



# Strawberry Cake (Naughty Desserts)

**Author:** *Tanja Longoria*

**Category:** Dark Erotica

**Description:** Decan

Decan never thought he'd find his dream woman while reading in a coffee shop. Hope was beautiful, charismatic, and everything that Decan wanted. There was just one problem: his wheelchair. Would Hope be able to see past that—and his insecurities?

Hope

Hope fell for Decan at first sight. The charming freelance editor stole her heart with one simple look. Now she just had to prove to him—and his family—that love knows no boundaries.

Don't let the cute cover deceive you, this book is for an adult audience.

**Total Pages (Source):** 24

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

looked over the edge of his book, bringing himself back to reality. He'd needed to escape for just a few hours, so he'd settled into his favourite Starbucks with a book he had read a thousand times already. But now his coffee was cold, along with his enormous chocolate chip cookie.

When he let his gaze wander over the other coffee drinkers, he met those of a few women staring at him. He'd used to bask in the stares and giggles, loving the attention. He'd worn his hair down, those long black curls falling over his shoulders and showed his tattoos openly—for no other reason than to have a girl point them out to her girlfriends. However, four years ago that turned on its head—everyone pitied the guy in the wheelchair. It wasn't just the looks, but people talked to him differently. It was as if his cognitive abilities had gone out the door along with his leg function. was often overlooked when out with others, and questions were never asked directly to him.

One of the women separated from the group, making her way towards him with flushed cheeks. She was fidgeting with the hem of her black t-shirt, and the sway of her hips drew his eyes south, to the way the denim of her high-waisted jeans moulded to every one of her curves .

She stopped in front of him, and her eyes flickered to the book in his hands. "I was wondering where you got the book from. I've never seen that edition."

Surprised, he looked down at the book as if he didn't know what she was talking about. "My sister actually rebound it."

"It's gorgeous. I liked the story, but the ending of the series wasn't really what I had

hoped for.”

“Really?”

She shook her head.

“What had you hoped for?”

“I mean, I knew the story wasn’t centred around a romantic happy ending since it’s more about the epic fantasy, but I was hoping for the main characters to end up together.”

“Have you read the newest one?”

“I wanted to, but it’s buried under the enormous pile of books I want to read.” She laughed shyly, glancing over her shoulder to her friends before her weary eyes landed on the book once more. “I tried binding my own books because I fell down the rabbit hole of fanfiction, but I’m not very crafty.”

“That’s how my sister started—with fanfiction. Then she moved on to her favourites.”

“I think it looks amazing.” The woman gave him a shy wave, and turned to leave. “Well, thanks.”

The next words out of ’s mouth were completely involuntary. “Do you want it?”

“What?” she asked, turning back to face him.

Her light blue eyes held him captive as he tried to sound confident in his next words. He felt rather out of practice, but there was something about her that he wasn’t ready

to let go of yet. “The book. She never bound the others because she hated this one’s colour, so it always looks out of place on my bookshelf.”

She stared at him, lips forming a perfect O. As if he’d been possessed, he grabbed a pen and flipped the book to the last page, scribbling down his name and number. Shit, he felt stupid, but he had to at least try.

“Here,” he said a little firmer than he’d intended, thrusting the book at her.

Were her hands shaking? But before he could confirm, she had the book clasped tightly to her chest, her cheeks a beautiful cherry red. “Thank you.” Then she was off, returning to her girlfriends.

had no desire to hang around and possibly look even weirder, so he grabbed his belongings and made his way back to his car. Houston was in the midst of summer, so his palms started sweating immediately. He opened his trunk and pulled himself to his feet. Once steady, he held onto the car with one hand while lifting his wheelchair inside with the other. As soon as everything was secure and closed up, he pulled himself along the roof rails and towards the driver’s door.

Two years ago, he’d been too embarrassed to get into his car—even more than being seen in the wheelchair. It had taken a long while for him to be proud of his accomplishments, no matter how insignificant they seemed to others.

After a short drive, he arrived at his apartment building in the Galleria Area. He parked in his spot and then took the elevator to the sixth floor. The ink had barely been dry on the papers for the apartment when he’d had his accident, so even though he hadn’t wanted to, he’d renovated it to fit his new needs. He’d installed rails disguised as mouldings, carpet had been replaced by hardwood, and his shower had been expanded to accommodate a chair. Though he appreciated all the small accessible details, he loved that he’d found ways to keep them discreet—less clinical.

As much as he tried not to, checked his phone constantly, hoping the woman from the coffee shop would contact him. He'd learned a long time ago not to get his hopes up, but she was cute. Damn, he should have at least asked for her name.

needed a distraction from the girl with the dirty-blond hair and the curious blue eyes, so he pulled his laptop out and started working through his emails and client bookings. He'd been an editor for a publishing company but after his accident, he enjoyed being his own boss.

After finishing up a virtual meeting with one of his authors, he checked his phone again—and his heart leapt. There was a missed call from a number he didn't recognize, and they'd left a voicemail. tried not to get his hopes up. He was used to rejection. The few times he'd attempted anything, they would either draw the line at being friends or stop contacting him altogether. He opened the voicemail and brought the phone to his ear.

“ Hi, this is Hope. We met at the coffee shop earlier .” She trailed off for a moment, seeming to find her confidence. “ I was hoping we could meet up again soon. Call me back . ”

didn't hesitate to return the call, and Hope answered quickly. “!”

Was that happiness in her voice? “Sorry I missed your call. I was in a meeting.”

“Oh, don't worry,” she chirped.

“What are you doing tomorrow? Or do you work on weekends?”

“Thank God I don't.”

“Do you have any plans yet?”

He could practically hear her smiling. “I was going to go thrift book hunting, actually.”

’s shelf did have a few empty spots. “Is that an only you thing? Or are these hunts open for someone to join?”

“Nobody’s ever asked to come with me before.”

“Would you mind if I joined you?”

“I’d like that.”

“Where do you usually go?”

“I go to a few places. Just start in one store and work my way around based on what’s nearby.”

“Oh, so you’re a pro.”

That made her laugh and fuck that sound warmed ’s heart. “Some might say I’m crazy or boring, but I enjoy it. How about we meet up at Starbucks, grab a drink, and we can start hunting from there?”

“Sounds good to me. Does ten work for you?”

“That’s perfect.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“See ya.” Then the line disconnected.

blew out a breath, leaning back and running his fingers through his black curls that had gotten long over the last few months.

couldn't believe it. He was going on a date, and somehow he felt excited and terrified all at the same time.

As he settled on the couch with his dinner in his lap and the TV playing, his best friend Marco called. They were friends all through high school, and he was the only one that really stuck around after his accident.

"Hey, man," he greeted him, muting the movie.

"Turns out I don't have to work tomorrow. You good to go to the gym?"

"Not sure yet. Maybe in the evening."

Marco gasped dramatically, feigning horror. "What could you possibly be doing that could be better than meeting your best friend?"

"Meeting someone who's much cuter than you."

"Wait, what? I didn't even know you were talking to someone."

"I wasn't until today."

"Did you meet her at the coffee shop?"

"Yeah. She came over and asked me about the book Layla bound for me."

"Ah, so she's a book lover and she made the first move. What are you two going to do tomorrow?"

“Book hunting. She wants to go thrifting.”

“That’s cute as shit.”

“Yeah...” Even though he was alone, ducked his head to hide the blush rising on his cheeks.

Marco sighed, knowing him far too well. “, stop questioning yourself. She made the first move! She clearly saw something she liked in you. ”

“Or she feels sorry for me.”

“If you say another pessimistic word I will slap you through the damn speaker,” Marco hissed, his usual playfulness gone.

“Fine.”

“Good. Call me and let me know how it goes, okay?”

“I will.”

The call ended, and set his phone aside.

Marco’s brutal honesty had driven mad during his recovery—he’d always call him out when needed just like he had on that call. He’d hated it, but now looking back at the time, he couldn’t thank Marco enough for it.



## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

He had tossed and turned all night. Even now, sitting under the hot shower, he couldn't relax. It was so easy for his thoughts to spiral in the dark direction that made him question himself over and over again. He tried to think back to dates he'd had before the accident and realised: he'd always been a nervous person. Only this time, his self esteem had taken a few hits along the way.

He stepped out of the shower and got dressed in black jeans and t-shirt, tying his wet hair into a bun. He was forcing down breakfast when he saw a message pop up on his phone. The sight of Hope's name had a smile lifting his cheeks.

We're still good for 10, right?

I'll be there!

Maybe she was just as nervous. After all, everyone had insecurities, right?

He sighed and tried to focus on work before having to leave, but he just stared at the screen with no headspace to create a simple ad for one of his clients. When it was finally time to leave, his heart thumped and his palms were sweaty to the point of needing his gloves to use his chair. Driving through Houston traffic was made even more miserable by the rainfall pattering against the windshield. He parked in front of the café and noticing he still had fifteen minutes, he waited and hoped the rain would subside.

He nearly jumped out of his skin when someone knocked on his window. Hope smiled at him, an enormous umbrella shielding her from the heavy downpour. Her eyes were bright, putting the dark clouds above them to shame. She held the umbrella

high enough for him to open his door.

“Hi,” she greeted. “I thought I’d come over and offer a dry path inside. Or we can wait and hope it stops soon.”

Fuck, that was sweet. “You could hop in and we can go order at the drive through.”

Hope nodded and waited for him to close the door before walking around his hood with a pep in her step. When she opened the passenger’s door she paused, her eyes on the dripping wet umbrella.

“Throw it in the back; a little water won’t hurt.”

She jumped inside and laid the umbrella on the floor behind his seat, careful not to sling water across the car. “I should have checked the weather. This might not be as fun as I thought.”

“We’re not made out of sugar.”

“We’re not?” she asked with a cheeky grin that illuminated her entire face.

“Does that disappoint you?”

“A little. I might have to add some to my coffee after all.”

laughed, backing out of the parking spot. “How did you know this was my car? ”

“I saw you getting into it yesterday.”

“Ah, so you’re not some crazy stalker.”

Hope crooked a brow and gave him a wink and a smile. “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

He pulled up to the window and ordered them a coffee each, making a mental note that Hope liked extra milk in hers.

“So where to?” he asked, unable to hide his grin as he watched her. She sipped at her coffee, happily wiggling in her seat. He’d only heard of the happy dance some did when eating but had never seen it, let alone for nothing more than a coffee.

“I usually get lucky in the store on Long Point.” He looked at her quizzically, waiting for further instruction. “The crossing of Long Point and Bingle,” she added.

“Gotcha.”

“Unless you want something closer to here?”

“I don’t mind the drive. Maybe the rain will let us be by the time we get there.”

“Good point.”

“I’ve never seen you around here before.”

“One of my friends just moved here and we helped her get settled. We were spoiling ourselves after a hard day’s work. Do you come here often?”

Hope was so bubbly, that hoped she would just keep talking. “I usually treat myself after a trip to the bookstore.”

“But you still ended up reading a book you already owned.”

“Yeah. I bought the last book in the series, but don’t want to read it before I reread the others.”

“You start series that aren’t finished? Very brave.”

“It often happens against my will.”

“I have a whole list of series I’m waiting to read until they’re finished. I learned from my fanfiction mistakes. I hated WIPs,” she laughed, rolling her coffee cup between her palms. “Are you from here?”

“I live in the Galleria Area. And you?”

“Spring Branch.”

“Have you always lived in Houston?”

“I grew up in the Woodlands. You?”

“Born and raised.”

That conjured a grin to her lips. “So proud.”

With it being Saturday morning, it didn’t take them long to arrive at Hope’s chosen thrift store. She stepped out, grabbing their empty coffee cups before rounding to the driver’s side. As they’d hoped, the rain had stopped, but the clouds still bathed them in an ominous grey cast. too got out and for the first time in a long while, he felt as if getting to the trunk and into his wheelchair wasn’t the accomplishment he’d always thought.

Hope didn’t pay him much attention, though. Her eyes stayed on her phone as she

opened the trunk for him. “We might be lucky and not get wet. The rain should be gone until the afternoon.” When she looked back up her eyes dropped to the sliver of skin exposed by his raised shirt. “You have a lot of tattoos, don’t you?”

“A few.”

“I always wanted one, but I’m too indecisive.” Hope reached for the trunk, but it was already closing. She frowned. “It would have opened without me, right?”

“Yeah,” he chuckled.

“And here I thought I was helping.”

“I thought it was really sweet.”

Hope bit her lower lip, a blush creeping up her neck and colouring her cheeks.

Inside the store, Hope already knew exactly where to find the books and knelt down in front of the shelves. She was totally in her element, reading the back covers and setting the ones aside she seemed interested in. sifted through the ones she’d deemed worthy, noting that they were all romances. It was a popular genre right now. Most of the authors he worked for were writing it in various subgenres. He placed the ones she seemed to want on his lap and picked up a few to check out for himself.

“So , what do you do for a living?”

“I’m an editor.”

“Like, for books?”

“Mmhmm.”

Hope nudged his shoulder, pulling his attention from the book in his hand. “And you didn’t even deem it worthy to mention while we talked about all kinds of bookish things? How rude.”

His chest vibrated in a laugh, but she seemed genuinely upset. “Sorry. In my mind I separate my leisure reading from my job. Most books I edit aren’t the genre I would prefer reading so...”

“Still,” she pouted.

“I’m sorry.” Trying to shake the disappointment, he asked, “What do you do for work, Hope?”

“Medical coding.”

“For a hospital?”

“Yes. So, rather boring.”

“It can’t be that bad. You chose it, after all.”

“Yeah, to pay for my book addiction without selling my kidney,” she joked.

“And yet, you’re still shopping for books at a thrift store. Maybe it’s time for a new job.”

Hope grinned and picked up another book. “Well, this is just an old habit. I didn’t grow up with a lot of money. Then when I started making it on my own, I still liked going for the hunt—just for the thrill of finding something that isn’t in print anymore.”

“That can only come from a book lover, the thrill of an old cover.”

“Well, what do you do for fun?” she asked, raising her brow at him.

“Reading and going to the gym.”

