaze wandered off as she thought. “I have no idea what I’d say if someone asked me that. Do you?”

“Yep.” Drew was matter of fact about it.

Wrinkling her eyebrows, Rose whipped her head around to look at them.

“I paid my way through college as a sugar baby. My parents wouldn’t pay so I had to find a way to come up with the tuition myself.” Drew nodded as Rose’s confusion grew.

Rose turned closer. “Really?”

Drew eyes her. “Why is that surprising?”

Sucking in a deep breath, Rose tried to figure it out for herself. She wasn’t quite sure why. “I guess you just seem buttoned up.”

Understandable. Even they could admit that they were prudish on the outside. But after all the shit they’d done together, Drew was a little surprised that Rose was surprised. “It’s really good money, and honestly really empowering. Like it was the only job I felt like my time was really valued.”

Tilting her head, Rose questioned, “But we set our own rates?”

Heeming, Drew shrugged. “That’s true but most clients don’t think we’re worth even that much. Sugar Mommy’s know you’re worth that much, if not more. They spoil you, pay for cabs, lunches by yourself, drinks, phones, books. I mean they know how much you offer them. Even outside of sex, they value just your company.”

It was an angle Rose hadn’t considered. Of course she never judged anyone for their line of work. But learning more about Drew kept her on her toes. “You’re full of surprises.”

Drew shrugged it off. “No, we’re just still getting to know each other.”

Hell, they still hadn’t talked about what exactly their relationship even was at this point. And every day that passed, Drew was getting more and more confused by it.

“But if you want to know something, just ask.” Drew opened the floodgates.

Considering it for a second, Rose cut deep. “Where are your parents?”

Duh. Drew laughed to themselves, it was a bold and obvious question. A part of them knew they couldn’t run away from it forever. Not when Rose could see the negatives in their apartment.

“My mom was not very happy that I came out. She was raised Catholic and even though she grew up here, she couldn’t get over it. But my dad was fine with it, so he was the reason we kept in touch.” Drew cleared their throat. “He got into a car accident my freshman year and passed away. After that, my mom kind of just stopped trying.”

It had been a really long time since they’d been honest about their parents. Sometimes on first dates or hookups, Drew would just say they lived in the Midwest. That they weren’t around because of the distance. But Rose’s sweet, gentle face felt safe.

There wasn’t pity on her face when she spoke, “I’m really sorry, Drew.”

They shrugged, “It is what it is.”

“And it sucks that that’s how it is.” Reaching her hand out, Rose rested it on Drew’s knee.

Their gaze drifted off, feeling a tear in their eyes.

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“You can have my parents. They’re super clingy and annoying. Obnoxiously normal.” Rose wiggled her eyebrows at them, getting a laugh.

Watching her eyes, Drew felt themselves calm down. “Maybe I’ll take you up on that.”

Diana sat back down at the table with some new snacks. Just as she did, Drew’s phone began vibrating from their pocket.

They had no idea who would bother calling them on a Sunday morning. But as they pulled the device from their pocket, they immediately recognized the number. Looking at Rose and Diana, Drew gestured to their phone. “I have to take this.”

The words had barely left their mouth before they were swiping to answer the call. Before being out of earshot, they smiled. “Hey, Tommy. Good to hear from you.”

Through the phone, Tommy sounded as if she was smiling. “Hey Drew. Thanks for picking up on a Sunday.”

“Of course, what can I do for you?” Drew rubbed the back of their head, taking a peek at the table a few feet away. It was hard to tell from here, but Rose looked both interested and annoyed.

“Look, I’ll make this quick since it’s a weekend. We’re torn between a couple candidates and we’d like to clarify some details with you to ensure you’re a good fit. We’d need the shoot in the next three weeks. We want a few locations, one at the John McEnroe Tennis Academy where she learned to play and the other at Arthur Ashe in Queens.” Tommy was moving fast, listing off details.

Drew nodded. “That won’t be a problem for me.”

Tommy exhaled. “Great. And this job requires... some discretion. She’s a huge star and we don’t want a photographer with a big mouth. She had a lot going on that the public really doesn’t need to know about.”

Drew tried not to cheer, instead lightly pumping their fist. “Discretion is not a problem. If you’d like to send over the dates, I’ll set them aside in my calendar for whenever you make your final decision.”

Tommy laughed. “Will do, thanks, Drew. Talk soon.”

The line disconnected and Drew was slightly baffled. Despite their many years in the field, they hadn’t had the chance to shoot many celebrities. This could really change things. And if Tommy wanted more details, it meant Drew was in the final running.

But as they turned around to head back to the table, their face fell slightly. Of course they were thrilled by the prospect. But as far as they knew, Rose hadn’t gotten a similar call.

God I don’t want this to get in our way. Drew bit the inside of their cheek. Knowing they couldn’t avoid the table forever, Drew walked back and sat down with a tense smile.

Unable to read the room, Diana nodded. “Anything interesting?”

“Just a follow-up, nothing crazy.” Drew looked at Rose, trying to gauge where she was at. But she just wiggled her eyebrows and went back to her food. “Oh Rose, how are the edits on the maternity shoot going?”

Rose nodded. “Good, almost done. I think we should be able to get Lauren the

collection by mid-week.”

Rolling her eyes, Diana groaned. “Am I the only one who thinks maternity shoots are weird?”

Drew laughed. “They aren’t my favorite but hers was kind of cool. Rose did a great job planning it out. I think it has a cool vision.”

Looking up from her plate, Rose shrugged. “Well, thanks. I tried.”

It was weird to imagine not working with Rose as much. But Drew reminded themselves that they still had the wedding. And after that, it would be up to them how often they wanted to pitch joint projects.

Drew tried to push down the fear that they would grow apart if they didn’t have a reason to be together. There was no way of knowing and right now, they couldn’t be happier with where they were.

28

ROSE

She hadn’t been able to take her mind off the call for the rest of the brunch. Obviously she was happy to see Drew getting more work. But it would be a lie to pretend like she wasn’t a little jealous.

Turning her attention back to Drew as they walked back to her place, Rose tried to push it aside. It didn’t matter. Accepting a phone call at brunch may be rude in another circumstance but Rose knew how important it was to them.

“So, I think I’ll have about twenty-three prints for the collection. Do you think that’s

enough?” Drew asked, looking at Rose.

But they clocked her annoyance. With a deep breath, Drew grabbed her hand. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Rose shrugged as she looked down the block. The curb boxes were exploding with wild flowers planted by locals who hoped to bring some light back to the city after the gentrifiers made the whole place so bland.

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She couldn't tell if it was the heat making her sweat or her own nerves. "I guess I thought it was a little rude to answer the call at the table." As soon as she said it, she knew it was silly.

Drew nodded. "You know I wouldn't have taken it if it wasn't Tommy. I just really want this job."

"I know." Rose couldn't look at them. It was obvious she was letting her jealousy guide her actions.

"Did you not get a follow-up call?" Drew asked.

Hearing the hesitation in their voice, Rose knew that the field had narrowed and at this point she was likely out of the running. She shook her head.

Drew nodded and squeezed her hand. "I'm sorry, hon. You know you're so talented right? And that there will be hundreds of other chances?"

"Totally." Rose steeled herself, looking up. But something still wasn't right. She opened her mouth to speak and then closed it.

Catching it, Drew met her green eyes. "Go ahead, say it."

Rose groaned and bit her lip. "This sounds crazy. But can you just tell me before you accept the job? Like I just want to know before you take it."

Their forehead wrinkled. Clearly, they didn't understand what that would help. But

with a shrug, Drew answered, “Sure.”

The rest of their walk was a desperate attempt to recover from the awkwardness. After a couple blocks, Rose gasped as she remembered the topics from brunch. “So, a sugar baby?”

“You’re still thinking about it?” Drew shook their head, trying to hide their blush.

Rose shrugged, “I mean mostly just surprised since you’re such a *domme*.”

Raising a finger, Drew looked at her. “You know, being a sugar baby does not mean being a sub. They loved that I was more of a dominant partner.”

As they were arriving back at Rose’s place, Rose fumbled with her keys. “When did you stop doing it?”

“Probably after my first gallery showing. I was keeping plenty of work at that point and having to plan around someone else made that a lot harder.”

They headed upstairs and opened their computers. Between finalizing the picks for Lauren and planning the wedding shoot, they still had plenty of work to get done. But the gap in Rose’s calendar after July was becoming more evident by the day.

Rose tapped her finger against the small, leaf table. “So we’ll send those to her by Friday. And then move into full wedding planning the next Monday?”

Scanning their calendar app, Drew nodded. “Works for me. Just so you know, if I get the tennis job, I’ll need mid-August to be clear from planning much for the wedding. So we might have to frontload some of the work to clear that.”

“Good note.” Rose wrote it down in her notepad. Her apartment was full of odd

smatterings of post-its. She claimed it helped her remember things but that would assume she could keep track of every note she left herself.

Rose pulled up her email and started to look through the maternity pictures. Having weeded the images down to a top one hundred, they were struggling to find places to cut.

“I really like these thirty, I think they’re the strongest. Anything else we add in is just gravy at that point.” Drew pointed to the dozens of photos on the page.

Their notes were far more positive than they had been when they were first working together. But Rose was struggling to accept every compliment. Somehow, it all started to feel like pity.

She cleared her throat and snapped her fingers together. “Actually, I forgot something in my bag.”

29

DREW

She had jolted up so fast, Drew hardly knew she had left the room by the time they were sitting in Rose’s living room alone.

What the fuck is she grabbing? Drew watched the bedroom door for a second before their eyes wandered around the apartment. It was cleaner than usual, the more Drew came over, the less the clutter piled up.

Eventually, their gaze landed on the table where their laptops sat next to each other. On the wood, Rose’s phone was open to her calendar app.

Looking away, Drew's foot started to tap. Why did she leave the room like that? Every paranoid thought Drew had managed to push away began to rush into their mind. Unable to stop themselves, Drew leaned over and noticed a calendar event on Tuesday night.

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Drinks w/ Shan – 9 pm.

Drew's face scrunched up. Why would she be getting drinks with Shan? It made no sense. They'd been broken up for the last month at least.

The spiral took over faster than Drew could understand, their heart racing with every second.

How long had she been seeing Shannon again?

Did they even have a right to be upset? They were just casual. Neither of them had reapproached the “what are we” talk. Even though it felt like a whole lot more than a situationship to Drew. But maybe they had read it all wrong.

Before they could figure out how to handle it, Rose zipped back into the room with an SD card in hand. She sat down and put her phone in her pocket as she plugged in the card. Looking up at Drew, she flashed a smile at them.

Drew froze, no idea how to respond. They pushed it down. No matter what, they had to deliver this project. The rest would have to wait.

But one thing was clear, Drew was clearer wrong about what they owed each other. After a few minutes looking through the new card, Drew cleared their throat. “Do you want to grab drinks or something on Tuesday?”

Rose paused and looked at them. Her eyes flitted around the room as she tried to remember her schedule. After a moment of avoiding Drew's eyes, Rose shook her

head. “I don’t think I can. I’m pretty sure I have something then, but I can’t remember what.”

Lie.

It was everything they had feared. Why else would Rose not be honest? If it was just to catch up or be friends, there was no reason to hide it.

“No worries,” Drew swallowed the lump in their throat as they looked back at their computer. They could hardly fathom how they could move forward, their chest tightening with every thought.

Standing up, Rose pat Drew on the shoulder. “Do you want some water?”

“Sure.” Drew nodded before clenching their jaw and checking their email. Just as Rose was walking away, a new message arrived at the top of their inbox. It was from Tommy, the name making Drew’s stomach drop into their ass.

They opened it and read it:

Drew,

We’re pleased to offer you the U.S. Open promo shoot for Mackenzie Bennett. Please find below a contract for your approval as well as details about Bennett’s schedule for August. Our team is thrilled to have you on board.

Tommy

Fuck. it should have been the best news Drew had gotten in years. But here they were, basically sweating at the thought of accepting it.

But as Rose stood at her sink, humming, Drew shook their head. This was their job to take and if Rose didn't feel like they were serious enough to warrant mentioning drinks with an ex, then why would Drew miss out on a professional opportunity.

They hit reply and typed out a quick message. Clenching their jaw, they clicked send. The familiar whoosh sounded as the email went out to Tommy.

Tommy,

I'm more than pleased to accept. I'll have the contract returned to you shortly.

Drew.

Rubbing sleep from their eyes, Drew gripped their coffee mug with an iron fist as they scrolled through their emails. They had barely slept, riddled with anxiety over the U.S. Open shoot and Rose's date with Shannon.

Of course they knew they shouldn't have sent the message without saying something. But they couldn't help but stand by it. Rose had kept plenty from them, obviously.

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But as they sat at their desk, tapping their finger, a text appeared on their home screen from Rose:

Got time to talk?

It was probably the vaguest message they had ever received and yet it tightened their chest like a boa constrictor squeezing its prey. They stared at the message for a long time, more time than it ever took them to answer a text.

After five minutes, Rose's face appeared on their screen. Crap. She must know now, she must have gotten the courtesy call by now.

Rubbing their forehead, Drew couldn't understand why they hadn't just told her herself.

Now you hid something, idiot. They stared at the familiar green eyes on their screen. The call went to voicemail. And when Drew stayed frozen for another few minutes, a new text appeared on the home screen:

Not fucking cool Drew. Call me back.

Standing from their chair, Drew's chest was on fire. They paced from one end of the room to another, pivoting on the ball of their foot hard on each turn.

The sound of the intercom ringing startled them from their haze. Fuck. Is that her?

Drew stared into space for a minute. Their phone buzzed again with another call from

Rose. Then another intercom ring. They walk closer to the console, staring at the Enter button. Biting their lip, they hold the button down.

They have to face her at some point. As they waited by their door, the sun still shining into their loft despite it not matching the vibe of the day at all, Drew could hear Rose's feet stomp up the staircase.

A few loud bangs signaled Rose's arrival. Putting their hand on the doorknob, Drew closed their eyes and turned it.

30

ROSE

Standing at the top of Drew's stairs, Rose caught her breath. This time it wasn't from the insane amount of flights but instead the rage boiling in her chest. "Drew, open up. We have to talk about this."

Just as the last word left her lips, the door opened. Drew was disheveled, exhausted. How long had they been awake?

Rose pushed past them, walking into the familiar apartment. When she reached the work table, she turned around and crossed her arms. "Really?"

Stone cold, Drew stared back at her as the door slammed behind them.

"I asked you for one thing. One thing to make me feel better about losing out on another job. And you couldn't put your ego aside to do that?" Rose shook her head. Of course she should've known better. It was everything Ellen had warned her about.

Flexing their temple, Drew shrugged. "No plans tomorrow, huh?"

Rose squinted. “Excuse me?”

“Drinks with Shan?” Drew walked closer. Finally it clicked for Rose. They were fucking jealous.

“That’s what this is about? You fucking snooped in my phone and saw a calendar event?” Rose shook her head. Unbelievable.

Drew raised a finger to defend themselves. “I didn’t snoop, you left it on the table and I saw it by accident. But it doesn’t change anything.”

Putting her head in her hands, Rose laughed. “Please tell me that you didn’t ignore my onerequest because I was going to see Shannon?”

Drew shrugged. “I don’t know Rose. It seems like you want this to be casual. Because if you didn’t, you would think that I deserved to know you were meeting up with your ex.”

“First of all, we were just going to catch up. I have the complete ick for her and you should know that. But second of all, we never said we were exclusive, Drew. We said we didn’t owe each other anything!” Rose’s voice grew louder, bouncing off the brick of Drew’s apartment.

With a laugh, Drew nodded. “Exactly. We don’t owe each other anything. So why would I ask for permission to take a job I earned from someone who doesn’t want to commit to me?”

As she stood in the sunlight, the rays warming her neck, Rose felt her heart break. A part of her brain couldn’t understand how they had ended up here. Just yesterday they sat cuddled up at brunch with Diana. And now... now Rose knew she had to walk away.

“I don’t know that you’ve ever respected my work. And now you fucked it all up because you wouldn’t just ask me what was going on.” Rose shook her head, not even really talking to Drew at this point.

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Even from across the loft, Rose could see Drew's chest heaving. Their eyes were glassy... maybe it was just exhaustion.

When she realized Drew wouldn't say anything else, Rose took a deep breath and crossed the apartment. As she approached Drew, they lifted their head. "I know I shouldn't have..."

"Let me know what maternity pictures you like and we'll send them." Rose couldn't let them finish their sentence. Just the smell of their skin wafting into Rose's nose was too much for her to resist.

I have to get the fuck out of here.

She stormed back to the door, gritting her teeth with every step.

"I'm sorry." Drew turned to look at her.

With a nod, Rose shrugged. "Thanks."

Grabbing the door knob, Rose hesitated. Maybe they were already crossing the loft, planning on swooping her into their arms and making it all better. But even if they were, it wouldn't have worked. Rose needed time to figure out what she wanted for herself.

When she turned to look at them, Drew just shook their head, stammering for words.

She grabbed the door handle and left.

Maybe it would be the last time she ever ran down these stairs. A part of her knew it could be.

The staircase was stuffy but the street wasn't any better. Rose's breath hitched in her chest as the ninety degree day hit her lungs. Trying to breathe through it, she stood on the small step outside Drew's building for a moment.

Her mind was still catching up to her body. Getting the email on the train. She felt like she could hear them in Tommy's voice. We've decided to go with another candidate, as you know Drew is talented and we're excited to see what their unique vision can do for our client.

Every siren, dog bark, and car honk felt too loud to Rose's ears. If it was really over, she knew Drew had ruined this neighborhood for her. Forever.

31

DREW

Standing in their now empty loft, Drew couldn't figure out what they were supposed to do now. So they did the only thing they knew how to.

Pulling their phone from their pocket, Drew called Diana. "Are you busy?"

In the two hours it took her to get into Manhattan, Drew stared out the window for most of it. Spending the rest of her time pacing.

When Diana was off the train, Drew left their apartment and met her at Phoenix on 13th Street. It was one of their favorite queer bars in college, more lowkey than Henrietta's or Stonewall but just as dancy.

Rubbing their forehead, Drew waited for Diana at a standing table outside.

“Hey.” Diana opened her arms to hug them. “What happened? You guys seemed great yesterday?”

After they hugged, Drew shook their head. “Do you wanna get completely fucked up? Like I’m talking college freshman levels?”

Diana almost laughed in their face. Her hangovers were no joke at this age, nearing thirty. “If that’s how you wanna play it.”

Clearly, Diana thought Drew was avoiding their feelings and of course... they were. But they couldn’t even say enough words to explain what was going on. They knew they’d have to deal with it eventually but right now, their heart ached and they couldn’t speak. All that was left was to try and forget about it long enough that they could process it.

“It’s always fucking Shannon.” Drew shook their head as they groaned.

Throwing her arm around their shoulder, Diana led Drew inside.

The inside of Phoenix was always dark, even at noon on a bright summer day. It was part of the appeal, feeling like a gay medieval dungeon. It was barely 6 pm when Drew and Diana went inside so the place was essentially empty with the exception of the lanky bartender and an older gentleman at the end of the bar.

“Rough day?” The bartender laughed as they stumbled over to the counter.

All it took was a nod for the bartender to pull shot glasses from behind the bar.

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The music had gotten louder since it had gotten dark outside and at this point Drew was throwing their body around on the dance floor. Diana supervised, having stayed sober to keep track of her friend.

Sweat dripped down Drew's face as they danced to Britney. Still some of the only patrons inside, Drew had the entire floor to go crazy. Whoever was brave enough to approach them was greeted with a loud "woo" and the flirting of a shit-faced enby.

As they danced, they could hardly see straight which was perfect because that was how they wanted it. This way, they couldn't even think Rose's name. Which of course wasn't even true, all they could see was her beautiful face. As the room waved around them, every face started to look like hers.

Once Drew was visibly stumbling across the floor, Diana looped her arm in theirs. "Alright buddy, time to go." She left a hefty tip for the bartender and guided Drew out onto the street.

"Make a left, Drew." Diana turned their body to the correct direction.

"Yeah, I know." Drew slurred.

They only made it a block before Drew lifted a hand and ran to a curb box. As they bent over, their tousled hair fell into their face, dripping sweat. After a second of throwing up, Diana's warm hand rested at the center of their back.

Drew heaved for a moment.

With a sigh, Diana pressed her hand into their shoulder blade. “Get it out.”

It was always embarrassing to throw up on the street. Drew hadn’t done it since college, probably from one of Quinn’s deadly cocktails. But as they closed their eyes with each hurl, Drew’s eyelids played a slideshow of Rose’s face.

“What if I can’t ever get her out of my head?” Drew shook their head, letting it dangle. Their neck wasn’t able to hold it up any longer.

Standing up, Diana pulled her hand from their back. “I don’t know. Then I think you spend the rest of your life trying to get her back.”

Drew rubbed their forehead as they lifted their head. “I really fucked it.”

“Yeah.” Diana nodded. It wasn’t the first time she was by Drew’s side after a bad breakup. Of course, she had caused a few herself. And even now, it was clear just how badly Diana had fucked them up. Even six years later, Drew couldn’t trust anyone.