Usually, people started questioning him when he talked about going to the gym regularly. Hope didn’t even seem surprised. “Someone suggested I get into audio books so I don’t feel like I’m missing out on reading time when working out.”

“Why don’t you?”

“I don’t have a good enough poker face to hide what’s being whispered in my ears.”

laughed again, and Hope ducked to hide her face. What he would have given to know exactly what she was reading. He was no stranger to smut, but there were varying levels of it out there. “I would give anything to see that. ”

Hope looked over her shoulder, worrying her bottom lip and giving him a onceover. “Maybe if you ask nicely, I’ll consider it.”

He reached for her hand and spun her to face him. “Hope, would you do me the honour of joining me at the gym some day?”

“Only if you’re not one of those diet fanatics.”

“I promise, I’m not.”

A gentle smile graced Hope’s face. “I’ll consider it.”

Once she’d gone through her first selection and narrowed it down to the books she

wanted to buy, followed her to the cashier. He was already reaching for his wallet when she shook her head and smiled down at him.

“You paid for the coffee,” she protested.

He crooked a brow, but Hope had already paid.

“And it was my idea to come here anyway.”

“So, if I invite you somewhere and make the plans you’ll let me pay?” he asked, tucking that information away for future use.

“Sure.” She took the bag and stayed by his side as they left the store. “Well, unless it’s like something extortionate and fancy. Or if we made the plans together. I have a rule: I don’t invite anyone to places if I can’t afford it myself.” Then she laughed when she saw his buffooned look. “You wouldn’t go on a date knowing you couldn’t afford it, so why would I expect that?”

“Well, when you put it that way...”

“Does it make you uncomfortable?”

Not as much as getting into the car while you’re watching...

shook his head .

He’d had a few dates over the past few years, but he never let them see him drive. He preferred to meet them somewhere. Just like before, Hope paid him no mind, setting her books in the back seat and waiting for him in the car.

As he backed out of the spot, she tilted her head slightly and looked at him. “Do you



want me to offer you help? Or do you prefer doing your own thing?”

sighed with relief. “I prefer doing it on my own. I’ll ask if I need help.”

relaxed further when Hope pointed to her right as he approached the exit of the lot. “The next one isn’t far, down on Kempwood and Gessner.”

He nodded, speechless. Her question had been so simple, yet so thoughtful. She hadn’t been awkward about it either, just straight forward and he fucking loved it. People often assumed he needed help when in reality, he simply needed extra time to get things done. He hated when people interfered with things—it only slowed him down and made him feel like an invalid. Hope asking what his preference was had been the sweetest thing someone had ever done during a first date. Mind-blowingly sweet to be accurate.

“So how often do you work out?” Hope asked, pulling him from his thoughts.

“At least three or four times a week, depending on workload.”

“What a dedication. I go through phases of either thinking I need to work on myself or just giving up and saying I need to love myself the way I am.” Hope shrugged her shoulders. “I always admire people who can make a habit of it. ”

He loved her curves, had never understood why women struggled with their self image. As he’d grown older, he’d seen more clearly that society was the devil’s tongue for them so to speak. Wanting her to feel better about herself, he said, “That could also be your regular.”

She laughed and shook her head. “Don’t say stuff like that. I’ll just use it as an excuse not to go.”

“So if I tell you that you look gorgeous no matter what, would you use that as an excuse not to go too?”

That adorable flush washed over her cheeks again, and made it his personal mission to make sure he saw it as much as possible. “I might.”

“Ah, what a shame—I like giving compliments to a beautiful woman.”

Hope’s gaze burned into him, bottom lip fixed between her teeth. He’d have given anything to know what was going on in that mind of hers.

The next store was just like the first, but Hope didn’t seem to like any of the books she saw. She commented that she already owned two of them, and none of the others intrigued her. They visited two more stores on the way back to the coffee shop, where she only bought one more book.

“You seem disappointed,” he pointed out when they left the parking lot of the last store.

Hope offered him a soft smile, her kind eyes finding his. “With the book hunt, not the company.”

“Does that mean I can join you more often?”

Her eyes sparkled as her smile widened. “I would enjoy that very much.”

When they arrived back at the Starbucks where he’d picked her up, she pointed at her silver sedan.

“That one’s mine.”

He stopped behind it, not seeing a free spot nearby. “I really enjoyed today.”

“Me too.”

“Text me when you’re home safe, okay?”

“You too.”

“I will, I promise.”

She gave him one of her beaming smiles, waved, and hopped out of the car. watched, waiting for her to be settled in her own vehicle before he reluctantly drove off.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

's heart was racing when she looked into the mirror and watched Decan drive away. Actually, it had done so the whole damn morning. First dates were notoriously awkward, but that hadn't been the case with him. What idiot would plan a first date going book hunting, she thought. But Decan seemed to have enjoyed himself. Not only had he said it, he'd made her feel that he'd wanted to be there the whole time. was confident they hadn't been empty words.

Her hands shook as she tried to put her key in the ignition, and only now did she realise the adrenaline pumping through her body. She shivered, the nervous energy slowly fading. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, calming herself as she held it and counted to seven. Then she slowly exhaled, and repeated the exercise three times.

On the way home, she stopped at the store to grab her weekly grocery run, pausing to text Decan as promised.

I stopped at the store, so not home yet. I didn't want you to worry.

I thought you might have forgotten .

Thank you for texting.

Are you home?

Just got to the gym.

Have fun :)

Would be if you tagged along.

You did ask very nicely.

Maybe another day.

So, if I remember my manners, there's a higher chance you'll say yes?

Of course.

Would you like to go out for dinner or lunch next week? It would brighten my day very much.

...

Pretty please. ??

I would like that very much.

When fits best for you?

Tuesday? I get off at 5.

So far away, but I'll take it.

Any kind of food you absolutely hate?

No.

I'll find us a nice place and text you the address .

I can't wait. Now go have fun and don't let me distract you.

Message me when you're home safe.

I will.

When she looked away from her screen, her cheeks hurt from her goofy smile. She took in her surroundings, so caught up in the moment that she'd forgotten she was in a store. Everything but Decan had been irrelevant. She quickly pulled herself together and finished up her shopping. Once at home and the groceries carried inside, she texted him that she'd safely arrived between her own four walls.

set aside the phone to minimise distractions and unpacked her groceries. Once that was done, she turned on some music and did her usual weekend clean up. After feeling a bit more productive, picked up her phone and saw three missed calls from Laura. She smiled, knowing her best friend far too well and returned the call.

"Are you still with him? Because that's the only excuse I will accept for not answering my calls," Laura whisper-yelled.

"I'm at home."

"You were supposed to call the second you left him!"

"I'm sorry."

"I don't want to hear your lame excuses. I want to hear the juicy details!"

laughed, collapsing onto the couch. "It was really good."

"So he was fine with the whole book hunting thing? "

Laura had thought it was a horrible idea, but it had been too late to change plans. Besides, was glad she hadn't now. She spilled the whole story, how sweet he'd been and how easy it had been to talk to him and how he had made her feel valid the whole time.

"And how was it with... well, the whole wheelchair thing?"

"What about it?"

"You're good with that?"

"No, it's a nightmare," quipped. "That's why I agreed to see him again on Tuesday." couldn't help the sarcasm. Honestly, she couldn't care less about Decan's disability. No, that was wrong. She did care, but she'd never reject him over it.

"Sorry," Laura mumbled, knowing she'd messed up.

sighed and ran her hand over her face. "It doesn't bother me."

"Okay, I just... I don't know... wanted to be sure you knew—"

"What I'm getting myself into? I'm well aware."

"I didn't mean to upset you."

"I know you didn't, but I didn't have to go out with him. Not even call him. I made that choice. I am an adult."

"Where are you two going on Tuesday?" Laura asked, attempting to steer the conversation onto a lighter path.

“He said he would let me know once he found a place.”

Further redirecting the conversation, Laura started talking about work, asking to share the latest gossip about her boss: rumour had it he was having an affair.

By the time they hung up, it was time for dinner. While she’ d been gossiping, Decan had texted her, saying he was home safely and sent her the address for Tuesday. It was for a fancy Brazilian Restaurant in the Galleria Area. She happily let him know that she approved, and couldn’t wait to see him again.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

He'd barely parked at the gym when Marco jumped his car, yanking open his door. His broad shoulders and bulky arms blocked 's way as he blurted out. "How was it?"

"Good," he replied plainly, trying to get out and to the trunk.

"That bad?"

"I said it was good but if you don't back up at least two feet, I won't tell you shit."

Marco chuckled, took a few steps back and lifted his hands in surrender. "Fine."

Only once in his chair and the car locked, paid his best friend attention again. "It was good, we're seeing each other again on Tuesday for dinner."

"Why do I feel you're holding something back?"

"Because we both know how this is going to end."

"I can't see the future and unless you have something to tell me, neither can you."

"Marco..."

"Don't 'Marco' me," he growled, opening the door. "Did she give you fucked up vibes, like she doesn't dig the kinky wheelchair shit?"

"No, she was actually really great about it. "

“Then stop thinking with your anxiety-riddled brain and go with your gut.”

“I’m not anxiety-riddled.”

Marco crooked his eyebrow at him, it nearly disappearing under his long brown hair. “Good, then there’s no problem. She approached you first, clearly interested enough to make the first move.”

“She came over because she liked my book.”

“Nah, man. If it hadn’t been the book, she would’ve chatted you up about your necklace or your damn shoes. The book was just the perfect excuse to show you that she is a perfect match for you.”

rolled his eyes, but Marco stepped into his path and crossed his arms over his chest.

“She likes you,” he said sternly. “And you and I both know that’s true. She didn’t have to call you, did she?”

Deep down, knew that Marco was right. It was just hard not to be pessimistic. His body was fucked up enough, he didn’t need his heart broken too.

Marco sighed and sat on the weight bench next to . “You said she was fine with the wheelchair. What made you feel that way? She must have done something.”

shrugged and fidgeted, wiggling into his workout gloves. “Just the way she acted around me. Not once did she seem to doubt what I can do. She wasn’t awkwardly trying to help me or staring like she thought I would crumble to pieces.”

“What else?”

“She did ask me if I would prefer that she offer to help.”

“And you told her what you truly wanted, right? ”

“Yeah, and that’s all she ever asked. She had a way of not making it awkward. I can’t even describe it.”

“She treated you as an adult and not a fragile little child like others have.”

“Yeah... she did”

“Look, just trust your gut. It hasn’t led you astray so far.”

After that, Marco didn’t pester him any longer. They went through their usual workout routine and then left together. On his way home, he called his favourite Brazilian steakhouse and made reservations before texting Hope the details. At home, he made sure to declare himself safe and sound and went to take a shower.

He sat under the spray, staring down at himself as his wet curls hung in his face. Tattoos covered his arms and torso. He’d always wanted to get some on his legs too, but he’d hated looking at them since the accident. He ran his fingers over his thighs and to his knees, the sensation of it dampened, as if he was wearing thick jeans. Whenever he looked at his legs, he warred with himself. The part of him that regretted that awful night and its consequences battled with the part of him that was fucking proud of himself for proving the doctors wrong. He’d been told that he would never walk again and though he needed help, he did it.

sighed and turned off the water, grabbing onto the railing to haul himself out of the shower. As he transferred himself onto a dry bench outside the stall, he couldn’t help but wonder if Hope would always be so casual about him and his disability. He hated that word, but what would she think if she saw him like this ? Probably not that he

was sexy. Women never stayed around long enough to be even remotely intimate with him. The only women who had seen him naked were the nurses who'd cared for him in the hospital, and that was emasculating enough.

Once his curls were no longer dripping onto his shoulders, he dressed and forced himself into the kitchen to make dinner.

He spent the next morning working on a manuscript for a new client. It was slow-working, having to get used to a new style. Every writer was different, so he had to make sure to offer the best suggestions without silencing what made the author unique.

Having ignored his phone all morning, he finally checked it when he stopped for something to eat. There was a missed call from Hope that he immediately returned.

"Hi," she softly greeted.

"Hi, sorry I missed your call earlier. I was working."

"On a book?"

"Yeah."

"Is it good? Would you recommend it?"

"It might not be your genre."

"Well, if you ever get something on your desk you think I would like, you're required to tell me."

"I'll be sure to give you the inside scoop," he promised with a smile.

“Thank you.” After a small pause, Hope continued, “I only wanted to check on a dress code for Tuesday. I can’t be showing up in a ballgown while you’re wearing sweatpants.” She giggled at her own words. “Not that I mind the sweatpants, but we should at least match.”

“I’ll wear my Adam Sandler best,” he agreed with a chuckle. “Business casual?”

“Business casual it is.”

“Can I pick you up? Parking might be a nightmare.”

“What a gentleman. I think I’ll take you up on that sweet offer.” A second later, his phone vibrated. “That’s my address. I’ll meet you at the leasing office.”

“Is it far from your apartment?”

“No, but parking here is a nightmare too, so it’ll be easier. I only just got a permanent spot.”

“You’ve lived there for a while?”

“Close to two years now. Are you working all day today?”

“Just a while longer. My best friend is coming over today to watch the game. What are you getting up to?”

“I’m volunteering at the animal shelter.”

“That’s awesome!”

“Thanks, I’ve always wanted a dog, but I work long days. I think a cat might be more

appropriate.”

“They can be good companions too.”

“And not as bothered as a dog when you leave them for hours at a time.”

“Why haven’t you gotten one yet?”

“The new owners don’t allow pets. Maybe whenever I’m ready to move again I might get one.”

“I’m guessing you don’t want to move anytime soon?”

“Not really. I moved around a lot when I left my parents’ house, had a few roommate situations and now I finally have a place of my own.”

“It does feel nice to have your own place.”

“You have your own too?”

“Yeah, I moved in a few years ago.”

“I finally felt like a real adult when I was on my own. It was a little scary but I’m happy now.”

“And that’s all that counts.”

“?”

“Yes, Hope?”

“Earlier, you apologised for missing my call.”

“I did.”

“You don’t have to do that. I mean it’s sweet that you did. But we’re both adults and have lives. Even if it takes you days to get back to me, that’s fine. Things happen.”

He stared into blank space, trying to find a response. “Oh.”

That made her giggle. “Maybe that was too much too soon.”

“No, I just... Well, that came unexpectedly—in a good way. I like that.”

“Good. I’ll let you be now so you can get some work done.”

“I’ll text you on Tuesday.”

“Can’t wait.” And with that, she hung up.

He stared down at his phone until the screen went dark. This was too good to be true. All his other dates suddenly felt so... childish. Not only that, but Hope didn’t expect him to be at her beck and call at all hours, nor did she expect him to pay for everything. This sounded healthy—maybe a little too healthy? Was that a thing?

He set his phone aside again, forcing himself to return to work until Marco could serve as a distraction.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Tuesday passed far too slowly. had spent the morning working, then visiting the gym when that no longer served as a distraction. Once he'd freshly showered, he pulled out a dark blue collared shirt and matching slacks. Once his curls were neatly tucked away in a bun, he added his bracelets and silver necklace, unbuttoning the top of his shirt to tease at his inked skin underneath.

Traffic was a bitch as always. It was the only thing he hated about the Galleria Area. To be honest, Houston traffic was horrific at any time, but the I-610 had to be the worst of it. Hope lived on the west end of Spring Branch, not far from the toll way on Hammerly. As directed, he parked by the closed leasing office and texted her. A second later he saw her approach. As she opened the door and slipped inside, admired her curves that were deliciously accented by a knee-length summer dress.

"Oh, wow," she said with a smile. "You look handsome."

"You look breathtaking yourself."

That adorable blush he was falling for deepened her cheeks. "Thank you."

waited long enough to make sure she was strapped in before driving in the direction of the steakhouse .

"Have you been to this place before?" she asked, smoothing her skirt over her thighs.

"Often. It's one of my favourites."

"Their menu did look good. But do they really walk around with steaks, like an all



you can eat buffet?”

“They do.”

Her eyes beamed and she did the same happy dance he’d seen when she’d gotten her coffee. “Well, I’m in for a treat.”

“How was your day so far?”

“Much better now. We didn’t have much to do so it went so slow. Yours?”

“Pretty much the same. Got some work done in the morning and then went to the gym.”

“Gosh, so productive.”

“It’s why I enjoy being a freelancer. I can work whenever I like.”

“Do you set your deadlines or the authors?”

“I tell them when I’m free and how long it’ll take me to get through their manuscript.”

“Is editing the only thing you do?”

“No, I’m also a PA.” Her brows fused, so he continued, “Personal assistant. I keep track of certain tasks like writing their newsletters or managing their social media accounts. Really depends on what they need and how often.”

“Oh, that sounds interesting.”

“It keeps me busy.”

From there, the conversation turned to Hope’s job.

She enjoyed the peace of working through the casefiles. He didn’t know much about medical coding, but she was very patient with him. When they arrived at the restaurant, Hope’s bubbly personality had rubbed off on him. He transferred himself to his chair, prepared to go inside but Hope surprised him. With a smirk, she stepped in front of him, blocking his path.

“My hair does that too,” she giggled, reaching out towards him. Her fingers twirled a lost strand and gently pushed it behind his ear. “There are always a few that escape no matter how hard I try to have them all lay perfectly flat.”

Now it was his turn to blush. If he hadn’t already been in a wheelchair, he’d likely fallen to his knees. Instead, he felt as if his insides had melted into a warm, gooey mess. Hope stepped aside and let him take the lead, but how he managed, he had no clue. His brain was still short circuiting. They were shown to their seats and given their menus before either of them spoke again.

Peering at him from behind the menu, Hope asked, “Do you mind if I drink?”

“Why would I mind?”

“Because you’re the designated driver. I wouldn’t want you to feel left out.”

“I’m here with you. How could I possibly feel left out?”

Her beautiful, rose-tinted cheeks lifted in a smile. “I promise not to get drunk and embarrass you.”

“Perfect, so I won’t need to find a new restaurant after this date.”

They ordered, and Hope let choose her wine for her. Once the waiter was gone, Hope’s attention was laser-focused on him. “So, tell me —what was your first tattoo?”

He loved the way his name sounded rolling off her lips. Almost with a purr. “My ex’s name.”

Her eyes travel from his face over his neck to his chest. “Do you still have it?”

shook his head. “Covered it with a lion.”

“And where is said lion?” There was a hint of something in her question that made his heart flutter and blood surge south.

“My chest.”

“Was that your second tattoo?”

“No, but my biggest so far.” He rolled up his left shirt sleeve, revealing a smattering of roses—thorns and all. “The skull was added later.”

Hope leaned over the table taking his wrist in one hand while the other traced delicate lines over the roses on his forearm. “Just the roses at first?”

“Mmhmm.”

“Do they have meaning?”

Hope’s fingers were so soft, and her gaze so focused that it sent a shiver shooting

down his spine. “Something about pretty things always hurting.”

“Why did you add the skull?”

“I thought it looked too feminine and was in my skull phase.”

Hope’s fingertips trailed up his skin to where his sleeve ended, then back down a different vine, turning his wrist as she moved. “They’re beautiful.”

“Thank you.”

She moved to his other arm, tugging the sleeve up to match the left. “And the ship and sea, was that a phase too?”

“Got it at a tattoo convention. ”

“By someone you really liked?”

“No, never heard of him before, but when I saw the drawing for it, I knew I would regret leaving without it.”

Her gaze burned a path up his arm and to his chest, tilting her head as if trying to see through the fabric. “Did she get your name tattooed?”

“Yeah.” Thinking about it made chuckle. “Yeah, she did.”

Her brows fused again. “Why is it funny?”

“You might think less of me if I tell you.”

“Maybe you can risk it?”

“I do like to live precariously.”

The waiter returned with their drinks and the appetisers. Hope took a sip of her wine, daring to spill his secret.

“I knew I would get mine covered up later. I was also well aware that she was already cheating on me. So, I proclaimed my undying love to her and suggested that we get matching tattoos since, like the ink, our love would never fade.”

“Couldn’t she just get hers covered up too?”

smiled. “She hated needles. Halfway through my name she was almost in tears. I knew I wanted more tattoos later, so it was nothing for me.”

“Why didn’t she say no?”

He wasn’t sure if Hope was aware of what her fingers were doing, but the circles she traced over his palm had his insides turning to mush. “Because she kept telling me how I was her ‘endgame’ and how much she loved me. She was that committed to the lie. She didn’t have to do shit. I was the first one to get tattooed. She could’ve walked away, come clean, and have me be the idiot with a girl’s name permanently inked on his skin.”

“When did you tell her you knew about the cheating?”

“The minute we walked out of the shop, I made all her private messages public.”

“That’s why you got the thorns?”

He nodded. “Seems depressing now that I look back on it.”

“Why not have your chest covered first?”

“It needed to heal, and I had to figure out what I truly wanted.”

“Did she ever get hers covered?”

“I’m not sure. But even if she had, it would’ve been torture for her.” He tilted his head to mirror her curious gaze and grabbed an appetiser. “I would have thought you’d be upset.”

“I think it may have been a little cruel. But then again you gave her every chance to back out, so she made her bed.”

Their sides came and with it, the first round of steaks. Hope tried a little bit of everything, taking seconds from whatever she liked the most. sat back and watched, amused. Hope’s mind-blowing realisation as she tasted the different meats was a sight for sore eyes. She admitted to not having gone to fancy restaurants before, so she was genuinely enjoying and soaking up the experience.

“What about you?” he asked when Hope finally came up for air.

She grabbed for her wine and took a sip. “What about me?”

“Any crazy ex boyfriend stories? ”

She placed her elbows on the table, rested her chin on her knuckles, and stared at something behind him. “Nothing that crazy, the usual ‘we weren’t a good match talk’ and then it typically just ended.”

“Why didn’t it fit?”

“Either we had different ambitions or were at different stages in life. If one always wants to party and get drunk and the other is perfectly fine staying at home and cooking dinner together, it won’t last long.”

“Are you a good cook?”

“I try. Do you cook?”

“Mmhmm. I meal prep a couple times a week.”

When she was done and set her cutlery aside, picked up the dessert menu and ordered for himself, which seemed to encourage her to do the same. He loved how she didn’t hide how much she’d enjoyed her food. Women tended to be embarrassed for the amount they could eat, but not Hope.

When the check came, she tried to hide her shock at the bill, but he grinned at her and set his card down. “Remember your rules. My choice, my treat.”

She blushed, worrying her bottom lip. “I know.”

Hope walked by his side out of the restaurant, her fingertips absentmindedly twisting a loose strand of his hair on his neck. He wasn’t sure his liquified insides would ever recover. Hope opened the door without a second thought and fell back into step next to him, her fingers drawing mandalas on his neck until they reached the car. While he handled his chair, Hope took her seat and patiently waited for him to join her .

“So, when’s our next date?” she chirped as he started the engine.

“This one isn’t even over yet,” he laughed.

“Would you rather I pray for it to end and never call you again?”

“I think that would leave me quite shattered,” he admitted, grinning in her direction. “Didn’t you say you liked cooking?”

“I did.”

“Maybe you can come over next time for dinner?”

Hope shifted to face him, reaching for that loose strand of hair again. “I like that idea,” she whispered, twirling the lock around her finger.

couldn’t help but hum at the pleasant sensation. “And I might keep my hair down next time too.”

“I do enjoy playing with it,” she said with a smile that made his stomach flip. Hope rested her head back and watched him drive through the city, her fingers curling his hair around them the whole way.

Once on the highway, he put on the cruise control and laid his hand on her thigh. With him having to use hand controls instead of foot pedals, simple gestures like this were difficult to show.

“I might fall into a food coma,” she finally said, suppressing a yawn.

“Don’t forget to set your alarm first. I would rather not have you remember me for making you miss work.”

“There’s so many other things to remember this date by.” Her hand found his, her thumb brushing his knuckles. “The whole having your ex’s name tattooed on you for example. ”

“Of all the things we talked about, that’s the one you remember?” he laughed,



unconsciously stroking her thigh.

“What will you remember?” she asked him.

“Your ocean blue eyes and that cheeky grin.”

Even in the dim light, saw Hope blush. But before he could enjoy the moment properly, he had to remove his hand from her leg to take the next exit. He might not have been as good at hiding his frustration as he thought, because Hope dropped her hand from his hair to his thigh.

“When can I see you again?” he asked, pulling up to her apartment complex.

“Friday evening?”

“You’ll make me wait that long?” whined playfully.

“You can always call.”

“I can and will.”

“Is that a promise or a threat?” she laughed.

brought Hope’s hand to his lips, dusting a kiss across her knuckles. “A magician never reveals his secrets.”

“Promise to text me when you’re home safely, okay?”

“I will.”

Then Hope leaned in and stamped a quick kiss to his cheek. “I’ll see you Friday,” she

told him, jumping out of the car.

He watched as she disappeared behind the gate and around the back of the building.

Fuck.

brought a quivering hand to his cheek, tracing the outline of her lips and wishing—praying— that he'd get to feel them again.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

The next evening, met up with Laura at Ikea, having promised her to help furnish her new apartment. They hadn't even gone up the escalator when Laura started her interrogation.

"So, tell me all about your date," Laura demanded, tying her hip long blonde hair into a ponytail before hooking her arm into 's.

"I don't think the butterflies have stopped."

"Did you kiss?"

"Cheek only, but he did say he liked my eyes and my cheeky grin."

"Secret hand holding?"

"Not secret and he likes it when I play with his hair."

Laura squealed and cheered her on, squeezing every little detail out of her. They picked up a few pieces for Laura's bedroom and spent the evening hauling them into a borrowed truck and to Laura's new apartment. After a quick dinner they started assembling the dresser Laura had chosen. Halfway through, and three laugh attacks later, 's phone started to ring. And the name on the screen had her heart racing.

"Hi Decan. "

"You sound fluffy. What are you up to?"

“Building a dresser with Laura and questioning our college degrees.”

“Let me guess, the instructions are in Swedish?”

“It at least feels like it.”

“Oh, is that him?” Laura chimed, returning to the room with drinks and snacks. “Let me talk to him.”

“Laura wants to talk to you. I warn you now, she probably won’t behave.”

“Isn’t that what all friends do?” he asked with a chuckle.

handed over the phone with a warning glare as her best friend sat back down next to her. “Hello Decan. I’ve heard you make my best friend happy.” There was a pause in which Laura flashed a naughty smile. “But if I hear anything about you hurting her, I will slash your tires and key your car.” She let out a long laugh. “Yeah, I might stab those tires too.” Another giggle, and she handed the phone back.

“Sorry about that,” quickly apologised.

“Don’t apologise for having someone care that much about you. She’s trying to protect someone she loves. Now go have fun.”

“I like him,” Laura declared the second hung up the phone.

“Maybe if you stop threatening to sabotage his mobility, I’ll let you meet him.”

They shared knowing smiles, and continued their search for the missing A8 piece that would allow them to get the dresser done before they passed out in the middle of the floor.

The next day was stressful at work, and was glad when she was finally able to leave the office. When she checked her phone and saw a text from Decan, her mood instantly lifted. She dialled his number, letting the phone ring through the car's Bluetooth as she drove home.

"Off this late?" he asked right away.

sighed. "Yeah..."

"You sound stressed. Everything okay?"

"Just a long day at work."

"I'm heading out for a late gym session. Would you like to join me?"

Her first reaction was to say no, but then again, maybe taking her frustrations out on a treadmill would help.

"Pretty please?" he added with a hopeful tone.

"What gym do you go to?"

"Twenty-Four Hour on San Felipe and Voss. You can be my plus one."

"Okay, but I'll probably just go on the treadmill or something."

"I'm not expecting you to do anything you're not comfortable with. There is a pool if you prefer swimming."

"Maybe another day."

“And you don’t have to stay long.”

smiled. “What time?”

“An hour? Does that give you enough time?”

“That should work, but I’ll let you know if I’m stuck. ”

“I’ll wait out front for you.”

“See you in a bit.”