“I shouldn’t have sent that stupid email. I should’ve just told her.” Drew scrunched up their face as they processed. The alcohol was leaving their brain, now sitting in their stomach, leaving only regret in their mind.

Knowing it was time to stay quiet, Diana waited for Drew. After a second, they stood up and walked back to Diana and pointed at her with a rigid finger. “And the worst part is, her photos are way better than mine.”

“They are.” Diana laughed.

Part of that was Rose had learned portrait photography first, her mind knew it better than Drew’s did. She didn’t have a schtick. She had talent and an ability to listen.

Drew had known they could learn so much from her. But they had thrown it all away for what?

“Fucking Shannon.” Drew rolled their eyes with a groan and stumbled down the street. Diana walked behind them, diligently keeping an eye on their movements and guiding them home.

The summer weeks passed quickly, far more so than Drew was comfortable with.

“That’s perfect.” Drew hollered across the court of the Arthur Ashe Stadium as Mackenzie took another swing. The sound of the tennis balls hitting the turf was the soundtrack of the entire shoot.

With a bigger budget than Drew had ever had, they felt wildly prepared for the shoot. And without Rose to distract them, they had been able to fall back into their scheduling routine. Meeting with Mac a week before the shoot, Drew had gotten a feel for what she wanted, not just what her agent thought.

Sweating as she hit practice ball after practice ball, Mackenzie looked great. She looked strong and ready to head into her first U.S. Open. Even booking the stadium had cost Tommy’s agency thousands. Just a week out from the Open, Arthur Ashe was buzzing with players and press.

“Alright, let’s take five.” Drew waved her down. Jogging to her bag off to the side of the court, she drank some water and took some deep breaths.

Drew snapped a few as she did, happy to get some more shots of the player more casual. They had already finished the locker room shoot. It became clear to Drew in the preliminary meet up that Mac wanted to play with the big dogs.

She was ready to put them in their place and rise to the top. But to do so, she needed

to start showing a harder face and beating out the younger competition around her.

Changing a roll of film, Drew's mind began to wander. It was strange to be without Rose this long. Drew had felt as if the summer had been claimed by her. That years from now, when they looked back on it, they would know it was the summer they had fallen for her.

But she hadn't said a word in months. As Drew walked over to Mackenzie, she looked up at Drew suspiciously.

"You good?" She asked.

Tilting their head, Drew squinted. "I'm good, why?"

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With a shrug, Mackenzie laughed. “You’re definitely not.”

Drew rolled their eyes. “Why do you care?”

“Look, when you play out there, you start to read people. You have to. You need to take advantage of their bad days, of their overconfident days. Of their heartbroken days.” Her own voice trailed off as she watched Taylor Young walk onto the Court, a string of paparazzi following behind her.

Noticing her gaze caught on something behind them, Drew turned to look. It was her biggest competition heading into the Open and from what Drew had read, they had been friends since they were young.

Looking back at Mac, Drew could tell it wasn’t just that. There was lust in her eyes, maybe even love.

“What’s your point?” Drew tried to bring her back to the court.

Mac nodded. “My point is. I can tell you’re missing someone. And as much as I feel you, I need you here with me. So if we gotta talk about it, let’s do it.”

It was wildly unprofessional for Drew to agree. But who were they to deny advice from their favorite Tennis player?

“The truth is, I fell for this woman that I didn’t think I had anything in common with. And I screwed it up to take this job.” Drew confessed. Not wanting to make eye contact with her, Drew lifted their camera and grabbed a few shots of the court. It was

mostly for themselves. But they took a few of the racket on the turf.

Mackenzie had a custom color made for theirs, wanting it to stand out on the court. She had said it was an homage to Billie Jean King's blue shoes, a way to show herself as a proud, sapphic on the court. Plus, it helped with the intimidation.

With a nod, Mac scrunched up her face. "I... get that." Her eyes looked back to Taylor, who whipped her own head back to her coaches. "And the thing is, I'm not sure any job is worth losing someone like that."

"Me either." Drew clenched their jaw. "What do we do?"

Laughing, Mac shrugged. "I'd be lying if I said I had the answer. But I think we have to make it right, at any cost. The fuck is the point of winning if no one's in your court at the end of the day?"

It was all she needed to jump out of her seat and grab the racket from the ground. Drew knew it was time to get back to work, they only had the court for a few hours. And selfishly, they wanted as many pictures of this rising star as they could get.

Getting back to work, Drew put Mackenzie all over the court. They even took a few in the stands, to put next to a picture of her from childhood watching the 2008 Finals.

When they started wrapping up, Drew pulled their phone from their pocket and pulled up Rose's contact. Their finger hovered over the call button, biting their cheek as they thought.

But looking back at Mac, Drew watched as she slung her bag over her shoulder and chased after Taylor who was disappearing into the locker room. With a smirk, Drew pressed down and held the phone to their ear.

It rang. And rang. And rang.

32

ROSE

“Fuck.” Rose winced as she looked at Drew’s face on her lockscreen. Even after a few weeks of Drew-detox, Rose still couldn’t look away from their eyes. I really have to change that photo because they’re too beautiful.

It was a picture she had taken when they had a picnic in Prospect Park, the sun had beautifully lit their hazel eyes, a deep fire burning in them.

She groaned as she swiped her finger. They had to talk at some point because Rose needed to tell them eventually.

“Hey.” Her chest tightened at the words. In the brief second that Drew didn’t respond, Rose’s mind spiraled. What if it was just a butt dial?

But through the other end of the phone, Drew’s raspy voice came through. “Hey, it’s good to hear your voice. How are you?”

Rose didn’t know what to say. Was it a casual chat? Bitchier than she wanted to be, Rose quipped. “Fine, what do you need?”

“Nothing. I just wanted to see how you were doing.” Drew cleared their throat, commotion in the background of their call.

Before they could say anything else, Rose cut in, “Cool. Well I actually have some news for you. I was going to call you later today about it.”

Drew swallowed loudly, clearly nervous. “Okay, shoot.”

“So I spoke to Ellen and Finley about the wedding. They’ve looked at their budget and only have enough room to hire one of us.” Rose tapped her finger against her kitchen counter, covered in dishes again.

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She leaves room for Drew to respond but when they don't, Rose continues, "So they're keeping me on since they'd have to pay for my plate anyway."

Her chest hurt saying it, knowing how hard they would take it. But at this point, Rose couldn't imagine having to work together again. Couldn't imagine standing next to their intoxicating, citrus and bergamot smell and not caving. And maybe a part of her really wanted to, to let it all go and just be happy.

But everytime she thought about that, she knew she wouldn't know where to begin or how to fix it. Not now.

"Got it. I always prefer to know why I'm being fired." Just over the phone, Rose could tell they were pacing back and forth as they spoke.

"More like let go." Rose tried to soften the blow. It was complicated, working with friends and... whatever Drew had been to her. She should've known better from the start but there was no changing that now.

After a moment, Drew tried to cheer up. "Do you think we could talk?"

It was all she had wanted to hear from them. But something stopped her from reaching through the phone and begging to see them. Maybe it was Ellen's voice in her head, telling her that clearly Drew wasn't perfect, that they didn't have a right to behave the way they had.

But that wouldn't be entirely honest about her role in all of it. She knew Drew's baggage from Diana, knew that they would be sensitive to her seeing an ex without

mentioning it. She even knew that this particular ex would be an issue. But she hid it from them.

And the truth was, she wasn't ready to be honest about it.

"That's all I have to say." Rose muttered, barely able to let the words out of her mouth. "Bye, Drew."

She pulled the phone away from her ear and heard Drew's low voice, "Bye, Rose." Hanging up the call, Rose slammed her phone onto the counter and turned it upside down.

Fuck that hurts. She shook her head. But now she was free, she had no reason to ever see them again if she didn't want to. They had turned in Lauren's pictures two weeks ago and with the wedding off Drew's plate, they had completely detached.

But as Rose looked around, she couldn't help but feel like her yellow apartment had lost some life along the way.

"I better not have to move to get away from this shit." Rose shook her head as she plopped down onto her couch.

33

DREW

Tapping their finger along their desk, Drew couldn't stop thinking about Rose. The shoot with Mac had gone perfectly and Drew was already halfway through developing the pictures.

In an unorthodox Drew move, they had agreed to rush develop ten pictures for the

press. But the Tournament began next week and they still had a ways to go on the rest of the shots. Even so, they couldn't focus as they tried to select the next batch of negatives to work on.

Putting their head down, Drew looked through the magnifier at their shots. Mackenzie looked incredible, her muscles were well defined and she looked like she was ready to go to war. Drew was proud of the work, they hadn't handled a celebrity shoot before and by all accounts this was a complete success.

Just as they circled a few of their favorite images, their phone rang from the desk. Faster than they should have moved, Drew whipped their head around to see who it was.

Disappointed to not see Rose's name, Drew sighed but it was Tommy. Which was either good news or really bad.

Swiping on the screen, Drew clicked the speaker symbol. "Hey, Tommy. How are ya?"

"Good, Drew. So I have a question for you." Tommy sounded like she was leaning back in an office chair, throwing a tennis ball against the wall. It was a sound Drew had become accustomed to during their shoot with Mackenzie Bennett.

"Shoot." Drew answered as they picked a few more negatives.

Tommy cleared their throat, sitting up as her chair squeaked. "Another agent at the firm represents a very famous singer who is returning to stage after a year of hiatus. They're looking for someone to shoot the hometown, New York show. Can I put your name in?"

It felt like a no-brainer, but something in Drew hesitated. A part of them wondered

how much fun Rose would have there. Anyone who had a phone knew exactly who Tommy was talking about. LAWSON was the only pop star who had disappeared as of late in a theatrical fashion.

“Drew?” Tommy checked in.

Shaking themselves out of it, Drew sighed. “Yeah go ahead and put my name in. Just let me know the dates as soon as you can. I’m booked pretty far out.”

Tommy laughed. “No worries, thanks.”

The line disconnected and Drew was left biting the inside of their cheek. Anyone would have been thrilled. They had fought for the U.S. Open shoot and this was the benefit, a slew of celebrity clients ready to hire them.

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Before they get too lost in their thoughts, their intercom rang. They stood and buzzed in the expected guest. After a minute, a breathless Diana appeared on the landing outside Drew's door.

"I will pay you to move." Diana begged as she leaned against the doorframe.

"How much?" Drew smirked and let her in.

Making herself at home, Diana grabbed a glass from the cabinets in the kitchen and turned on the sink tap. After chugging the entire glass, Diana took a breath. "Are you ready, or what?"

Drew checked the time. "Shit, I thought you were early."

"When have I ever been early to anything?" Wrinkling her eyebrows, she couldn't help but wonder if Drew truly knew her at all.