Sure enough, it took her a little over an hour to get home, change into her gym clothes, and make the drive through congested Houston. Decan was waiting by the entrance, a smile curling his lips the second he laid eyes on her. Suddenly, she felt awfully self conscious about the way her thighs jiggled in her leggings. She’d grown to tolerate the weight she’d put on since her sporty days, but with Decan looking like a five course meal in shorts and a tank, she couldn’t help but miss her flat stomach.

“Sorry.”

“Not sure what you’re apologising for. You texted that it was bad out there.”

“Are you working out alone?”

“No, Marco is already waiting inside.”

She held the door open and followed him to the desk, where a young woman signed her in as Decan’s guest. Once that was out of the way, Decan gestured up to the second floor.

“Treadmills are up there, and the lockers are right over there.” He pointed at the other end of the gym. “Leave whenever you like, but not without saying goodbye.” Then, he reached for her loose shirt and tied the side of it over her hip bone. “You’re gorgeous, don’t hide yourself.”

“You’re putting my audiobook to shame. I’m already blushing.”

“People will just think it was me and not a naughty story in your head. Now go.”

“Shouldn’t I say hi to your friend? ”

“God no. Once he starts talking he doesn’t stop. We’ll never get anything done.”

“Fair enough.” smiled and headed up the stairs, choosing a treadmill right at the bannister that overlooked the gym floor. She had the perfect view. Decan stood with who she assumed was Marco. Once he’d warmed up at a—damn what were the bicycles for the arms called?—he went on to do some bench presses. He effortlessly transferred out of the wheelchair and onto the bench, securing his legs down with a belt. Marco spotted him, running his mouth and earning himself a few scolding glares from Decan that made her giggle to herself.

She couldn’t take her eyes off him as they worked through their routine. Before she knew it, she was out of breath and sweating profusely. Looking down at the timer, she was shocked to find that she’d been slow jogging for thirty minutes already. Maybe coming to the gym with Decan wasn’t as bad as she thought. She slowed her speed, letting her heart rate come down and finished off with some stretches. Probably not to the standard of an athlete but who cared? Not her.

Deeming herself spent, she wiped the sweat from her brow—even though it was useless—and made her way over to Decan. She lingered nearby, letting him finish his set before she approached.

“Leaving?” he asked.

“Yeah. It wasn’t as bad as I thought after all.”

“Ah, your woman might come more often,” Marco teased, catching ’s attention.

She quickly offered him a hand. “I’m .”

“I’ve heard a lot about you. I’m Marco.”

“It’s nice to meet you.”

“Okay, let her go before she’s stuck with one of your monologues. She’s too polite to tell you to shut up.”

“I’m just curious,” Marco defended, hands held up in surrender.

“We never decided on dinner tomorrow,” said, changing the subject.

“I was thinking of lasagne?” Decan suggested ignoring his best friend’s pouting face.

“Sounds good. Should I bring anything?”

“Just yourself.”

“And dessert?” she prodded, unsure about showing up empty handed.

“I thought she was the dessert—ow!” Marco earned himself a punch to the gut with that one.

“Bring whatever you like,” Decan offered with a smile.



“Okay.” Then she shyly waved and walked off, grinning at the hushed bickering that followed her out of the building.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

kept his eyes on Hope, but didn't miss the opportunity to give Marco another—harder—punch to the gut. “You just couldn't keep your mouth shut, could you?”

“What? I thought that was funny.”

“I'm trying to keep her around and you're being a dick.”

“Oh, c'mon! She was grinning the whole time. She seems like a woman who knows a good joke when she hears it. Besides, she couldn't take her eyes off you the whole time she was on that treadmill.”

“Just keep your mouth shut next time.”

“How long do I have to behave around her? Because I'm not going to wait until your slow ass has a ring on her finger.”

groaned and rolled his eyes again.

“Oh, you're honestly mad at me? How will you know if she's a keeper if she can't handle your best friend?”

“She came to the damn gym after saying she doesn't like it. She only came because I asked her nicely.”

“Fine she's a keeper and hot.”

“And she’s mine,” growled. “You better keep your hands and eyes off her.”

“Oh, is getting feisty,” Marco laughed .

“I’m not fucking with you.”

Marco sobered. “Okay. She’s yours and you will kill me if I ever look at her the wrong way.”

Neither of them mentioned Hope again, and they finished their workout.

Once in the parking lot, sighed. “I’m sorry. I know you were just messing with me. I shouldn’t have gotten so upset.”

“And I shouldn’t have fucked with you. I have no interest in taking this girl away from you.”

“Thank you.”

“I want this to work out for you, but I also like messing with you.”

“I know you do; you just got the better of me.”

Marco gave him a wink and nudged his shoulder before he walked to his own car.

Although tried keeping himself busy with work and grocery shopping, Friday couldn’t come fast enough. Once he couldn’t focus on editing, he tried to create some social media content, then moved on to cleaning his apartment—especially the kitchen.

He decided to dress casually, jeans and a black V-neck t-shirt, the lion on his chest

peeking over the collar. And of course, the most important part: he left his hair down. Just before six, he got the telltale chime that meant someone was at his gate .

“Hi.”

“?”

“Yes, it’s me.”

“Oh. Good. I wasn’t sure if I did this right. These gate things always mess with me.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll let you in. The guest spots are at the very top. I’ll come get you, so don’t run away.”

“Thanks, I’ll probably get lost finding you.”

He buzzed her in and grabbed his keys to meet her in the garage. Hope was waiting by her car, grocery bags in her hands. Jeans hugged her thighs beautifully, and the light blue blouse she wore matched her eyes.

“You look gorgeous.”

With her free hand she tossed her hair back and grinned. “Well thank you. You’re a piece of eye candy yourself today.”

Dramatically, he mimicked her move—which made her laugh. He took the bags from her and placed them in his lap, guiding her to the elevator.

Her fingers combed through his curls as he pressed the button to the sixth floor. “Have you always had long hair?”

“Off and on. I’ve just been lazy the last year or so and haven’t gotten it cut.”

“You don’t happen to have pictures of you with short hair, do you?”

“Oh, plenty.”

“Care to share?”

“There are a few hanging on my living room wall.”

“Good to know.”

As showed her to his apartment, her hand moved to his neck. Curious, she stepped inside and looked around as he took her bags to the kitchen. He watched out of the corner of his eyes, waiting for Hope’s reaction to the pictures he’d mentioned.

“I can’t decide which I like more: your short or long hair. Don’t get me wrong you look good with both, but it’s quite relaxing to play with. Does it bother you when I do?”

“Just the opposite. I like it.”

“Good, but I’m not going to keep doing it if it makes you uncomfortable.”

“It doesn’t; I promise.”

Hope joined him in the kitchen and picked through one of the bags he hadn’t gotten to yet, grinning when she found what she was looking for: a floral apron. “Wanna match?”

He chuckled at the atrocious, flowery fabric and took the one she offered him. “I’d

love to.”

Once all the ingredients were set on the counter, grabbed his barstool from the corner and pulled himself to lean on it.

Hope peered up at him, crooking her eyebrows. “Show off.”

He simply winked at her and turned on the stove. Smiling the whole way, Hope filled a pot with water and set it to boiling. While he sizzled the meat, she kept an eye on the pasta and made the sauce with the help of his instructions.

“Was work less stressful today?” he asked as they started to put the layers together.

“Thankfully. Honestly, I have no clue what it was about yesterday, but everything seemed to go wrong. ”

rested his hand on the small of her back. “Those are the worst days. Even the smallest things can set you off.”

“Today was much better, but maybe just because it’s Friday. Did you work on the same manuscript today?”

“Yes, I tend to only do one at a time. Helps me keep my stories straight.”

“So, you make different suggestions depending on the author?”

nodded. “Some I’ve worked with for a long time. I know what their tendencies are like and it’s almost like hearing them speak, so I try to keep their voice alive as best as I can.”

“Do you have a lot that come back?”

“Some more frequently than others.”

“Do you prefer returning clients over new ones?”

“I make more of an effort to squeeze them in where I would turn a new client away. I know they’re returning business and it’s easier for me to edit for an author I already know.”

“That’s reasonable.”

He made room for her to slide the dish into the oven and set a timer. “Do you want to be formal and eat at the table or slum it on the couch with a movie?”

Hope visibly relaxed. “Slumming it sounds wonderful. ”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” It was only then that realised, “I never offered you a drink.”

“I was too busy to even notice.”

While they waited on the lasagne, they cleaned the kitchen together. He’d just handed her the last pan when the timer dinged. “Gloves are over there,” he said, directing Hope to the correct drawer.

A few moments later, Hope held his plate while pulled himself onto the couch. They’d decided to choose a random movie that had been suggested by Netflix, and paused to admire that adorable happy dance.

She waited for him to finish his and took his plate. “More?”

“Yes, please.” It was so easy to let her do the little things, like grabbing him seconds

of dinner. It seemed so natural to her and made it that much easier on him.

Once seconds were gone, Hope placed the plates in the dishwasher and returned with two cans of soda. Instead of letting her reclaim her seat, took her wrist and pulled her onto his lap.

“Come here.”

“So demanding,” she giggled, following his lead nonetheless.

“Please,” he added with a smile. Her thighs hugged him, but he could feel that she put most of her weight on her heels. “I know you like it when I ask nicely.”

“It does make me feel special.”

He rested his head against the back of the couch and sunk in, relaxing beneath her.

“It’s our fourth date.”

“You counted yesterday as a date?”

“I saw you, didn’t I?”

“True.”

“So easy to convince you, huh?”

That bottom lip was back between her teeth again, her fingers fidgeting with the hem of his shirt.

“Hope? ”



“.”

“Why haven’t you asked yet?”

“Asked what?”

“What happened to me. It’s usually the first thing people want to know.”

“You’ll talk about it once you’re ready. And besides, nothing is going to change. You’ll still be the same handsome, cheeky man who caught my eye in the coffee shop.”

Hope’s words stung, and didn’t know why. She hadn’t said anything horrible. She’d only answered the question he’d asked.

Their eyes locked, and her brows fused. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for my words to be so rude.”

“You were honest, and I would prefer honesty over a sweet lie any day.”

“I could have wrapped it nicer.”

“I’ll make sure to have some wrapping paper and a bow nearby for next time.”

brushed his thumb over her thigh, wishing she’d worn that dress again. The thought of her bare skin under his made his blood rush south. He closed his eyes, rolled his head back, and soaked up the moment. The movie played like white noise in the background.

“I used to race,” finally said. He kept his eyes closed, unable to look at her. “I was a speed junky. My car was my whole identity and then four years ago, I wrapped

myself around a concrete pole. Woke up to doctors telling me I would never walk again.”

Hope didn’t say anything, only pushed her hands under his shirt and flattened her palms against his stomach.

“Marco was actually the one to pull me from the wreck. He was the last thing I saw before I passed out. He stayed by my side the whole way through recovery. No matter how many heavy objects I threw at him, he picked up the pieces. He called me a jerk, but he stayed.”

Hope’s thumbs started to rub soothing shapes over his skin.

“I went to rehab, where they showed me that even though I wouldn’t be able to walk, I could stand if I worked hard enough. They ignored my bad moods, only cheering me on until I saw what I could do—what I could reach.”

“You’ve accomplished a lot in four years.” Hope’s praise was soft and timid, as if she wasn’t sure it would be appreciated.

“Thank you. It took me forever to accept the small victories.”

“Are you still going to physical therapy?”

“Like clockwork. Every two weeks.” He sighed and finally opened his eyes to see her face tilted down, gaze focused on her hands. “I haven’t been with a woman since the accident.”

“If you’re trying to scare me off, it’s too late.”

“I’m just trying to be honest with you.”

“Well, I haven’t been with a guy in some time.” sighed, but she didn’t let him counter. “We’ll figure it out. Baby steps.”

Unable to resist anymore, cupped her cheek and pulled her into a soft, gentle kiss. Hope leaned into his palm right away, leaving no doubt that she wanted—even needed—the kiss as much as he did. One hand pushed up to rest on his sternum while the other reached for his neck, her fingers spearing through his hair.

When she pulled back, she struggled to catch her breath. “I don’t want you to worry. I want to see where this thing goes.”

He pulled her into another kiss, needing to feel, needing to breathe her words. She melted into his touch, giving her full weight. Blood rushed through his veins, filling his cock and making it swell. He tried to focus on the warmth spreading from her touch rather than the building need between his thighs. He didn’t want to think about sex, not now. Not when being close to her felt this good.

Hope, however, seemed to have other plans. Her body shifted on his lap, grinding against his rapidly hardening erection.

“Hope,” he warned, brushing a thumb over her cheek.

“Too pushy?” she asked, pulling away again. “Sorry.”

He tightened his arm around her waist to hold her in place. “I didn’t say you could move.” This time when she bit her lip, he used his thumb to pull it free. His other hand slid over her waist and around to her ass where he grabbed her tightly. “But maybe next time you should wear a dress again.”

“Only if you ask nicely.”

He hummed, his chest vibrating against hers. Hope did seem to enjoy him asking, maybe even begging for things he wanted. “Please, sweet, gorgeous Hope? Would you give me the pleasure of wearing a dress next time we see each other?” And if he had to be honest, he loved begging for her .

“I only have that one,” she admitted, cheeks warming beneath his palm.

“The one you wore on Tuesday?”

Hope nodded.

“And why is that?”

“I try to avoid wearing them. My thighs rub up against each other.”

“Were you uncomfortable?”

“No. It’s okay if I don’t have to walk.”

“Well, then I’ll just have you sit on my lap when you wear it.”

Before she could suck on that bottom lip again, he shoved his thumb inside Hope’s mouth. Her lips curled around him in a cheeky grin, her teeth scraping the skin. He let out a long breath, his fingers now digging into her ass. “I’d like that very much,” she breathed.

The last word had barely left her mouth when their lips met once more. She ground her core against him, his cock testing the limits of his jeans. His body and mind were burning up, remembering what it felt like to be touched again. “Will you stay?” he asked, his tone far more hopeful than he was typically comfortable showing.

“Only if you let me borrow your clothes,” she giggled.

“They’re all yours.”

One more sweet kiss, and Hope pushed off him. “I might find a new favourite sweater.”

He indicated the direction of his bedroom. “Go for it.”