"Fair enough." Drew turned off their computer and the light box next to it. The prints would have to wait until tomorrow. Right now, Ginger's was calling their name and they did not have the willpower to resist such a tempting bar.

They grabbed their flannel overshirt from the desk chair and walked to the door. Besides, they needed to get Rose off their mind.

Drew took a sip of their beer, setting it on the wood lip above the benches. Diana leaned over the pool table taking an impossible shot at a solid.

Their competitors, an older sapphic couple who wore matching leather vests, were not playing around. In fact, it may have only been Drew who didn't see the match as life or death. As they moved around the table, a crowd of Ginger's patrons gathered to watch the match.

Far less of a dancing kind of bar, Ginger's was a perfect place to chat and watch some pool. All night a group of women were eyeing Drew as they bent over and took shots. They weren't nearly as skilled as anyone else at the table but this crowd didn't seem to mind.

"Ah!" Diana groaned as she missed her pocket. Grabbing her drink off the bar, she looked over at the group ogling Drew. "Are you gonna do something about that?"

Drew shook their head. "I wasn't planning on it."

With a heavy sigh, Diana leaned closer. "Dude, you know what they say. Get over by getting under."

Rolling their eyes, Drew laughed. "It's not even about that. I know it's over. I'm just not in the mood."

"Mmhm." Diana downed the last few sips of her beer, sucking her teeth as she did. "God I fucking hate beer."

After one of the elder lesbians took their shot, Drew grabbed their cue stick and wandered around the table. There weren't any easy shots left, their skilled opponents had made sure of that. But Drew was a little tipsy and feeling a little daring.

There was one shot they might be able to pull off. Clearing their throat, they leaned over the felt table and lined up a shot with their cue stick. One arm resting on the table, their long fingers guided the stick in the right direction. Taking in a deep

breath, Drew squinted their eyes and took their shot.

A cascade of clacking was music to their ears as the cue ball hit the solid. It was a near miss going into the pocket.

“Well, they’ve got this locked up.” Diana groaned.

Sure enough, the older couple sank the 8 ball on their next hit. Handshakes were exchanged and the next pairing shuffled into the table. As Drew left the table, one of the women who had been watching tapped them on the shoulder.

“Good game.” She flitted her eyelids at Drew. Holding out her hand, she smiled at them. “I’m Nicole.”

Drew took her hand and returned the gesture. There was no denying that she was pretty, blonde with a sweet face. “Thanks. Drew.”

“I think I’ve seen you here before.” Nicole blushed, leaning a little closer to them.

Looking down at her, Drew laughed. “Well, there’s not many places to go, are there?”

Nicole giggled a little too eagerly.

Drew took a second to think about what they were doing. By all logic, they should have been thrilled to have a beautiful woman throw herself at them. But their chest burned with anxiety.

None of them will ever be her.

Flinching away, Drew stood up and cleared their throat. “I’m gonna run to the bar

and grab a drink, it was nice to meet you.”

Nicole strolled off back to her friends. As they leaned against the bar and waved to the bartender with their empty glass, Drew stared at their reflection in the glass behind the counter. For a second, they weren't sure it was even them. But it was, something about their face had faded.

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Diana's hands on their shoulder startled them out of it. "What even was that? She was basically already asking to go home with you."

"I didn't want to go home with her." Drew wiggled their eyebrows at Diana as the bartender set down their drink. Their last beer was really hitting now, the music pulsing in their ear as they tried to focus on Diana.

"Next time, can you at least try and get me laid? I need a wingman." Diana winked.

Laughing, Drew nodded and clinked their glasses together. "You got it."

As they took a sip, Drew looked around the bar. It was like a zoo, everyone staring each other down from across the bar and no one making a move. Of course, Drew was just like they were. But all they could think about was who wasn't here.

Every few seconds, they could have sworn they spotted Rose's red hair moving through the crowd. Even if they had, they didn't know what they could possibly say that would make her look at them the same ever again.

"I don't know, I just hate seeing you so hung up on it." Diana rubbed her forehead.

With a shrug, Drew looked down at their drink. "I hate it too, but I just need time. I hadn't felt like that about someone since... well, you."

Sipping the foam off her beer, Diana groaned. "Oh that's terrible."

"The beer or me?"

“Both.” Diana slammed their glass down on the counter.

Drew nudged her arm with their fist. But it was true, at some point they would let it go and the pain would fade.

Unless it doesn’t.

34

ROSE

“She was nice, it just wasn’t like fireworks.” Rose explained as she opened the passenger’s door of Ellen’s car.

Hopping out of the backseat, Fin shrugged. “Well that’s alright.

“No, it’s not. She’s still hung up on that asshat.” Ellen shook her head at her fiancée.

They walked across the gravel driveway of the Mohonk Mountain House. Rose scanned the entrance, already thinking of places they could shoot some of the pre-ceremony content.

“I’m not hung up. I’m just still hurt. And per your advice, I am trying to be more discerning before I decide I like someone.” Rose pulled her phone from her pocket and took some location shots.

Fin wrapped their arm around Ellen. “Just one more week and then we’ll be wives.”

Clapping, Ellen could barely sit still at the thought. “Can we go look at the ceremony spot?”

Everyone nodded as they walked the path through toward the back of the massive main building. It was basically a hotel with a beautiful first floor for weddings. Outside, the back overlooked a gorgeous lake with shimmering water. It wasn't far from where Rose and Drew had shot Lauren's maternity pictures.

Rose's throat tightened as she remembered the day. Her body still responded to the thought of Drew's touch. Ugh, Stop it. She shook the feeling as they appeared around the curve in the path, the lake below revealing itself to the group.

"Wow." Rose's mouth fell open. It was quite a majestic place to promise forever to someone.

"Right?" Ellen crossed her arms triumphantly.

"Well, you've made my job super easy. This spot does all the work for me." Rose already had the setups in her head. Ellen in her flowing dress sitting on the farmhouse fence, Fin leaning against her. The two of them walking down the aisle. The families coming together. It might just be the easiest wedding Rose would ever shoot.

But all she could think about was how beautiful it would all look on film. She knew Drew would see something she didn't, add something she missed.

They kept walking, pointing out where Ellen and Fin had planned on certain moments. The venue even included a wooded property where they could take pictures away from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the venue.

Walking along the pebbled path along the cliff, Fin cleared their throat. "Have you heard from them?"

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Rose's shoulders fell at the question. "Yeah. Every few days they'll send something. A meme. A song. Sometimes pics from other jobs we did."

Placing her hand on Rose's back, Ellen rested her head on her friend's shoulder. "You know, if you change your mind, it's all your call. We're just following your lead."

"I know, but I think it's still for the best." Rose shook her head, she was still convincing herself that was true. "Maybe I do need to learn to be alone."

Fin's attention was grabbed by a manager who wanted to show her something, leaving Ellen and Rose alone. They walked along in silence for a second before Ellen shattered it. "Look, when I said that... I didn't mean to give you a complex about it. I just worry about you and hate seeing you get hurt."

Rose smiled. Ellen was her oldest friend, they had been through everything together. "You don't need to worry about that. I know what you meant and I don't think you're wrong. I just think Drew is... complicated."

"And you know that I didn't dislike them right? I thought you were sweet together, I just want to make sure you're protecting yourself." Ellen was clearly nervous she had offended her friend.

With a laugh, Rose nudged her. "I know, hon. Thank you."

Looking around at the lake below, Rose could see the leaves starting to change. The light yellows would be a stunning backdrop to the ceremony. Shaking her head, Rose

giggled. “I can’t believe you’re marrying Finley fucking Sullivan in a week.”

Ellen shook her head. “I never thought I’d fall for her whole goofy act. But god I love her.” Her eyes wandered to her partner who was waving their arms frantically as they joked around with the Mountain House manager.

Rose smiled. She still wanted that. She still believed it was there for her.

35

DREW

Their AirPods blasted into their ears far louder than they should have been for a Wednesday morning. But the walk to C&B had felt particularly daunting that morning as Drew stumbled out of the house.

They had finally sent off the last of the U.S. Open shots to Tommy the week before just in time for the post-tournament socials. But they were beat, having done everything in their power to not stop moving since Rose walked out of their apartment.

Sitting still felt like torture. And the September morning sun was a welcome change from the red light of the darkroom. Even with their sunglasses on, Drew felt like the light was helping their mood.

To get through the last few hours of darkroom time on another engagement shoot, they needed a coffee. A few months ago those shoots annoyed them, not it was depressing, making them miss Rose more than they already did.

They turned the corner onto 7th Street. The coffee shop was busier than usual, the outdoor patio filled with patrons that Drew was happy to ignore.

Grabbing the metal door handle, Drew held the door for someone exiting. Pushing past, they made their way up to the counter where Jess stood taking orders. The renovations they had done mid-summer must have done something for business because Drew actually had to wait in line for once.

When they made it to the front, Jess smiled. “Hey dude, sorry for the wait.”

“No worries. How are ya?” Drew nodded.

“Busy as all hell.” Jess wiped a bead of sweat from their temple. “The usual?”

Drew smiled. “Can’t go wrong with a classic.”

Jess put the order into the POS and processed Drew’s payment. Just as Drew was about to say goodbye and head to the pickup counter, Jess raised a finger. “By the way, your friend is outside. Grabbed a table this morning and I thought you might want to say hi.”

Drew’s forehead wrinkled. But before they could ask which friend, Jess had to run back to the counter and take more orders.

Once their drink was finished, Drew’s heart was pounding. Usually the coffee raised their anxiety but this ominous warning seemed to be doing plenty of that.

“Order for Drew.” The barista lifted the paper cup to their hand.

With the drink in hand, Drew hesitantly walked outside. They scanned the outdoor patio. It wasn’t until they saw the burning red hair that their heart stopped. There she is.

At that point, they hadn’t seen her in at least a month. And they had hoped to see her

like this probably every day since. She hadn't looked up from her laptop yet and Drew took advantage of the time to refamiliarize themselves with her face. Her glowing green eyes shone, even under the covered outdoor seating.

She lifted her head slowly from her laptop, probably having an inkling that someone was watching her.

Her eyes met Drew's gaze. Their heart was racing as they smiled at her. Taking a gulp, Drew walked closer.

“Hi, stranger.”

It was obvious that Rose was trying to hold back a smile, her cheeks flushing slightly under their gaze. “Hi.”

Looking into her eyes, Drew could hardly find the words to say anything. “How has everything been?”

“Good, crazy. But good. Ellen and Fin’s wedding is this weekend, so just a lot of prep for that. A little nervous I’ll screw it up for them.” Rose tucked her hair behind her ear, nervous. It was obvious she hadn’t meant to reveal an insecurity on their first chat. Their eyes darted around each other’s faces.

They couldn’t have been sure, but they thought Rose may have checked them out too.

But that wasn’t the point. They smiled at her. “I’m sure it’ll be beautiful if you’re shooting it.”

Rose smiled. “I’m sorry you won’t be there.”

“Should’ve lowered my rate.” Drew quipped. It hurt them to see her feel guilty over something that was their fault.

With a giggle, Rose shrugged. “You are very expensive.”

Their eyes met again as they laughed. Drew watched her chest rise and fall faster, matching their own. All they wanted to do was to pull her in and kiss her like none of

it had happened. As if they were just back in Drew's loft, spooling film and picking photos.

But they weren't. Instead they stood two feet apart as Rose stood from her chair, swallowing her nerves. "I've gotta run, so much prep to do."

Drew nodded. "Of course. Maybe we could grab a coffee sometime and properly catch up?"

"It's never just coffee, is it Drew?" Rose lowered her voice, her eyes soft with want.

Stepping forward, Drew shook their head. "I know I screwed up. I'm really sorry, but I'd like to be your friend if that's possible. Because I think you're really cool and it'd be a shame to waste what we built."

Rose opened her mouth to answer but walked past them instead. Once she was a few feet past them, she sighed and turned back. "I really wish I could do that. But I don't think we can do that."

A part of Drew knew she was right. If they opened that door again, they weren't sure they could keep it platonic. Drew would always wonder what would have happened if they hadn't let their worst intentions get the best of them.

They watched her walk away. Maybe for the last time. But Drew wasn't sure they could let that happen. Once she was out of sight, they started walking home. Something about the walk home dragged, like the sun was stealing all of the energy.

By the time they made it upstairs to their apartment, they felt like they needed a nap. Heading back to the mounting press, Drew looked at the photo of an engaged couple laid out on the counter.

Drew flipped it over and applied wax paper to the back before sticking it into the press. While it sat inside, the wax slowly melting onto the mounting board, attaching the photo along with it, Drew took a deep breath and closed their eyes.

As air filled their lungs, they saw Rose's smiling face. With every inhale, they remembered what her hands felt like holding their neck. How her lips pressed against their skin. Her laugh. Her messy apartment. Her hugging her friends.

When Drew finally opened their eyes, ripping the now-mounted photo from the press, their eyes felt heavy and glossy. It took everything in them to keep the tear brewing in the corner from falling.

Shaking their head, Drew threw the mounted print down and headed over to the computer.

I have to see her again. Drew started flinging open drawers, searching for something. Every time they blinked, the image of Rose came to mind.

"Where is it?" Drew scratched their scalp as they grew more desperate. Finally, they pulled open the drawer next to their computer.

Bingo. Opening it, Drew's breath caught in their chest as Rose's face peered up at them.

A waterfall behind her, Rose had her camera just a few inches from her face. The sun behind her created a halo around her auburn hair, damp from the spray of the falls. Her eyes crinkled into crow's feet.

Drew had snapped it while Rose was trying to make Lauren laugh. She was too distracted to chastise Drew for the personal shot on a professional shoot. But Drew hadn't been able to look away. Even when they were developing it, they felt themselves

falling in love with her. And even a month later, they still couldn't convince themselves to take the photo out of this drawer.

Gripping the photo paper, Drew brought it closer to their eyes. A chuckle escaped their lips as they looked at her face. That's just how Rose was: just seeing her smile could make Drew feel like they'd won the lottery.

But she had walked away. And Drew hadn't chased her.

Not anymore. A lightbulb went off in Drew's head as they sprung into action. Hunting through the negative drawer, Drew flipped through the organized files of each event until they landed on "Ellen and Finley's Engagement". They pulled out the sheets of negatives and held them up toward the loft's windows.

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Who even needs a light box with windows so bright?

“Come on.” Drew tossed the negative sleeves onto the counter when they couldn’t find what they were looking for. “I know it’s in here.”

“Yes!” They cheered to themselves as they grabbed the negative from the sleeve. Holding it up to the light, they realized they were right. It was a shot of Ellen and Fin holding hands, turning to look at each other as the sun set before the camera. Even in black and white, Drew could feel the warmth of that late-spring day.

The first day she met Rose.

Moving to the next drawer, Drew pulled the other Ellen and Fin folder, inside they started to scan for the matching print. Their fingers flipped through the stack like a secretary on a tight deadline. Before they knew it, they had the photo in hand. Setting it down on the table, Drew examined it. Enlarged, it was exactly what Drew needed.

They picked it up and headed to their desktop, searching for the digital folder of Rose’s prints. From the thumbnails, they selected a few of the same shots. There were slight variations but they were all close.

But for this to work, it had to be perfect. Drew rested their chin on their hands as they leaned into the screen, needing a closer look.

“A-ha!” Drew cheered when they found the perfect match. They turned on their photo printer and sent the image to print. They stood and moved over to it, shaking their leg as they waited.

The longer they stood in front of the printer the more they questioned what exactly they were thinking. What would she do? See the picture and forget everything? But Drew was out of options. They couldn't spend another day not fighting for her.

The stutter of the printer finally quieted, releasing the picture into the tray. Drew snatched it and headed back to the work bench where their own print still sat. The two images next to each other seemed like almost exact copies, but the only way to know if their crazy idea would work, was to cut them in half and see. Pulling a pair of sharp scissors from the cup on the counter, Drew sliced each print in half.

“This will be embarrassing if it doesn't work.” Grabbing their print, Drew moved the film version of Finley to the center of the table. They scooted the digital version of Ellen next to them. As the photos met in the middle, Drew felt like they clicked in the last puzzle piece.

Lowering themselves down to the table, Drew scanned for any difference. But it was what they had suspected: a perfect match.

With the images laid out on the table, Drew opened their phone and checked their calendar. Ellen and Fin's wedding was still there, just three days away.

Drew basically ran to their desktop, opening Photoshop – much to their computer's surprise.

I have to work fast.

36

ROSE

Stop calling me. Rose groaned as she flipped her phone over, making Shannon's face

disappear. She must have found out that Rose was single again – a detail she had not disclosed when they caught up over a month ago.

But Rose was far too busy packing her bags for the wedding to worry about Shan. All of her gear piled up near the front door. In the morning, Rose would take a passenger van up to the venue at 5 am, arriving just in time for the Bridal party to get ready.

Ellen had offered to get Rose a hotel for the night before but Rose felt like that would somehow make her feel more alone, sitting in an empty room with a massive bed meant for wild hotel sex. Instead, she left *When Harry Met Sally* on in the background.

She mouthed the words as she snapped her lens into their case, making sure each was clean before tucking it away. As she did, she got a notification on her phone. She flipped it over, scrolling past the Shannon calls and voicemails.

Hinge. Another match. With a heavy sigh, Rose thought about clicking it. In just another month or so, her schedule would open up almost entirely as the wedding season came to an end. She'd have a whole lot of time on her hands. But she wasn't so sure she wanted to fill it.

Turning to her TV, Rose watched as Billy Crystal missed his shot at the small bedroom basketball hoop as he reminisced about Sally. Rose crossed her arms as she leaned against her counter.

Completely distracted by the film, Rose forgot about her packing as he ran through the streets of New York to find Sally.

It made her heart hurt. Grabbing the remote, she turned it off. Maybe for the first time ever, Rose couldn't stomach finishing it. She couldn't stand to watch Sally and Harry get their happy ending when her's was anything but.

Maybe it had all been a lie. Maybe all of these love stories were wrong.

But she shook her head. It couldn't be true. If it was, why were her two best friends getting married the next day?

Rose took in a deep breath, letting the silence of her apartment wash over her. Turning to look out her window, Rose could see lower Manhattan just barely.

Getting over Drew was going to take a hell of a lot of effort. But if they weren't meant to be, then so be it. She would find her match eventually, and they would fight like hell for her.

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DREW

“Diana, open up!” Drew banged on her door for a full minute. Between police style knocks, Drew tapped their foot. Their camera bag was slung over their shoulder and in the crook of their arm, was a craft-paper wrapped rectangle.

After a moment, they could hear footsteps under the door. “Diana, dude come on. It’s Drew.”

Throwing the door open, Diana sleepily eyed Drew. “What in god’s name could be this urgent on a Saturday morning? Why are you in a suit?”

Drew, dressed in black trousers, a black button-down, with a black tie and shoes, pushed past her and took a deep breath. “I need your truck.”

“What?” She was still playing catch up as Drew paced around her living room.

“The wedding. I have to go.” Drew smiled.

Diana went to her kitchen, not bothering to fight the morning on being awake, and brewed a coffee. “I thought Rose told you not to go?”

Drew waved off the concern. “She did but I have to give her something.”

“The day of her best friend’s wedding, where she’s the photographer?” Shaking her head, Diana prepared to talk Drew down off the proverbial ledge.

Drew shrugged, “Trust me.”

“Drew, I don’t...” Diana trailed off, unsure how to handle this.

Looking around Diana’s apartment, Drew clung to the wrapped gift in their arm. “Diana, it’s so obvious now.”

Diana walked closer, her heart rate escalating. “Drew. Stop.”

It was a tone Drew had never heard from her. Serious. They stopped dead in their tracks and looked at her. “What? I’m gonna fix things. She doesn’t want to be my friend because she still loves me. So it’s not too late.”

Shaking her head, Diana met Drew’s gaze. “So you’re gonna pull up to the wedding and profess your love?”

“That’s kind of the idea.”

Diana leaned against her marble counters. “Have you thought about whether that’s something she would even want?”

With a shrug, Drew nodded. “I mean, I think so. She’s a hopeless romantic and loves a grand gesture. I’m not planning on interrupting the ceremony or anything like that. But we ended things so suddenly because I was defensive about my work stuff.”

Waving Drew onward, Diana prompted them to continue. “What else?”

“What do you mean?”

“Shannon.” Diana crossed her arms.

Drew nodded. “It was a factor.”

Scoffing, Diana took a sip of her coffee. Drew shrugged. “What?” All it took was an eyebrow raise and a head shake for Drew to be honest.

“I know, the jealousy is a problem. I’m trying to deal with it.” Drew’s gaze lowered, the pain coming back to them as the excitement took the back seat. Their eyes wandered around the apartment. Talking about it made it feel impossible for Drew to look at Diana.

Taking a deep breath, Diana reached her hand out to Drew. Once she held Drew’s hand in her own, Diana swallowed the lump in her throat. “You’re never going to be happy until you do. Just because you were right about me, doesn’t mean you’re right about everyone. And to be with her, you have to let it go.”

“I know that.” Drew nodded, sniffing.

Diana sat up straight. “So why did you accept the job without telling her?”

Drew tilted their head. “You’re really going to make me say it?”