With a beaming smile, Hope turned and walked towards the back of his apartment and even though he couldn’t see it, she was probably curiously taking in his home. And liked how she looked in it.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Once tidied the kitchen and turned off the lights, he followed Hope to his bedroom. Noting the light behind the bathroom door, he pulled his shirt over his head and threw it in the laundry basket. In the closet, he opted for grey sweatpants and a black t-shirt. He set the clothes in his lap, meeting Hope in the bedroom.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I stole a hair tie.”

The words took a moment to register. He was too busy taking in her gorgeous figure wearing his clothes. They hugged her body like a glove, from the sweatpants to the old t-shirt. And if he wasn’t mistaken, she wasn’t wearing a bra. “Um, that’s... fine,” he stammered.

Hope stepped aside, letting disappear into the bathroom before he could make even more of a fool out of himself. Maybe it was too soon for her to stay over... but it was too late to back out now. Suddenly, he felt so desperate but at the same time, undeserving.

He sighed and splashed cold water on his face, trying to take Marco’s words to heart and not be so pessimistic. He changed and tied his hair back, then returned to the bedroom .

Hope sat at the foot end of the bed, scrolling through her phone. When she heard him, she looked up and smiled. “I wasn’t sure which side you sleep on.”

“I prefer the left.”

She finished her text, then walked around to the right side of the bed. “Fair warning:

I'm a blanket hog."

"Then I guess I'll just have to rely on your body heat to stay warm." He transferred himself onto the bed, feeling odd about someone watching him. It wasn't the sexiest move, after all. But Hope didn't react. She already sat on the bed, her back against the headboard. He made himself comfortable and lifted the covers. "Come here, little thief."

Hope curled up next to him, laying her head on his shoulder and pushing beneath his shirt to draw those hypnotising shapes around his belly button. "Can I ask you something?"

He let his head sink into the pillow and closed his eyes. "Of course."

"Are you in pain? I mean... Do your legs hurt?"

"Is that why you didn't add your weight to my legs earlier? Because you were afraid to hurt me?"

"You noticed that, huh?"

"Yeah, I noticed," he chuckled, reaching up to turn off the lights. Then he hooked a hand behind Hope's thigh and pulled it over his leg, wrapping her gorgeous figure around him. "It's more like feeling everything through really thick clothes. The sensation is dampened and often it feels like my legs fell asleep."

Her hand moved further south, teasing over his hip bone to his other leg. His heart pounded so violently against his ribcage it felt as if it were going to burst. "Where does it start?"

He laid his hand over hers and guided it down to the spot where the sensation changed. "Somewhere on my upper thigh. It's odd, like a smooth transition."

“Do the questions bother you?”

“Not at all. I mean, I don’t talk much about it. Most people I have in my life already know and others never have the courage to ask.”

“I apologise if I say things that come across rude or awkward,” she admitted. “Like earlier.”

“I told you; I don’t mind. I would rather you be honest, however it comes out.” Hope’s hand shifted from underneath his, trailing over his thigh and... Fuck. His breath hitched when she brushed over the bulge in his sweats. “Hope...” He couldn’t help that it came out in a deep, desperate groan.

Instead of a response, Hope moved. She sat up and straddled his thigh, bracing herself with a hand next to his head as she leaned over. Their lips met, and melted into her touch. The kiss was soft, but commanding him to lie back down. He relaxed into the pillow, and Hope added more pressure with the heel of her hand. ’s body trembled.

“I can stop,” she hushed against his lips.

“Hell, no.” Then he remembered how much she seemed to like his manners. “Please don’t stop, little thief.”

Delicate kisses trailed along his jawline to his neck. “You said I’m your first since the accident. I don’t want you to feel pressured. ”

“I don’t.” Fuck, he sounded breathless. “Would you feel better if we had a safe word?”

“I’ve never used one before. It just means stop, right?”



nodded against the pillow. “It goes both ways. If you use it, I’ll stop, no questions asked.”

Her lips found his earlobe, sucking the sensitive skin into her mouth. “I’d like that.”

“What’s your favourite dessert?”

“Strawberry cake,” she said with a soft laugh.

“Strawberry it is. It’s something you won’t forget.”

As if that had lifted a weight off her shoulders, her body melted into his. He sighed, loving the pressure of her ass against his thigh. His hips rolled, seeking out her palm. Her teeth nipped at his ear, drawing another groan from him. His body burned, aching for more. wanted— needed —her to release all the built up pressure from the past four years . He only hoped his desperation didn’t turn her off.

Hope moved her hand, and before could protest, nimble fingers slipped beneath his sweats. “No boxers,” she hummed, her fingertips skimming his bare length.

“Habit,” was all he could say, dizzy with how fast blood rushed south.

“One you should keep, I think.”

There it was again: that gooey sensation in his belly as he melted for her praise. His dick jerked, the first drop of precum escaping. When her fingers wrapped around his shaft and her thumb ran over his cockhead, she let out a soft breath, eagerly using that clear liquid to lubricate his skin.

Shit. He would be losing it far sooner than he wanted to.

Hope wiggled her ass and moved to kneel between his legs, knocking his thighs apart. The next few moments passed in a blur. Hope yanked his sweats down and his cock sprang free. Another drop of precum seeped out. With a greedy, wicked grin, her head dropped, and her tongue lapped it up.

“Fuck,” he groaned, his fingers spearing through her hair and latching onto a thick fistful.

Hope dropped onto her belly and sealed her lips around his cock. One hand pushed under his ass to support herself while the other covered the distance her mouth couldn't. Her tongue swirled around him, licking up his precum. He was already close, and she'd hardly started.

“You're going to make me come,” he panted.

Though he was a little disappointed when she pulled off with a pop. “I want that.”

“I want that too, little thief, but...” He hissed with another flick of her tongue.

Hope only sealed her lips tighter. He threw his head back against the pillow, squeezing his eyes shut as Hope sucked him down. She took her time exploring him, and he soaked up every torturous moment. Suddenly, he remembered that it had been a while for her as well. He massaged her scalp, rewarding her with every inch she gained.

Once she was comfortable, Hope found a steady pace, chasing the path of her hand. He moaned, the obscene slurping coming from Hope hurtling him towards the edge. His balls tightened and a shiver shot down his spine. Her tongue pressed against the sensitive bundle beneath his cockhead, all but milking his climax right out of him.

tugged at her hair, scrambling to pull out of her mouth—but it was in vain. His

orgasm rocked his body. “I’m coming,” he groaned, releasing with a shout as Hope doubled down. His cock pulsed, shooting his cum right down her throat.

Hope swallowed around his length, and he looked down at her to see her sucking him clean. His heart raced and his palms grew clammy as she dragged his climax out. She only sweetened it more with her satisfied gaze. Proudly, she sat up and licked her lips, fixing the mess he’d made of her hair.

“Fuck, you’re amazing,” he panted, collapsing onto the pillow.

“Thank you.”

He crooked a brow. “Not fighting the compliment?”

“I’m working on accepting them more easily.” Hope hummed and nuzzled into his side again, throwing her leg over his thigh, after redressing him.

“Do you need me to do anything for you?” he asked, running one hand over her thigh while the other pushed under her shirt to caress the small of her back.

“Can you just hold me?”

“That seems fairly easy, but it’s nothing in comparison to what you just did for me.”

“It’s really all I want,” she sighed, slipping beneath his shirt again, her body moulding to his. “It feels good.”

“Anything you want,” he whispered with a kiss to her hair.

He ran his fingers over her skin, spoiling her with his attention while she slipped away into her dreams.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

She woke up the next morning turned away from Decan, but his hand still laid on her bare waist. She rolled over to find him still sleeping, his curls having broken free from their elastic restraint and spilling all over the place. His hand slipped from her waist to the mattress, and laced her fingers with his. She closed her eyes again, her stomach fluttering with butterflies. She'd felt so alone lately, and Decan filled a void that she'd worked hard to ignore. She dozed off again, relishing the warm, fuzzy feeling washing through her veins.

only awoke again when Decan stirred. His sleepy eyes found hers, his lips curling into a lazy smile. "Good morning, little thief."

"You still have your blanket," she pointed out with a laugh.

"I'm not talking about the blanket."

Her cheeks heated as she gathered the courage to ask. "So what am I stealing?"

"My heart." He kissed her hair and stretched, carrying on as if he hadn't just dropped that bomb on her. "Mind if I take a shower?"

She welcomed the sudden change of subject, feeling as if any response she came up with wouldn't measure up. "Are you asking my permission to take a shower in your own home?"

"I guess I am."

"Well can I have coffee?"

“Of course.”

“Then I’ll allow it.” She leaned over and stamped a kiss on his cheek before climbing out of bed to give him some privacy. She could see how uncomfortable he was in certain situations—such as getting in and out of a car, or his own bed. Not that she thought there was a need, but she could respect that doing it all with an audience was new for him.

In the kitchen, she excitedly used his fancy coffee machine to make herself a cup of steaming morning sun. She took her time returning to the bedroom, but not without stopping to look at the pictures that decorated his walls. There were a few of him and his car—a Ford from what she could see, but that was as far as her knowledge of cars went. When she stepped into the bedroom, the water ran behind the closed bathroom door.

“What would happen if I walked in right now?” she jokingly shouted.

“Come in and find out.”

She froze, not having expected that response. She hesitated, staring at the door, but then took a few steps towards it. Slowly, to give him time to veto, she turned the knob and pushed the door open.

Decan sat on the built-in bench, steam fogging the glass walls enclosing the shower. His hair was longer now, weighed down and dripping wet. Her eyes trailed down to his chest where that lion proudly stretched across his skin. Somehow, she’d always thought one could still see his ex’s name on his chest but there was nothing but a beautiful detailed roaring lion. The sails of an old pirate ship decorated his left arm while skulls and roses twisted and wound up the right.

“I was about to get out, but I can stay a little longer,” he chuckled.

Her face burned as hot as her core. “I wouldn’t mind joining you.” Her words shook, insecurity creeping in like a weed amongst the roses.

That self doubt was partially at fault for her rejection the night before as well. Before she could second guess herself, she set her mug on the counter and shoved her stolen sweats to the floor. She couldn’t bring herself to check Decan’s reaction as she stepped out of the fabric. Those encroaching thoughts only got worse when she pulled the shirt over her head, revealing her pudgy stomach, stretchmarks, and hanging breasts.

But Decan surprised her. “Gorgeous,” he hummed, pushing the door open and offering her a hand.

She stepped in, the steam and hot water wrapping around her like a warm comforting cocoon. The water dripped down from the rainfall shower head above them, weighing down her hair still secured in the hair tie. Her breath hitched when Decan pulled her to stand in front of him. His free hand dipped down, trailing over her knee and teasing up her inner thigh.

“Safe word?” he gently asked.

“Strawberry.” She couldn’t help but giggle at the word .

“You can use it any time, even now.”

“I’m just a little insecure,” she admitted with a heavy heart.

“That’s okay. Just know I don’t understand why. You look breathtaking.”

“Thank you.”

“I like how you’re working on accepting compliments.”

“It looks easier than it is.”

He chuckled. “I bet.”

Decan’s fingers traced over her skin, leaving trails of goosebumps in their wake. Unsure of what to do with herself, she placed her hands on his shoulders and studied the majestic beast inked across his chest. The water rained down on them, melting the tension away from her muscles.

“You seem tense.”

“A little.” She sighed, closing her eyes and trying to find the courage to speak. “Last night I wanted more, but... I was scared to take it further.”

His fingers grazed over her hip bone, following it south. “I thought so.”

“I’m sorry.”

“, please look at me,” he hummed, but the plea beneath his confident facade wasn’t lost on her. She did and when her eyes finally met his, she melted. “You never have to apologise for your feelings. Believe me, I know that’s hard not to do, but your feelings are valid, no matter what they are or what anyone else thinks. I want you to know you’re safe with me to express yourself.”

She took a deep breath, as if to inhale his words. With a newfound bravery, she bent down, taking his jaw in her hands and angling him precisely where she wanted him. Her lips crashed down on his, and she swallowed the deep, rumbling groan he fed her. She straddled the man in front of her, kneeling on the bench to either side of him. Strong hands grabbed her waist, his fingers pressing into the plush skin. Decan’s cock

swelled beneath her—and it felt good . So why was she questioning this? Decan tugged on her hips, pulling even her closer.

She laced one hand through his wet curls, slipping the other between their bodies. She found what she wanted, loving the way his cock jerked in her hand.

“Please, ,” he begged, though he didn’t seem to be sure what he was even asking for.

She claimed his lips again, gripping his shaft tightly while her thumb claimed the first drops of precum. Decan shifted, slipping a hand between her thighs and finding her clit effortlessly. She moaned into the kiss, and Decan’s fingers kept searching. The heel of his hand now pressed against her clit while a single finger gently pushed inside her. She arched into his hand, giving his shaft one slow stroke. She found a rhythm, breaking away from the kiss to trail a path down his jaw.

When her lips reached his ear, she sealed them around his earlobe and sucked it into her mouth. The simple move earned her a pleased groan and a second finger pushing into her.

“You feel so good,” she panted, raking her teeth down his neck.

“Don’t stop making me feel good. Please.”

That was a plea she couldn’t resist. Her grip tightened around his shaft, her thumb teasing that sensitive spot below his cockhead. He rewarded her with a third finger and more pressure on her clit. He was gentle, stretching her until he was knuckle-deep inside her. She rocked her pussy over his fingers a few times before knocking his hand away and placing herself over his cock.

His grip tightened on her waist, preventing her from sinking down. “I have condoms.”



“I’m on the pill, but we can use them if you feel safer.”

Decan’s head rolled back and he took a deep breath, releasing it in a long sigh. “Are you telling me you’ll let me fuck you bare?”

“Yes, but only because you’ve been so polite.”

“I’ll be sweet as sugar for the rest of my life if that means I can feel your pussy around my cock.” He grabbed her hips, slowly lowering her over his thick length. “I’m going to come so fast.”

“Please do, I loved seeing you come apart for me last night.”