Pulling her keys from her pocket, Diana dangled them in front of Drew. “You want the keys, you have to verbalize your feelings. Go on.” She waved for Drew to continue.

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Fake retching, Drew clenched their jaw. “I wanted to hurt her before she could hurt me.”

“And?” Diana raised an eyebrow, scrutinizing Drew with every look.

“I’ll never do it again.”

Taking in a deep suck of air, Diana nodded and took another leisurely sip of coffee. When she set the mug down on the counter, she stood up and took off her bathrobe, a pair of pajama pants and a plain t-shirt underneath. “Alright, let’s go.”

Drew tilted their head, holding their hand out for the keys. “I have a license.”

Diana laughed. “Oh I know. But I’ll be damned if I miss this. I would pay money to watch you grovel.”

With a goofy grin, Drew headed for the door. But they paused at the doorway. “Do you maybe want to get changed?”

“Nope.” Diana shook her head as she threw on her sneakers and opened the door.

38

ROSE

Rose was already exhausted on her third coffee of the day. Having spent most of the morning taking pictures of Ellen’s Bridal Suite and Fin’s Grooms Suite, Rose had

even finished the first look shoot. It was one of the most beautiful moments Rose had ever witnessed but it also shattered her heart.

Fin cried seeing her soon-to-be wife. Ellen held back tears to not ruin her makeup. And Rose snapped as many pictures as she could with watery eyes.

It would have been beautiful to shoot it with Drew, to have someone to hold as her best friends promised forever to each other.

Now, she stood at the back of the ceremony space, dozens of white, folding chairs perfectly aligned into rows, waiting for her friends to walk down the aisle. She took a few shots of the crowd waiting, their family and friends all smiling. Just as they thought, the ceremony space was perfect. The cold air off the lake made the leaves change color a little faster than everywhere else, giving each tree a slight pop of color.

Before she knew it, the music picked up and everyone took their seats. They rose as Fin walked down the aisle, greeting everyone as she did. Rose took a few from a distance, but let the videographers take center stage.

After Fin got into position at the altar, the officiant standing next to them, the music began a sweeping cover of Make You Feel My Love. Rose felt her breathing hitch in her chest as the song began, the opening notes pulling at her heart strings.

And without much of a wait, Ellen appeared in her stunning gown. The train grazed the grass underfoot as she slowly made her way to Finley. Wow, she looks amazing. Rose smiled, winking at Ellen as she walked past.

Ellen clutched her chest and mouthed thank you to Rose.

Lifting her camera, Rose took more shots of them. Ellen's dress flowed elegantly

behind her as she made her way to Fin, who was already crying. Despite having seen Ellen in the first look, she still couldn't stop the tears.

Rose's own eyes watered as she watched them meet at the altar. There, Fin helped Ellen up the few steps. Everyone took their seats as the ceremony commenced.

Glancing around the wedding, the officiant began her speech. The entire time, Ellen and Fin stared deeply into each other's eyes.

When it came time to read their vows, Fin started. "Ellen, you took a chance on me as Juniors in college, letting me take you out for cheap ice cream. And as soon as you said yet then, I dreamed of the day we'd get to say yes forever."

She waxed poetic about their love story for a moment, explaining the hardships they had been through together – lost pets, terrible apartments, endless career changes.

Fin smiled. "But, Ellen, there is no one on this planet I would ever wish to do it all with. You make me laugh on my darkest days and I hope I can try everyday to bring out that beautiful smile of yours."

Wiping at the corner of her eye, Ellen tried to keep her composure. Her bridesmaid passed her a folded piece of paper that Ellen held tightly.

Rose took a few more shots. They hadn't asked her to take any pictures of the ceremony, wanting her to enjoy it without feeling like she had to work. But she was inspired. The light was stunning and she wanted to have these forever, even if it was just for herself. It was the reminder she needed that her love was out there.

Ellen looked at the crowd, her eyes catching on Rose at the back of the crowd. Smiling, Ellen looked down at her paper. "We've been talking a lot lately about how we got here, to this day. Not everyone knows this – well really only one person here

does.” Ellen winked at Rose, “But we have broken up three times. And every time, we found our way back. It wasn’t because we were perfect people or because we had solved every issue we ever had. It was because no matter what happened, I always wanted to fall asleep next to Fin. I always wanted to be better for her.”

Taking a staggered breath, Ellen released the tension in her shoulders. “And that’s what love is all about. Hoping that you can find each other in the darkness and be a light.”

As much as it was their ceremony, Rose knew Ellen was talking to her. Telling her that if she wanted to, the love she wanted was already waiting for her.

Before she knew it, the officiant was smiling. “I now pronounce you: married.”

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Fin grabbed Ellen's waist and pulled her in for a deep kiss. The two of them were smiling so much they could hardly hold their lips together. Lifting the camera to her eye, Rose captured it.

Hand in hand, they walked back down the aisle and into the venue. There, they would spend a few minutes together before doing their shoot. Rose caught up with them, taking pictures as they signed their marriage license – objectively the sexiest part of a wedding was the paperwork.

Afterward, Rose led the beaming couple to the woods behind the venue that they had toured the week before. The sun was beginning to set, creating golden light for them to bathe in. As they walked, Ellen looped her arm through Rose's.

“Can I say one thing and then I won't mention it again?” Ellen squinted at her friend.

Rose sighed. “This day is supposed to be about you.”

Ellen shrugged. “Sure, but I can't have my best friend upset on my wedding day. So, here goes. You are allowed to be upset, it's valid and fair to wish they had done something differently. But I would be remiss to see you end the best relationship you have ever been in because they made a mistake.”

Her shoulders dropping, Rose groaned. “But what if it's too much?”

“Then you know you gave it your all.” Ellen looked at her. “But I think if you leave it like this, a part of you will always wonder if it could've worked.”

They made it to the clearing, the sun streaming through the trees and creating long shadows on the forest floor.

With a smile, Ellen raised her hands in surrender. “That’s all I’ve got.”

Nudging her, Rose nodded. “Let’s get to work.”

As she guided them into poses, Rose tried to keep Drew out of her mind but Ellen’s words kept coming back to her. Maybe she was right. At the very least when Rose got back to the city, maybe they could grab that coffee. It’d be a damn shame to miss out on a good coffee.

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DREW

They hadn’t let goof the Oh-shit bar the entire ride, as Diana’s truck careened down the highway. Considering it was a weekend upstate, it was wonder how they hadn’t gotten pulled over with the way she was driving.

Luckily, she turned on her blinker to get off the highway. The off-ramp was a surprisingly tight turn that Diana did not bother breaking for.

“It would be good if we could get there in one piece.” Drew winced.

Rolling her eyes, Diana laughed. “At least I’m not bringing a moving truck to someone’s wedding.”

The pickup truck was probably the closest to U-hauling Drew could get. Their foot tapped against the rubber mats on the floor of the passenger side. “How much longer?” Drew but their lips.

Diana looked at the center console where the navigation estimated another ten minutes. “Not long. But you could’ve looked yourself.”

Drew’s mind was racing, moving faster than the car at this point. They still hadn’t worked out what they would say. Glancing back at the wrapped gift in the backseat, their chest tightened. What if it’s corny?

There wasn’t any time to change their mind at this point and they couldn’t turn up to a wedding empty handed.

As the car slowed, taking the turn onto the winding path leading up to the Mountain House, Diana’s mouth dropped open. “Damn. It’s a real shame you screwed this up. This shit would’ve looked awesome on your website.”

The place was basically a fortress, positioned on the top of a literal mountain. The red stone roof popped against the old, gray stones of the outer walls.

“Leave it to the lesbians to get married in a castle.” Drew chuckled as the car struggled up the driveway. Pressing on the breaks, Diana looked for a place to park as she rolled up to the front awning. A valet was already waving them to leave.

Before the car stopped, Drew grabbed the gift from the back, slung their camera bag over their shoulder, and opened the passenger door.

“Hey!” Diana yelled after them.

Drew whipped around, about to slam the door of the truck. “Yeah?”

Diana smiled. “Don’t forget to listen to her.”

A goofy grin spread across Drew’s face as they nodded. From behind themselves, Drew

heard Diana toss her car keys to the valet. “Keep her close, just in case.”

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Hunting for a sign of where to go, Drew scanned the yard for anything. Their eyes landed on a simple, beige and green sign that read: “#Fellen Wedding ?”

Bingo.Drew smirked as they picked up the pace, jogging through the backyard where the ceremony had been. It was empty now, just a collection of empty chairs. They could hear the sounds of the cocktail hour and followed it. Diana was a few feet behind them.

When they arrived, they couldn't see Rose as they searched the crowd. But they did see one familiar face. “Hey, Tommy!”

Her head whipped up from her drink, the blonde with a buzzcut and the brunette with a high and tight bun always turned to follow the commotion. Before them, a sweaty enby in a tailored suit desperately tried to catch their breath.

“Ari, Cass, this is the photographer I was telling you about.” Tommy gestured to them.

“Pleasure,” Drew gasped. “Tommy, look. I’m sorry to be so rude. Where’s Rose?”

Tommy stammered, shocked by the bluntness while also trying to remember where the couple and their photographer had gone.

Cass, the blonde, stepped forward and pointed back toward the altar. “That way, go into the woods and follow the path. They’re shooting.”

Letting out a sigh of relief, Drew smiled. “Thank you!” As they ran off in Rose’s

direction, they hollered over their shoulder, “It was nice to meet you both!” They knew they’d have to clear it up with Tommy later, but for now, they couldn’t care less. All they could think about was Rose.

Booking it now, Drew’s feet slapped against the gravel. Their black dress shoes certainly weren’t meant for running like this. Back at the altar, Drew scanned for the wooded path. Once they spotted it, they took off down it. The gravel quickly turned to dirt as Drew ran.

“Where are they?” Drew whispered to themselves, running a hand through their hair as they zipped through the woods. But after a minute, they started hearing voices. Twigs snapped under their foot as they got closer.

“What is that?” Ellen asked through the trees, concern in her voice.

Before anyone could answer, Drew burst through the treeline to the cliff that overlooked the Mountain House.

“Jesus!” Fin startled, putting herself in front of her wife and friend. Rose and Ellena also jumped with surprise.

Clutching her chest, Rose raised her voice. “Dude, what the fuck?”

Drew bent over, their hands on their knees as they tried to catch their breath. The gift leaned against their leg “Sorry... sorry. It’s just me.” Drew raised a hand in surrender.

“Drew, seriously. What are you doing here? We’re in the middle of shooting.” Shaking her head, Rose wrinkled her brow. Drew lifted their head and met her gaze, unable to hide their smile. Just as they thought, Rose looked beautiful. She was in a beautiful black dress that hugged her curves. Her face was just as gorgeous angry.

With a nod, Drew tried to recover their composure. “There’s another job.”