Precious little sighs filled the air as she gifted him inch by inch. She took it slowly, needing the time to adjust, but that was likely for the best. Decan’s eyes were already fluttering and his jaw tense as he fought his orgasm just as he had last night.

“You’re doing so well,” she whispered against his ear, her tongue flicking against his neck. He shivered despite their hot, humid surrounding. “You look gorgeous,” she praised, the resulting whimper spurring her on.

Once Decan was buried to the hilt, his tight grip on her hips held her in place. His breathing was heavy, his jaw set and face determined. “You feel too good.”

“It’s okay,” she whispered in his ear, swirling her hips as much as she could. “You can come.”

“You’re not even close,” he strained between clenched teeth.

“I enjoy watching you come,” she purred, peppering his neck with soft kisses. “I love seeing you lose control. You were so mesmerising last night.” She grabbed his waist

in return and ground harder, nails scraping over his soft skin.

“Fuck,” he let out in a long breath.

“Just like that,” she praised, finding that sweet spot in the crook of his neck. “Relax and give in.” She sucked the tender skin between her teeth, and that was it.

Decan’s body trembled, his hands slipping down to grip her ass. He was so precious like this: completely and utterly in her control. had never felt that with a man, but she loved it. It was something she could get used to. She rolled her hips slowly, making sure she was thoroughly adjusted. Decan’s groans filled the air once she’d found a rhythm. The sound was like music to her ears, and it wasn’t long before she felt him shiver and his muscles tightened. She gave him two more hard thrusts, grinding down and swivelling her hips in a way that drove him wild.

It worked, and his cock pulsed inside her. sighed, enjoying the feeling of his cum spilling deep into her.

“You did so well for me, Decan,” she praised, using her tongue to soothe the angry purple mark she’d left on his neck.

“Damn, little thief,” he said, pulling her into a kiss. “Can I spoil you now? ”

“And just how would you do that?”

Decan’s hands drifted over her spine and up to her shoulders. “You still seem tense, and you haven’t washed your hair yet.”

“Are you offering a massage?”

“Only if you’re willing to sit on the floor at my feet. I promise the tile is heated.”

With a kiss to his cheek, she slipped off his lap and sat on the floor between his legs, relishing the feeling of his cum trickling down her thighs. “I never thought of having a heated floor in the shower.”

“It came up in one of my support groups when I told them I was renovating the bathroom. Apparently, it’s more comfortable if you slip and have to wait for someone to find you.” Decan chuckled, which made it easier for her to laugh at it.

“The poor guy who had to figure that out the hard way...”

“My mom didn’t think that was funny either. Ever since she’s worried herself sick. My dad made sure to order the most slip-resistant tiles he could find.”

“So, your parents helped you renovate everything?”

“Yeah. My mood was all over the place those days and there were times I couldn’t even get out of bed, so they often took over for me. Marco, of course, always dragged my so-called ‘lazy ass’ out, but I often was just an empty shell.”

“Do you still have those days?”

“Barely. And if I do, they aren’t as bad as they used to be. They’re more of the ‘I don’t wanna text or talk to anyone’ kind of days. ”

“How long should I leave it before I start worrying? Two days?”

Decan paused, turning off the rain shower and massaging shampoo into her hair. “Yeah, that sounds good.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“When should I start worrying about you?”

tipped her head back to look at him. “I’m one of those people that will read your text, think of a reply, and then forget to press send.”

“And days later you wonder why you never got a response, huh?”

“Yes, and then it’s all on me and you get an apology text that I hopefully remember to send.”

He laughed and reached for the showerhead to rinse the bubbles out of her hair. “I’ll message you after a day just to double check.”

She closed her eyes and enjoyed his fingers combing conditioner through her hair. Once that was in, he let it soak while he massaged her shoulders. It felt good— easy .

Only after Decan had spoiled her rotten—or so it felt—she got up and reached for a towel just outside the glass door. “Where do you keep the other towels? I think I just stole yours.”

He pointed her in the right direction and she handed him a new one. She started to dry off, leaving him to transfer out of the shower, but she couldn’t help but worry just like his mother. Out of the corner of her eye, Decan used the handles to take the necessary steps out of the shower, but with the floor covered in water she was still afraid he would fall. Then she tried to relax, reminding herself that he did this himself every day.

“I usually air dry my hair, but there’s a blow dryer next to the sink somewhere if you want it.”

“I’ll go the old-fashioned way.” She kissed his cheek and walked out to grab her

clothes, drying her hair with a second towel. “Do you prefer anything for breakfast?” she asked through the open door.

“Usually, I have cereal and coffee.”

laughed. “I think I’ll have to make myself a new one anyway. Mine’s gone cold.”

“I wonder why,” Decan quipped.

Once she’d dressed and wrapped her hair in the towel, retrieved her mug and went to the kitchen. She was making herself a sandwich when Decan joined her and prepared his own breakfast.

“This might be a stupid question...” she started, but he shook his head.

“No such thing as stupid questions, only stupid answers.”

“Why not lower the countertops?”

“Pride, I guess. I considered it, but I hated how it looked, and at that time my goal was to be able to stand again.”

“So, you kept them at normal height to force yourself to reach that goal.”

“Exactly. Though I’m now thinking of replacing the island with a height-adjustable one.”

“Ooh, fancy.”

She followed him to the table and sipped on her coffee. “Do you have plans today?”

“Gym, then I have a meeting with one of my authors. Will you join me for the gym?”

“Only for the view.”

Decan grinned at her, colour flooding his cheeks. “I might be scolded again for being distracted.”

“I thought you looked pretty well put together on Thursday.”

“I’m glad I can mask well, then. Marco kept making fun of me.”

“Isn’t that what best friends are for?”

“That and kicking my ass when I need it.”

“That’s the best kind of friend.”

They finished breakfast together before he took her back to her car. With a soft kiss and a promise to meet him at the gym, he watched her drive away.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Damn , he thought to himself, watching Hope's car disappear from view. That woman would be his death and he would do anything to keep her.

With his heart still pounding a steady staccato against his ribs, he tried to focus on getting at least a single chapter done before his gym time. Just as he was getting into his car, Marco texted to confirm that they were still meeting up. responded, saying that Hope would be joining them, and his phone immediately began to ring.

Marco immediately launched into an interrogation. "I need to hear every detail about last night before we meet up."

"Only if you don't pester her for more information."

"I can't make any promises."

sighed, knowing that was as good as it was going to get when it came to Marco. "She actually stayed over."

"Shut the fuck up and stop messing with me!"

laughed and started his car. "I'm not messing with you."

"Did you get frisky?"

"Yes..."

"Like just a little or all the way in? "

“Was that pun intended?”

“Who cares? Just tell me!”

“We did... everything.”

“Yes! Finally!”

“We only met last week!” defended.

“You haven’t been with anyone for years , so my reaction is justified.”

shook his head. “ Please don’t bother her about it. I shouldn’t be saying anything without asking her first.”

“Fine. I’ll tease her first and see how she reacts.”

“You can’t just let it be, can you?”

“Hell no! My best friend is finally getting laid. I wouldn’t be doing my job if I passed this up.”

“If you’re the reason why I don’t get laid ever again, I’ll key your fucking car.”

Marco gasped, and smiled. Marco loved that car... possibly more than he loved most people. “You wouldn’t.”

“Want to find out?”

“Fine.” And with that, Marco hung up.



When pulled up next to Marco, his best friend leaned against the car while grabbed his wheelchair.

“There’s your pretty lady,” Marco commented.

He followed Marco’s gaze over his shoulder and couldn’t help but smile. Hope wore the same leggings and loose shirt, her water bottle and phone pressed to her chest—and she still looked every bit as breathtaking. He was still standing when she reached him, so she stretched onto her tiptoes and kissed his cheek.

“Very cute you two,” Marco teased.

“Mind your own business.”

Hope giggled and took a step back so could sit down. “He’s just jealous because you’re prettier.”

Marco made a choking sound. “Did you two get any sleep last night?”

“A little,” she teased with a wink.

“I shouldn’t have told you shit,” grumbled, tying a knot in Hope’s shirt to expose those luscious hips.

Marco only rolled his eyes and followed them inside. made sure Hope was checked in and the whole time, her fingers wound into his curls. She gave him a kiss and he watched as she climbed the stairs to the second floor, only looking away once she vanished over the landing.

“Need a towel to dry the drool off your face?” Marco laughed, smacking him in the stomach with said towel.

didn't give him the satisfaction of a response.

The workout was a bitch. Especially because Marco was determined to make him look bad in front of Hope. She stayed longer this time, and every time he glanced up at the second floor, their eyes met. There were only a few glances, Marco making him pay for each one. When she finally came down, sweat beaded down her face and her cheeks were a bright cherry red.

"Leaving?" he asked, taking her hand in his.

"Yeah. I have a book that's calling my name and a cliffhanger that wants to kill me. Text me when you're back home?"

"I will."

"So will you two love birds come to Post next Saturday?"

"Drop it before I follow through on my promise," growled. Why did Marco have to bring this shit up now ?

"It's just a question, man," Marco raised his hands in defence.

"One I'm sick and tired of having to answer."

"I thought you two—"

"Stop thinking for me!"

Hope's eyes flickered between the two of them but seemed to decide against chiming in. Instead, she leaned down, her free hand on his neck guiding him to look at her. "Don't rip each other apart, okay?" She captured his mouth, leaving with a passionate

kiss that had him breathless.

waited and watched Hope leave before he exploded. “What the fuck was that? I told you don’t bring that shit up again!”

Marco dropped his head and sat on a bench. “Sorry.”

“You’re such an asshole.”

Marco’s playful demeanour vanished. He broke his gaze away from ’s and hid it in his lap. “I thought you might feel comfortable going with her.”

wanted to punch him. His day had started out so well but now? Anger, guilt, and shame burned through his veins. He wasn’t proud of it, but he turned and left without looking back.

He was still fuming when he got home, ignoring his phone as it buzzed in his pocket. He slammed his car door every chance he got, and then the front door once he wheeled himself inside.

When he finally looked at his phone thirty minutes later, it was Hope’s name that finally brought his heart rate down. She’d made it home. His first instinct was to call her and use the sweet melody of her voice to soothe him further, but then he would have to explain why he’d lost his temper. And he wasn’t ready for that.

Meeting up every first Saturday at Post had been a monthly routine for years. Showing off his own tuned car in front of other competitors had been his drug of choice. Once he’d managed to nearly kill himself, he hadn’t been back. Marco had stopped inviting him after a thrown mug had nearly cracked that pretty face of his.

Post had been his home for years, and he hadn’t been able to bring himself to go back

there. Why Marco decided to bring it up now, he had no fucking clue, but it bothered him for the rest of the day. He could barely put on a smile for his client meeting let alone put on a front to even text Hope. Not that it was her fault, but he didn't want her exposed to his rotten mood.

After his meeting, he was trying to figure out what to eat for dinner when someone knocked at the door. "C'mon, man!" Marco called from the outside. "You haven't answered your phone all day. Let me in."

He groaned, frustrated, but opened the door only to be met by Marco and tacos from his favourite spot. "Asshole."

"I thought we were past that."

"With you? Never."

Marco stepped in, making himself right at home by kicking his shoes off and plonking himself on the couch. Far too hungry to resist, joined him and stuffed his mouth. After the tacos were devoured and their hunger sated, Marco was the first to break the silence.

"Does she know what happened? "

nodded. "Told her last night."

"I thought maybe that's why you were mad at me—because she didn't know."

"I'm mad at you because you keep bringing up my past. I don't appreciate it slapping me in the face all the time."

Marco's tone turned sincere. "Fine, I was in the wrong. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have

brought it up.” The conversation lulled while Marco stood and cleaned up the evidence from the diabolical taco murders. When he returned to his seat, he had a smarmy grin plastered on his face that knew far too well. This conversation would be embarrassing. “So, what was it like last night? What did you guys do?”

“You really want to talk about how my crippled ass got laid?”

Marco ignored the question. “How did she react?”

crooked his brow at his best friend. Was that... concern in his voice? “She was better about it than I was.”

“So, she didn’t make a big fuss?”

Slowly, it dawned on . “Shit, you’re actually really worried.” It was a statement. Not a question.

“I just don’t want her to make you feel bad because things might be a little different between you two. You shouldn’t look past the red flags just to get your dick wet.”

“She was amazing. She didn’t make it awkward or anything—never has. She’s been very accepting from day one and doesn’t make me feel... Well, like I’m lacking.”

“Good.”

continued rambling. “It’s like she doesn’t even see me as disabled. I mean she understands my limitations, but it’s not like she sees them as defining who I am. ”

“Good.”

“Is that all you can say? ‘Good?’”

“I guess I just haven’t seen her around you enough to completely agree with you.”

And just like that, the conversation was over. They put on a movie in the background, continuing as if they’d never fought at all.

The next morning, texted Hope and asked her to call him whenever she was free. After hours of agonised waiting, his phone finally rang near lunchtime.

“Hi,” he greeted.

“Hi there. Feeling better?”

“Yeah,” sighed.

“Did you two talk it out or are you still fighting?”

“He brought tacos last night and we talked it out.”

She laughed, light and gorgeous and soothing to his soul. “So when we fight, all I need is to bring tacos? Is there a place you prefer?”

smiled. “The place of Westheimer and Winrock.”

“Adding that to my notes, thanks.”

“You have notes on me?” he chuckled.

“Of course, I can be awfully forgetful when mad, so I’m preparing beforehand.”

“Clever.” He scrubbed his hand over his face.

“If you want to talk about it, I’m going to listen, but I won’t press you. ”

“That’s actually super sweet of you.”

“And here I thought you wanted to be my sugar.”

He laughed, remembering their convo in the shower. “I did say that.” Since she’d been so accepting, decided he had nothing to lose by being honest with her. “Since I’ve left rehab and started feeling better, Marco wants me to get back to our old scene. I’ve been avoiding everyone but him. I mean, they heard about the accident and reached out, but the bad days were too much for most of them.”

“So, you got triggered by the invitation to a car meet-up?”

“How did you know it was a car meet-up?”

“The internet is my best friend.”

“Oh...”

“Too nosy?”