Rolling her eyes, Rose crossed her arms. “Can we talk about this later?”

Shaking their head, Drew swallowed the lump in their throat. “No. it’s very important. I need your help. I can’t do it without you. Not because they want both of us. But because you make my work better.”

“Well, thanks. I think we should go into details later.” Rose bit her cheek, her eyes flitting across Drew’s sweating face. Even from across the clearing, Drew could see her chest rising and falling.

Emboldened, Drew picked up the wrapped gift and brought it closer. “I also wanted to make sure you got this.” They passed the gift to Fin and Ellen, who accepted it with hesitance.

“Thanks, Drew... but couldn’t this have waited.”

Rose moved toward them, holding her hand out. “I’ll move it out of the way.” She threw a glance at Drew, confused why they would make such a mess of such an important shoot.

Raising their hand to stop them, Drew shook their head. “No, actually. Sorry. Could you open it now?”

The gift was in both Rose and Fin’s hand as they paused. Fin looked around the clearing, “Now? Like now, now?”

Meeting Fin’s gaze, Drew pleaded. “Please?” They were seconds away from getting on their hands and knees and begging. Instead, they stood up and buttoned their suit jacket.

Ellen looked to Rose for guidance. Lifting her camera back to her eye, Rose nodded. With a shrug and a heavy sigh, Ellen took the gift back into her hands.

More cracking twigs came from behind them, everyone's attention turning to see who the fuck else could be here. But when Diana burst through the treeline, catching her breath, everyone relaxed. She stood by the treeline and waited.

“Hi, Diana.” Ellen smiled politely as she started opening the gift.

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“Hey, beautiful day.” Diana nodded and kept her mouth shut.

Holding the gift as Fin tears the paper off, Ellen’s eyebrows wrinkle as she sees another frame. Fin’s eyebrows raised as she realized what she was looking at. Ellen’s mouth fell open.

Fin shook her head as she met Drew’s gaze. “Drew... this is beautiful.”

Covering her mouth, Ellen couldn’t tear her eyes away. “It’s everything we wanted these pictures to be.”

Confused, Rose walked closer, peering over their shoulders. Her eyes began to water as she saw it. The two images merged seamlessly in the middle, a light fade connecting them together. Two people, two tastes, finding a way together. The grain of Drew’s film and the crystal clear of Rose’s digital made a perfect connection. Ellen’s ring in Black and White and Fin’s ring in vivid color.

Stepping toward them, Drew clenched their jaw. They had stayed up all night to finish it. “I wanted to thank you both for letting me share this with you and Rose. It was a one of a kind assignment. I don’t think I’ll ever get to work with more incredible people again. I owe you two an apology. I let my ego stop me from delivering the best work I could.”

Fin was about to wave it off, but Ellen raised her hand to stop her.

Turning more to Rose, just a few feet away now, Drew tried to slow their breathing. “I thought I was the best I could be, and not just at what I do. But you pushed and

pushed. You encouraged me to let someone new in. I even learned Photoshop.”

Ellen and Fin moved to the side, making room for Drew to come closer to Rose.

Not meeting their eyes, Rose tucked her hair behind her ear. Drew ducked lower, intercepting her gaze. “I underestimated how hurt I was in the past and I let my paranoia get the best of me.”

From the edge of the woods, Diana cleared her throat. “Sorry about that one, that’s on me.” She took pictures from her spot in the corner.

Drew looked back at Rose, who was lifting her head ever so slightly. “And I disrespected you. Your work. Your integrity. And worst of all, your trust. But you didn’t deserve to feel untrusted. I should’ve worked harder to overcome that.”

They took another step closer. “I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you. I’m sorry I looked down on your work and didn’t trust your judgment.”

“It’s not that simple.” Rose’s voice cracked as she finally met Drew’s eyes. Her emerald eyes shone, glassy from the tears building in her eyes. Waiting for her to speak, Drew held their head high. They were ready for anything. But she couldn’t find the words.

With a nod, Drew tensed their temple. “I know. I know it’s not simple. I don’t want simple. I want you. For your messy dishes. For your frantic mornings. For your soft skin on a Sunday afternoon. For your attitude. Because this is the best I’ve ever felt.”

Drew held their hand out, hoping to feel Rose’s meet theirs.

“I can’t miss any more coffees with you. I’m standing here, asking you to let me do better. Let me tell you what’s hurt me and let me try to work through it. Because I

swear to you, I will never hurt you like that again.” Drew was shaking, their throat tight as they looked at Rose. The rest faded away, just the two of them standing at the edge of a cliff.

Turning to look at her friends, Rose shrugged. Her eyes met Ellen’s, wanting her sage advice.

Ellen smiled back at her. “They’re great photos.”

Looking back down to the ground, Rose let her hand meet Drew’s. A slight smile crept onto her face. “Did you really learn Photoshop?”

Drew’s concern turned to a wide, beaming smile. They nodded. “Over your shoulders. I could use a real lesson though.”

Finally meeting Drew’s hazel eyes, Rose shook her head. “Yeah god, those lines are really rough.”

Drew laughed. Rose put her arm around Drew, pulling them closer. “I’ve wait a long fucking time for this.” She pressed her lips to Drew’s, an electric shock shooting from her lips to her lungs. It was like her body had restarted, like she could finally breathe again.

After a moment, they pulled apart to claps from their friends and Diana taking pictures. Giggling, Drew rested their forehead against Rose’s, letting the warmth from their heads meet.

“Should we finish shooting this wedding?” Drew pulled away and tilted their head toward the bride and groom.

Rose laughed and wiped a tear from her eyes. “Probably.” Drew grabbed their camera

bag from the floor near Diana who stepped forward and took the frame from Ellen and Fin.

Setting the couple against the cliffside, Rose prepared to shoot. Finley shook their head and nudged Drew. “Way to upstage my wedding, bro.”

Shrugged, Drew quipped, “At least I waited until after the ceremony.”

The group broke into laughter, as they kept shooting. Drew couldn’t stop stealing glances at Rose as she smiled. She was something else, the most incredible woman Drew had ever met. And now they had to make sure they kept her.

After a while in the woods, the sun began to set as the golden hour light passed. They collected their things and headed back to the reception. Emerging from the woods, Ellen and Fin’s friends and family broke out into applause.

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Behind them, Drew and Rose took endless pictures from behind the happy couple. Rose moved around the front, capturing their smiles as they rejoined the wedding. Drew moved out of the way, making sure Rose had a clean shot.

Rose lowered her camera for a second and winked, mouthing a thank you to Drew.

Stepping to the side, Drew patted Diana on the back. "Thank you."

"I never thought I'd be thanked for traumatizing you, but I'll take it." Diana laughed as she settled into the party.

As Ellen and Fin disappeared to get changed for the reception, Drew and Rose took a break. All Drew wanted to do was kiss her, to spend every second from now on, absorbed in her. But they spotted Tommy from across the floor, Drew hung their head. "Shit, I owe some very nice people an apology."

Rose tilted her head. "What could that possibly mean?"

Drew held out their arm for Rose to grab, effortlessly slipping hers between Drew's. They guided her over to Tommy.

"Hey, I'm so sorry for that frantic moment." Drew turned to Ari and Cass. "It's a pleasure to meet you both."

Tommy shook their head, smiling as they looked from Drew to Rose.

Turning to Rose, Drew smiled. "Tommy, you remember Rose." They looked at Ari

and Cass, “This is Rose, she’s an incredibly talented photographer. And could probably make all your dreams come true.”

Rose shook her head, her face flushing as she extended her hand.

“So this is the second photographer you requested for the concert?” Ari nodded.

Confused, Drew nodded. “How did you...”

“I’m Ari, I represent LAWSON.” Ari winked at them.

Rose’s mouth dropped open as she whispered to Drew. “The gig is fucking LAWSON?”

With a shrug, Drew laughed. “Did I not mention that?”

Lightly punching Drew’s arm, Rose rolled her eyes. Before they knew it, they were launching into chats about the upcoming concert and how they could all work together.

Drew couldn’t stop themselves from staring at Rose. Watching her in her element made Drew happier than they ever could have imagined. It was starting to feel like this was just the beginning of everything they’d make together.

EPILOGUE

The bass felt like it had swallowed Rose’s eardrums, even with heavy duty earplugs in. But she could hardly give a fuck as she watched LAWSON belt out her new album on the stage of Webster Hall.

Standing between the barricade and the stage, Rose and Drew held their cameras to

their eyes and captured every second. It was too loud to talk, but their eyes said everything they needed to. Like: holy fuck this is unreal, she's so hot, and this album fucking slaps.

As Rose danced, she pushed down the shutter button as LAWSON held the microphone out to the audience. The crowd sang every word.

Between songs, LAWSON laughed. "You guys fucking rule. Thank you for loving this album as much as I do." She held her hand on her chest as she took it all in. It was dicey territory for a minute there. No one was sure her career would recover after her PR nightmare breakup just two years before.

Between the curtains behind the stage, Rose could spot LAWSON's now-wife, Dani Crawford, dancing along. She snapped a few sneaky pictures of her watching LAWSON perform adoringly.

After another song, Drew met Rose in the middle of the barricade and planted a kiss on her cheek. Shouting over the crowd, they asked. "You good?"

Rose nodded. "More than." Her eyes wandered down Drew's sweaty body. The venue was at least eighty degrees and running back and forth to catch LAWSON was a real workout. And Drew's biceps were bulging under their tight t-shirt.

Swallowing the excitement in her throat, Rose tried to refocus. The show was winding toward the encore, and before she knew it, they'd be back in Drew's loft. Then, she could do whatever she wanted.

Sure enough, LAWSON left the stage with her band. Drew and Rose whipped around and took pictures of the cheering crowd. The ballroom full of Sapphics begged for LAWSON to come back to the stage. It was electrifying to feel how excited they were to have her sing just one more song.

Hell, Rose started chanting with them. From the corner of her eye, she could feel Drew's smile watching her sing. Her face still flushed under their gaze.

Returning to the stage, LAWSON paused and planted a kiss on Dani. When she returned to the mic, her voice was low and sultry. "This one's for my wife."

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The crowd swooned and Rose couldn't help but giggle. She rocked out on stage for another song, a massive cannon of confetti shot off as the last chorus began.

Rose lifted her camera and snapped pictures as LAWSON jumped along to the end of the song.

Before leaving the stage, she yelled out, "Thank you, New York!" Once she left the stage and the house lights came on, Drew made their way to Rose. They wrapped their strong arms around her and kissed her hard.

Leaning into their ear, Rose lowered her voice. "I want to go home and fuck the shit out of you."

Drew pulled back and raised their eyebrows. "Let's say bye to Jamie and get the fuck out of here then." They basically ran toward the backstage entrance where the duo flashed their press badges. With a nod, security opened the door for them.

The bright lights of the green rooms were a tough transition from the dark hall and flashing lights of the show. Once the door cracked open, Dani flew off Jamie's lap. She blushed as they came in.

"Sorry, we don't mean to interrupt." Rose giggled.

Jamie wiped her mouth of her wife's spit. "No, please. Come on in."

Walking closer to her, Drew dapped Jamie up. "What an amazing show that was. Congratulations on everything."

Rose winked at Dani. “Truly, I’ve never been to a concert so electric.”

Letting out a huge sigh, Jamie laughed. “Thank god. I was terrified they’d boo or not know the words, or something.”

“Oh god never,” Rose shook her head, “You’re like our god, we’ll love anything you do. And this album is just perfect.”

Jamie smiled. “Thank you. I really appreciate it.”

Drew nodded. “We should have some early pics for you in the next day or so. Mostly the digitals that Rose has and the film will be a minute. But if you don’t mind, we’re gonna head out.” Their excitement was impossible to hide.

From next to Jamie, Dani laughed. “Absolutely. We’re doing the same as soon as security lets us.”

They said their goodbyes and headed out of Webster Hall through the stage door. A crowd of adoring fans cheered for Drew and Rose for a brief moment before realizing it wasn’t LAWSON. But for a moment, Rose felt what it must have been like to be greeted like that everywhere you go.

She could see why someone would want it. But it was loud and Rose liked hiding away with Drew. After her eyes recovered from the flash of paparazzi lights, Rose looped her arm through Drew’s as they walked back to Drew’s loft.

The air was crisp as it filled Rose’s lungs, the leaves in full bloom now as it neared winter. But the bite of the wind felt like a relief against her flushed cheeks. Before she knew it, Drew was unlocking the front door and the duo was heading up the steps.

Taking multiple steps at a time, Drew’s long legs bounded up the steps. Rose smirked

as she watched them move. They were clearly excited to get home. By the time Rose made it to the top of the stairs, Drew had already opened the apartment door and held it open for her. “My lady.”

Rose tucked her hair behind her ear and kissed their cheek as she passed. Both of them set their bags down on the work and took off their shoes.

“I should get this film developed so we can develop in the morning.” Drew sighed as they opened their camera case.

But Rose wasn’t interested in waiting, pulling her shirt off over her head and revealing a sheer emerald bra.”I think it could wait until morning.”

Swallowing the excitement rising in their throat, Drew’s eyes widened. They looked weak, desperate to touch her. But their eyes flicked between Rose’s half naked body and the canisters of film lined up on the table.

Licking their lips, Drew shrugged. “You wanna piss off LAWSON?”

“I don’t think she’ll mind.” She grabbed her pants by the waistband and threw them down to her ankles, stepping out of them delicately. “I think she’d like knowing everyones leaves her concerts and fucks.”

It was hard to argue that point. Drew strode across the room and grabbed Rose’s waist. She moaned at the rough tug, Planting their lips on hers, Drew let their hands grip her curves. But after a minute, Drew pulled away and groaned. “Just let me put this in the tank and then I’ll fuck you like you couldn’t believe.”

Rose sighed. “That’s a big promise.”

“Have I ever broken a promise?” Drew winked.

“Literally yes,” Rose laughed as she turned away and walked toward the bed. It was obvious that Drew’s eyes hadn’t left her ass, watching as her cheeks bounced with each step.

Disappearing into the darkroom, Drew went to spool the film into the reel. Wandering toward the bed, Rose took a deep breath. Of course she wanted to wait for them, but her clit was throbbing. And she knew just how much Drew loved to watch her.

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So she laid down in the bed, resting her head on the pillow. She reached for her toy, in its spot in the nightstand and connected to its charger. Gripping the rabbit, she turned it on, pushed her matching sheer panties to the side, and brought the toy to her clit. The moment the silicone met her skin, a moan escaped her mouth.

After a minute, Drew appeared from the darkroom. Their mouth fell open as they saw the stunning redhead in their bed. “Couldn’t wait for me?”

“You didn’t ask.” Rose winked as she let the toy massage her folds. “I’m fucking soaked.” The toy slipped in her slit, teasing the outside of her entrance.

Walking the black canister to the table, Drew couldn’t take their eyes off of her. Her moans grew louder by the second. As they flipped the canister, letting the liquid wash over the sealed film, Drew clenched their jaw.

Rose smirked, biting her lip as she increased the speed of the vibrator. “Do you like watching me, baby?”

Raising an eyebrow, Drew laughed. “Was it not obvious?” The film needed to develop for a few more minutes but they could hardly stay away from her. Rose felt the pull between them, like two magnets pretending they couldn’t come together.

“Fuck.” Rose moaned as she met Drew’s gaze, staring them down.

As they dealt with the film canister, Drew unbuttoned the top button of their gray jeans. Sticking their hand down toward their center, Drew started to touch themself.

Rose whimpered. “Look who can’t wait now.” Her back arched as she let the toy push into her pussy slightly but pulled it back.

“Are you going to fuck yourself?” Drew groaned as their fingers rubbed their clit.

Shaking her head, Rose pulled the toy back to her clit. “No, that’s for you.”

Licking their lips, Drew smirked. “Good girl.” Rose watched Drew’s hand flex under the band of their boxers. She felt like she could already taste them, her mouth watering at the thought. Grinding her hips along the toy, Rose couldn’t stop herself from thinking about how good Drew would feel inside her.

“I need you.” Rose whimpered.

Drew laughed. “I love seeing how desperate you get.” From across the room, Rose could see Drew grinding against the chair, using the metal to rub themselves. It sent a jolt of pleasure through her body.

The alarm from Drew’s phone blared loudly, pulling Rose back to her body. Drew drained the canister into the sink, keeping their head cocked toward Rose, not wanting to miss a goddamn thing.

Once they had rinsed the film, they took it from the tank and brought it to the clothesline. Rose couldn’t stop watching them. They were so muscular and every movement was so intentional. Being under their gaze felt like a pleasure, a luxury that only she was afforded.

Their hands still damp from the sink, Drew wandered over to the bed. Towering over Rose as she toyed with herself, their eyes wandered down her body.

“You are unbelievable.” Drew rubbed their face, the thought of what they could do to

Rose taking over their mind. Balling up their fist, they leaned down onto the bed. Rose's eyes caught on the beads of water dripping down their hand, catching on the bulging veins scattered across their hands.

"How do you want me?" Rose whimpered. The toy was almost impossible to control as it grew slick with her excitement.

Drew licked their lips, a sinister laugh rumbling from their chest. "Just like this, darling."

They got on top of her, letting their other arm rest on the bed. Rose's head was pinned between their hands as they looked down at her. Just feeling them surround her was enough to make Rose moan.

After a moment of watching her face, Drew reached into the nightstand. A laugh escaped their throat.

"What?" Rose sat up slightly, following their gaze. Her eyes found the print she had insisted Drew keep in there. Her heart raced as she saw the image: her tied up and on her knees. "Do you touch yourself looking at me?"

With their own vibrator in hand, Drew nodded. "When I can't have you here."

Letting out a groan, Rose's eyes squeezed shut. Reaching into the drawer, Drew pulled out a double-ended dildo, one end shorter than the other. Eyeing Rose for approval, she whimpered a yes.

Sitting up on the bed, Drew rubbed the pink toy along their folds. Within seconds, it was covered in them and ready to be slid inside them. Rose watched as Drew lifted their hips and lowered themselves onto the toy. Their mouth dropped open as they entered themselves. "Oh god."

“That’s it, baby.” Rose grinned as she watched, her body shaking at the sight. Once Drew had it deep inside themselves, Rose lifted the rabbit at her center and set it on the bed next to them.

Drew laughed looking at it, “You always make such a mess.” Grabbing the other end of the dildo, Drew lowered the tip toward Rose’s center. They rubbed it along her folds, letting it get covered in her slick excitement.

As they felt the toy slide from her clit down to her entrance, Drew groaned. “How long have you been this excited?”

Rose shrugged as her back arched against the toy, wanting more of it. “All night... all night... maybe a couple weeks.”

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“Then I won’t deny you any longer.” Drew leaned closer to her face, licking her neck as they let the pink toy enter her. As it slid in, they moaned. Rose joined their cacophony. She loved how desperate Drew was to touch her, to feel her.

Thrusting slowly at first, Drew watched Rose’s face as she took all of them. Even after a few months, Rose still hadn’t gotten used to the smile on Drew’s face while they fucked. Every time it looked like Rose had just given them the greatest gift in the world. She’d never felt more appreciated.

Rose’s hips found Drew’s rhythm, letting herself push into Drew. With each movement, Drew moaned too, the toy pushing back inside of them.

“Oh Rose.” Drew groaned as their eyes squeezed closed.

As their bodies moved together, Drew’s center pressed into Rose’s clit and sent waves of pleasure through her body. She felt the sweat building on her body, their skin beginning to stick together.

Grabbing Rose’s wrists, Drew brought her hands about her head and pinned them to the mattress as they thrust into her. “I want you to scream my name.”

Rose nodded as her climax grew closer. Rocking together, Rose’s moans grew louder.

Before she knew it, she had lost complete control of her body, only feeling Drew’s strap deep inside her and the feeling of her wrist squeezing near her head. Drew watched her carefully as their own orgasm neared.

“Oh...” Rose started as her body began to stutter. “Oh, Drew.”

Leaning into her ear, Drew growled. “Louder.”

With a nod, Rose’s throat rumbled as the scream left her mouth. “Oh god, Drew.” Her pussy tightened around Drew, almost pushing them out of her with the force of her muscles.

But Drew thrust harder, groaning as the toy pushed back into them. They hit her G-spot, just enough to send her over the edge.

She gasped. “Fuck, Drew!” Her eyes shot open as her body shuddered. The feeling of Rose coming was all Drew needed to follow her, their own motions growing more rigid as they peaked.

Their screams grew together, until they both couldn’t moan any more, instead whimpering into each other’s ears as their bodies released.

Once they both stopped, Drew released their grip on Rose’s hands. Slowly, they pulled the toy out of her and themselves. Rose watched as it basically fell out of them both. “I guess we were both excited.”

She giggled as Drew tossed the strap onto the bed. They lowered themselves onto her chest, letting their heads rest on her collarbone. Rose brought her hand to Drew’s scalp, gently massaging the skin under their brown hair.

Catching their breath together, Drew looked up at Rose. “I don’t know if I’ll ever get used to seeing you in my bed.”

Rose giggled and planted a kiss on the top of their head. “We don’t have any more jobs together after this. What happens then?”

Looking up at her, their hazel eyes filled with joy, Drew shrugged. “Whatever we want.”