“No, it’s not.” He let his head drop back and looked up at the ceiling. “He thought it would be nice if I took you.”

“Ah, I see why that would be nice. You two could ask me about blinker fluid and laugh at my reaction.”

“Damn, you already know about the blinker fluid?”

Hope laughed, and the sound made ’s stomach flutter. “Sorry to disappoint.”

“Are you volunteering again today?” he asked, steering the conversation in a different direction.

“Yeah, I’m just leaving now.”

“Will you message me when you’re back home?”

“Of course.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

“Me too.”

He tried to focus on the manuscript again, but it led to a lot of breaks as his attention started to wander. When a photo of Hope’s bright grin and a grey grumpy-looking cat lit up on his screen, he couldn’t help but laugh.

Looks like you have a new friend.

Oh, we’re well acquainted. He’s just having a hard time being adopted so I’m giving him our weekly cuddle session.

Why does no one want him?

He’s old and grumpy and only has three legs. Most want cute little kittens.

What would one need to do to adopt an old grumpy fellow like him?

Just come by, see if they get along and then if all goes well fill out some paperwork.

Your shift ends soon, doesn’t it?



Yes, 30 more min.

I'll meet you there.

Forty minutes later, he parked in front of the shelter. He hadn't started his day with the desire to adopt an old, grumpy cat, but he remembered that shelters tended to euthanize animals when they got too full. Hope grinned as she met him halfway in the parking lot.

"So, you want to meet Mr. Grumps?"

"If that's his name."

"I didn't know you were in the market for a pet."

"Me either," he chuckled, pulling her down for a kiss.

"He does have a cute little face, doesn't he?" She laughed and her hand found its spot on his neck. "Have you ever owned an animal?"

"My parents used to have a dog. So if Mr. Grumps and I click, I might need your help."

"Cats are easy. They want food, a sunny spot to sleep, and attention only when they demand it."

"Sounds like something I can handle."

Hope laughed, greeting a few employees as she showed him the way. While thought Mr. Grumps wasn't much impressed with him, Hope insisted that he seemed happy to be on 's lap. She made sure to tell him everything they knew about his history. He'd

been rescued after being attacked and they hadn't been able to save his leg. He'd been at the shelter ever since. They did assume that he'd been a stray, but he'd adjusted rather well to being with them. He'd been chipped, neutered, and all his vaccines were up to date.

"I don't have anything for him," he said looking down at the cat in his lap. Mr. Grumps still looked rather displeased, but maybe that was just his face. At least he allowed to pet him. "Not even food."

"But would you like to take him home?"

"He does have a certain charm."

Hope laughed, scratching Mr. Grumps behind the ear. "He does. We can fill out his paperwork, and we have some supplies you can take. But know that you don't have to do anything. I wasn't sending you the picture to convince you."

"I know. But he seems rather relaxed and if he doesn't mind not being able to go outside, I could use the company. I'm home most days anyway."

Hope helped him fill out the paperwork before offering to go with him to the nearest pet store for more appropriate supplies than what the shelter could offer. She rode with him and then guided him to the cat section, pointing out the litter boxes she thought were less messy than others, before grabbing some treats and the food Mr. Grumps was accustomed to.

"What about toys?" he asked, feeling rather lost.

"You can always try these treat puzzles. He's super smart and might like them."

nodded, choosing one that seemed easy enough. "Well, I can always come back."

“You have a good starter pack.”

“Let’s just hope he and I get along. He didn’t seem impressed with me.”

“He was all over you.”

“ After you forced him to sit on my lap and endure my rather unprofessional petting.”

God, he loved hearing that intoxicating laugh. “I thought you two were rather cute. A real bromance in the making.”

“Don’t tell Marco.”

“Maybe you should warn him that he has competition. Let me send you the photo I took of you earlier.”

He forwarded the picture to Marco, and almost instantly his phone rang. “So you’re a cat guy now?”

“Hope thought you might like to know you have competition.”

“I better come around and check this new guy out.”

“I’m stocking up on supplies now.”

“Let me know when you’re home. I’ll come by for dinner. Will Hope be there too?”

pulled the phone away from his mouth. “Marco would like to know if you’re up for dinner with us.”

“Always.”

After choosing a carrier, they returned to the shelter where Hope helped him get his new friend into the car. She followed him to his place and went off to find parking while situated himself. Mr. Grumps had actually taken the car ride well. He'd barely even seemed fazed as checked him over. He reached into the bag and grabbed a few treats, feeding them into the carrier. He was glad to see that Mr. Grumps took them without hesitation, maybe after living on the street and losing his leg he was just happy to be taken care of.

Hope appeared, opening the passenger door with a smile. "I see you two are bonding. How was the ride?"

"He didn't complain at all. Didn't even seem uncomfortable."

"Such a good boy."

While held Mr. Grumps on his lap, Hope insisted on carrying everything else. The only thing left behind was a bag of cat litter they would return for. Inside, Hope told him it was best to just find a spot to set the carrier down and leave the door open for Mr. Grumps. She also explained it was best to keep the box there for the first week or so to keep the cat's safe space nearby. anxiously watched the box out of the corner of his eye as they unpacked everything else. Mr. Grumps didn't appear until he heard the sound of a can of food opening. He trotted over to see what all the noise was about and sniffed the food, deciding it was worth his attention. Hope offered to get the litter bag herself but insisted, leaving Mr. Grumps to his dinner and returning to the parking deck.

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*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Decan returned with Marco, who carried paper bags in his hands. Mr. Grumps had found a spot on the couch and was curled up, seemingly unbothered by the change of scenery.

“So, where is my new rival?” Marco asked, setting the food on the table.

“Already feeling at home and comfortable on the couch,” she laughed, curiously eyeing the bags. “Is that Chinese I smell?”

“Yep.” Marco followed Decan to the couch and sized up his opponent. “Well, that’s not really competition at all, is it.”

Decan reached out and scratched his new friend’s ear. “Did he eat?”

“A little.”

Marco rolled his eyes. “Look at you, changing your whole life within a week. First a girlfriend and now a cat. What’s next? Your midlife crisis?”

“Jealous, Marco?” she teased in return.

“Nope, living the bachelor life.”

“He still hasn’t grown out of his hoe phase,” Decan explained, taking to setting up the litter box in the guest bathro om.

Marco followed to the kitchen where she pulled out plates and glasses for them. “You

serious about him?”

Well, so much for pleasantries. As it was, had seen this interrogation coming. After all, she expected Laura to do the same. “I am.” The answer came easy.

“He’s been through too much shit already. I don’t want to see his heart broken too.”

“I’m not here to hurt him.”

“He has bad days.”

“I know, and we’ve talked about it.”

Marco crossed his arms and fused his brows. “What do you see in him?”

“A kind, handsome guy who I enjoy spending time with.”

At that, Marco groaned. “Can you be less cheesy please?”

“Fine. He has nice tats, owns his own place and his dick is incredible.”

Marco stared at her for a moment, then broke into laughter. “Yeah, I like you.”

“Good, because you’re not going to get rid of me.”

Over dinner, enjoyed Marco throwing Decan under the bus with embarrassing stories from their past. They’d been friends since high school, and she loved hearing about the shenanigans they got themselves into.

After they’d eaten, Marco pulled her into a hug and headed home, leaving the two of them alone to watch a movie before she had to get going too.

While Decan settled on the couch, she refilled their drinks and loaded them up on snacks. But after she'd set it all down, Decan pulled her into his lap and captured her mouth in a scorching kiss. She wrapped her arms around him, loving how his fingers teased beneath her shirt.

"Another amazing day with you," she hummed, straddling him and peppering kisses along his jawline. "It feels good to be with you."

"I wish I could hold you here forever." Decan's voice was deep and raspy, and she could feel him hardening between her legs.

"I don't think I can do that, but I can make the time we do have very special. Would you like that?"

"Yes, please."

's hands danced down his chest, shoving his shirt out of the way to tease down the hard planes of his stomach. Feeling his muscles twitch under her fingertips, she lifted his shirt and admired every inch of ink she revealed. Once the pesky fabric was tossed aside, she kissed him again, her hands gravitating to his belt. Decan groaned, his hands slipping beneath her shirt and grabbing her rolls she'd accumulated over the past few years.

Her fingers curled behind the waistband of his jeans, and she slipped off his lap, instantly missing his hands on her skin. She tugged his jeans with her, his hips lifting so she could pull him free. His thick cock tented his thin boxers, and she decided that those had to go too.

The second her fingers wrapped around his shaft, Decan's head rolled back and he let out a long groan. "..."

“Yes?”

“May I please you too? ”

She ducked down, using her tongue to trace the prominent vein running along his length before pressing a gentle kiss to the tip. “You know I can’t resist when you ask so nicely.”

He patted on the couch next to him and tugged on her shirt with his other hand. “Please.”

She rose to her feet, discarding her shirt and bra, while Decan unzipped her jeans and tugged them down until she could step out of them. Once completely naked, she knelt next to him on the couch, lowering her mouth over his cock. Her lips had barely touched his sensitive cockhead when a deep sigh of relief filled the air, pebbling her skin with goosebumps. His fingers snaked down her spine before he palmed her ass and slid between her thighs. She adjusted her position, anticipating his fingers running through her dripping pussy. Two fingers slid in easily, Decan’s hips jerking as she gave him a firm suck.

She loved how gentle he was in praising her, combing her hair away from her face. There was no pressure on the back of her head, just soft strokes of approval. When his fingers pushed deeper into her, she hummed around his cock, taking him as deep as she could.

“Oh, little thief,” he groaned, his thighs flexing beneath her. She adored that nickname, loved how he wore his heart on his sleeve.

Decan crooked his fingers when rocked back onto him, silently begging for more. But when his thumb circled her back entrance and added pressure she halted. She lifted her head and sat up, giving him slow strokes with her hand. “We can do that, but only



if you're open to trying it too. ”

When Decan's eyes met hers, could clearly see the struggle behind them.

“You don't have to decide now. Just think about it.” With that, she dropped back down sucking Decan's cock into her mouth and flicking her tongue against his slit. He jerked, a burst of precum coating her tongue. She eagerly drank it down, his fingers returning to their position. With his thumb rubbing against her hole, he'd clearly made up his mind. Emboldened, her fingers slid from his dick, down to his balls, giving them a gentle massage before her hand continued its path. She'd expected him to fight, but he only widened his thighs in anticipation. The new angle let her easily slip her middle finger around to his hole. She mirrored him, rimming the muscle with her finger and only adding pressure when he dared to. From experience, she knew it was best with lubricant, so she simply felt the muscle relax beneath her touch.

After a few moments, where Decan didn't protest, she sat up and licked her lips. “We can save that for another day.”

Without warning, she straddled him and sank her pussy onto his cock, slow and easy to adjust to his size. Her head lolled back as she braced herself on his shoulder with one hand, latching onto a fistful of hair with the other. His hands were back on her waist, gripping her lovehandles and kissing along the hollow of her throat. Her heart raced, her mind already painting an erotic picture of what she would do with him if he actually allowed her to fuck him. She had fooled around with anal before, but no man had ever let her go to that extreme. With the possibility in front of her, her mind ran wild. She rewarded him with her pussy, the whole while he sucked kisses along her collarbone. Once he was buried to the hilt, she dropped her hand from his shoulder to slide between them and find her clit. She ground over his lap, finding a steady rhythm with her hips.

Decan's lips had reached her ear, his words a hushed apology. "I'm close. So close."

"I know. I want that."

"What about you?"

"I want you to come," she panted, her fingers working her clit faster. "I love feeling you fill me up."

"Fuck, little thief."

She moved faster, relentless. His grip on her waist tightened, but she showed no mercy. "I'm okay." Thrust. "You're doing so well, giving me what I want." Another thrust. "What I need."

Decan fought her, wrestled his orgasm—damn it, the man just needed to let go. His thighs quivered beneath her, body fighting the urge to release.

"Don't fight it, baby. Give your little thief what she wants."

That was it. Decan came on a roar, his cock jerking and spilling inside of her. Hot bursts of cum filled her up, sating a hunger she hadn't known she had. She intensified the pressure on her clit, riding Decan through his orgasm until hers surged through her body. Panting, she let her head rest on his shoulder and dove into her climax with muffled moans.

"You did so well," she hummed, running her fingers over his sides. "You made me feel so good."

"I made you feel good?" He laughed, breathlessly. "I think you sucked my brain out through my cock."

She chuckled, wanting nothing more than to curl up next to him and fall asleep. As if he could read her mind, he wrapped his arms tightly around her.

“You’re thinking of leaving me, aren’t you?”

“Only for tonight so I can get home and into bed. I need to get to work again tomorrow.”

Defeated, Decan sighed and kissed her hair. “I know.”

Though she didn’t want to, got dressed and watched as Decan’s gorgeous body and tattoos disappeared behind his own clothes. She said goodbye to Mr. Grumps—who had moved from the couch to an armchair out of view during their escapade—and then let Decan walk her back to her car.

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*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Before heading to bed, picked up Mr. Grumps and reminded him again where he could find his litterbox, surprised to see he'd already used it. As he changed, he sat the grumpy old man on the bed, only to find him curled up on a pillow when he re-entered the room. It made him happy to see the cat already feeling at home. He laid in bed and pulled out his phone to see a message from Hope.

Home safely and curling up in bed now.

Me and Mr. Grumps are doing the same. He claimed one of the pillows for himself.

Awww!

Hope?

?

Would I be your first?

I've done anal before, but never been on the giving end.

Okay .

You don't have to do anything you aren't comfortable with.

I know. I trust you and feel safe with you.

I do too.

Sleep tight, little thief.

You too, baby.

His heart fluttered. No woman had ever called him that before. Though exhaustion swept over him, he pulled up a browser on his phone and typed in anal play. He'd done it before, but they were both young and inexperienced so it hadn't gone well.

From what he read, lubrication and patience were the most important things to keep in mind. After reading, he went straight to ordering the highest-rated lube he could find—along with a few other things. Somehow, the forbidden nature of it all excited him. Some of the blogs he read said that it could be an amazing experience. It also struck that it only took Hope mentioning it once for him to be desperate to try it as soon as they could.

The next few days flew by. He buried himself in a cycle of work and the gym. Hope was busy, but never too busy to call and check in on him. There was always a good morning message, and a text at night before they both fell asleep.

Thursday, he'd hardly heard anything from her other than her usual morning text and plans to see Laura. Just when he was getting ready for bed, his phone rang.

"Hi little thief."

"Hi baby." There was a giggle in the background, and Hope shushed the person. "Sorry. That would be Laura not minding her own business again."

"I think that's just a quality of a best friend."

"I just wanted to say goodnight."

“Would you like to spend tomorrow evening with me again?”

“Only if I’m allowed to spend the night.”

“How could I say no to that?”

“I’ll see you after work. Unless you want to meet up at the gym first?”

“I’m sure Marco would be thrilled.”

“See you tomorrow.” With that giggle echoing in the background, Hope hung up the phone.

He leaned his head back and reached for Mr. Grumps, who’d taken his usual place on the pillow next to him. He’d been settling in well the past few days, and couldn’t deny that he enjoyed having his three-legged companion around. After noticing him retreating into his box more often, he had gone back to the pet store and bought two sets of stairs: one for the couch and one for his bed. Of all people, he knew what it was like to not have accessible surroundings.

The next day couldn’t pass fast enough. Mr. Grumps joined him for his workday, curled up and content on his lap. The old grey man was easily pleased, though, he seemed to get upset when the food wasn’t filled up the moment he demanded it. He’d knock the empty bowl over the floor, making as much noise as he could.

When gym time approached, he pulled out Mr. Grumps’s treat puzzle and let him have at it as he left the apartment and locked the door. So far, he’d been great being left alone. He had followed Hope’s advice to try short outings first. Gradually, he’d stayed out longer and longer.

When he pulled up to the gym, Marco and Hope were leaning against Marco’s car,

chatting away. Hope wore a sundress that must have been new, with her hair in a tight braid to keep it out of her face. They slowly approached as he retrieved his wheelchair from the trunk.

Once within arms' reach, Hope stole a kiss. "I don't see any battle scars, so I assume you and my little grump are getting along."

"Yeah, he's actually quite cuddly."

"Is he using the stairs you bought him?"

nodded. "He's climbing onto the couch more often now, but usually only goes into the bedroom with me."

"Stop being so fucking adorable you two," Marco laughed. "I might get a cavity."

"Someone's jealous," Hope hummed, falling into step beside .

Marco rolled his eyes, but smiled. "Sure, that's it. I'm just so jealous."

Once Hope was checked in, she disappeared into the changing rooms while and Marco went straight into their routine. When she re-emerged, she stepped up next to him and watched him finish his set of bench presses.

"How long are you two going to flex your muscles?"

"Does an hour sound okay?"

"Yeah, I'll just chill on the treadmill." She leaned down and kissed him, her fingers brushing a strand of hair from his cheek. "Have fun."

As watched Hope walk away, he saw a few others stealing glances and had to grin to himself. Those men could stare all they wanted. Hope was his, and she was coming home to him tonight.

“Don’t tire yourself out too much,” Marco called after her. “I’m sure would appreciate it if you still had some energy for tonight.”

Hope glanced over her shoulder, her grin seeming to illuminate the whole building.

“Asshole,” mumbled. But Marco was right: he did have something special planned for her tonight—if she allowed it of course.

An hour and a half later, he unlocked his door and let Hope in ahead of him. Mr. Grumps was sprawled out on the couch where the sun warmed his fur, the puzzle seemingly emptied of all the treats.

“Shower together?” Hope suggested, already moving in the direction of his bedroom.

“Wouldn’t miss it for a thing.”

stopped off in the kitchen, meeting Hope in the bathroom where she was stripping down. She took the protein bar he offered her with a grateful smile and stepped into the shower, tipping her head into the spray and letting the droplets run down her body. He undressed himself, suppressing the feeling of being the unsexist man in the world as he transferred into the shower.

Once he was settled on the bench, Hope turned to him, the pearls of water glistening on her skin. “Would you mind washing my hair again? It felt amazing last time.”

“I would love to spoil my little thief.”



As he turned off the rain fall, Hope sat in front of him and closed her eyes. He took his time massaging the shampoo in first and then conditioner before tending to her tense shoulders. Only when she stretched her legs did he lean down, kissed her temple, and rubbed his thumbs one last time over her shoulders.

“Thank you.” Hope stood and rinsed off, and quickly did the same. “I was hoping to steal your clothes again, but do have my own pyjamas if you aren’t inclined to share.”

“Unfortunately for those pyjamas, I love seeing you in my clothes.”

She pressed a kiss to his cheek and stepped out of the shower. “Lucky me.”

When Hope didn’t return to the bathroom, towel-dried his hair and dressed himself, going in search of her. He found her sitting on the bed, wearing nothing but one of his t-shirts and a pair of black lace panties.

“I have something for you.”

Her brows shot up and a cheeky smile warmed her face. “You do?”

“Yeah.” He patted his side of the bed, next to the nightstand. “Want to see?”

“Of course.” She scrambled across the mattress, perching in front of him.

locked the wheels on his chair and after supporting himself on the mattress, he lowered himself to his knees in front of her. “It’s actually something I was hoping we both could enjoy.” He reached into the nightstand drawer and pulled out the silk bag that had arrived at the beginning of the week, handing it over to her. “I hope it’s okay.”

Hope pulled out the vibrator and grinned. “More than okay.”

He'd chosen a rather basic model. It was a pink silicone shaft, which was supposed to stimulate their g-spots. While Hope played with the settings, slipped his fingers behind her panties and kissed her inner thigh. She spread her legs for him and lifted her hips, allowing him to slide the fabric off her legs while he caressed her skin with kisses. "Will you allow me to please you with it?"

Hope hummed, smiling down at him and combing through his wet hair. "You know I can't resist your sweet pleas, baby."

swayed, lightheaded with how fast his cock filled with blood. Ignoring the pressure building in his dick, he tossed Hope's panties aside and trailed his lips up her inner thigh. One hand spread her open, while the other reached out for the toy. She leaned back and placed her legs on his shoulders, her fingers twisting through his curls. With the vibrator on its lowest setting, he held it against her clit and her hum turned into a pleased moan.

"Do you have your own toys at home?" he asked, sliding the vibrator away from her clit and to her entrance .

"Mmhmm."

He shifted closer, kissing her hip bone before flicking his tongue over her clit. She jolted again, her hands fisting his hair. He let his tongue explore for a moment before licking her pussy and dipping in. Fuck, she was already soaked. She didn't need much more work with his tongue before he carefully penetrated her with the vibrator. He watched, amazed, as she took it so well. Maybe she was used to it.

"Good?" he tested, gazing up at her.

"Yes," she hummed. "You're doing such a good job."

He licked over her clit again to hide how he turned to mush beneath the praise. When the toy was completely submerged, he paused to allow her to adjust, then he started to move. Her thighs quivered around him and determined to keep those sweet little noises coming, he upped the intensity of the toy and sucked her clit into his mouth. Hope held his hair to keep him in place, the grip so tight it burned in the best way possible. Not that anything could tear him away from her sweet pussy anyway. He loved watching Hope fall apart as well.

“A little harder,” she panted, her hips rolling into him. “You’re making me feel so good.”

Fucking shit. He could blow untouched listening to her praise. He upped the vibration again and sucked her harder, his tongue flicking against her clit.

“You won’t hurt me, baby.”

He took her words as a promise and thrust the toy into her pussy hard and fast. She writhed under him, her thighs tightening around his head. She tasted so good. Stealing another glance up, he saw her eyes shut tight, mouth falling open with beautiful sounds.

Fuck breathing. That sight alone was enough to keep him right where he was, sucking until her body tensed and stilled, hips pushing into his touch before she let out a whimper and fell apart. Her legs fell to the bed, and the pain in his scalp intensified.

“, please,” she begged, pulling him away from her sensitive clit.

With one last flick of his tongue, he pulled back, turned off the vibrator, and licked his lips. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” she panted. “That was amazing.”

He spoiled her with kisses over her quivering thighs, reaching out to the drawer once more. “I also have these,” he said, laying the plugs on the mattress next to her. Why was he suddenly feeling so vulnerable? “I trust you and want to give it a try.”

Hope sat up and grabbed the smallest plug, still brushing through his hair. He’d chosen a set of lengthy ones which increased in width gradually, the tips only the width of a finger. He hoped they would help him stretch easier. “We’ll also need lube.”

Wordlessly, he grabbed the bottle and dropped it onto the bed.

Her fingers shifted to behind his ear, gently scratching him there. “Have you tried them by yourself yet?”

Eyes on the floor, he shook his head.

“I promise to be gentle. But you have to be honest with me and tell me when you don’t want to continue.”

“I will, I promise.”

Hope dropped the plug and tipped his head back with a finger under his chin. “You’ll do so well for me.” She brushed a soft kiss over his lips, reaching behind herself for a pillow. “Let’s get you comfortable, baby. Can you take your pants off and put this under your knees?”

As he placed the pillow on the floor, he watched Hope walk to the bathroom and then return with a towel. She settled on her knees behind him, placing a kiss on his bare back and dropping the towel next to her.

“Relax,” she hummed, spoiling him with more kisses. As a distraction, she reached

around and fisted his cock. “Can you spread your legs a little for me and sit back on your heels?”

He nodded, reaching down to nudge his legs farther apart and melting into her touch.

“Such a good job.”

His head dropped to the mattress with a groan. Hope’s words alone had him fighting his orgasm, and then he knew that as long as she coached him through with her sweet praises, he could do anything.

She pushed the towel between his knees and reached for the lube. When he noticed her struggling to open it with one hand, he flicked the lid open, hissing when the cool liquid dripped onto his cock. Her fingers slid smoother over his length as she gave him slow, teasing strokes. He loved seeing her fingers running up and down his cock, mesmerised by the sight.

“Do you still want this?” she asked, her breath hot against his spine.

“Yes.”

“I’ll be gentle,” she reassured .

tensed, cold lube drizzling down between his cheeks. “Did you like it?”

“I did,” she hummed, massaging the lube into the skin around his hole. It felt odd for someone to touch him there, but he tried to focus on her gentle strokes over his cock and her words. “He wasn’t very patient and didn’t take his time, so it hurt at first. I thought I would hate it but once the pain of the stretch was gone, I was drowning in how good it felt.”

Hope's fingers vanished, returning more slick than before. He closed his eyes and relaxed a little more, her fingers massaging the lube into his muscle.

"I won't let that happen to you," she promised. "I won't hurt you, but it might be uncomfortable at first."

"I'll take it."

"Of course you will, baby. I know you'll do so well." Another pause and when he turned his head, he saw her adding lube to the smallest plug. Then he felt the tip press against him and couldn't help but try to wiggle away. "It's alright," Hope soothed, pausing her movements.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be, baby. It's an odd feeling. I hated it at first."

He let out a long breath and sat back down on his heels. Only then did she try again. This time, he let her in and even though he knew it was just millimetres—likely not even that—it felt too much to take.

"You're doing great." Her melodic voice wrapped him in a fuzzy cocoon. Hope's grip on his cock tightened, her thumb brushing over his sensitive cockhead. "Focus on my hand on your cock. Breathe slowly. In... and out."

Her lips ghosted over his spine, her hand jerking him faster. She made it so easy to do as he was told. His dick kicked in her hands and her kisses sent sparks down his spine.

"You're doing it, baby. I'm so proud of you."

Fuck she was? What for? Then he felt it. She was slowly pumping the tip of the plug in and out of him. A shiver ran down his spine and he quickly focused back on his cock in her hand. The feeling was... odd . He knew the stretch wasn't much, but it still didn't feel right. Not that it was painful, just... foreign.

“Does it hurt?”

He shook his head, covering her hand with his. His woman needed no guidance, but he needed the distraction.

“Good, baby. Show me what you need. Just like that.”

Then the sensation was gone, only to return more intensely.

“You're taking it so well,” she praised. And just melted for it. “Let's try a little more. You can do it.”

As the pressure intensified, he had trouble ignoring it. The stretch was heightened, a delicious burn spreading through him. Cold met his skin where more lube drizzled over his crease. That time, he clenched around the plug.

“Too much?”

“I can take it. It's just different.”

“I know. Take your time. You'll feel so good once you're nicely stretched.”

He never thought he even wanted to hear those words. But he wanted to do well for her. He wanted to trust her and feel what she had enjoyed so much herself. Hope swiped away a drop of precum, and he relaxed .

“Oh baby,” she drawled. “You look so gorgeous taking what I give you.”

Fuck. His insides turned to lava again. She thought he was gorgeous, and he loved it. He wanted to hear that all day long.

Hope worked the plug into him a little faster. With each pump, he could feel the thickness increase and his hole stretching more and more. He wasn't sure how long it was before it stopped, but when the plug vanished again, he caught Hope adding lube to the pink vibrator. He let out a long groan, the thought of her fucking him with it making him quiver.

The wide head of the vibrator lined up with his hole, and the stretch was much more sudden than the plugs. The width wasn't gradual, stretching him in one wide swoop. He fucked into Hope's hand, rocking onto the toy being shoved deeper into his ass. She pumped him again, slowly giving him inch by glorious inch. Without warning, his balls tightened and his insides turned—in the best possible way.

“Oh fuck,” he cried, the toy hitting a spot inside him that had him seeing stars. “Don't stop.”

“You did it, baby,” she cooed. “Good, isn't it?”

Before he could answer, the toy shifted again and he only groaned, his prostate being stimulated beyond words.

“You're dripping,” she hummed. Only when he forced his eyes open to look down at his cock, did he see she was right. His cock leaked like a faucet, Hope's thumb collecting the clear liquid.

“Please,” he begged but he wasn't sure if he wanted her to slow down so he could savour the feeling, or if he wanted to be fucked into the next millennium.



“You look so beautiful,” she praised, speeding up with both hands. “I just love watching you fall apart.”

His heart was exploding in his chest as she thrust into him, his insides gooey and his mind fucking high on whatever it was that she was doing to him.

“So gorgeous, taking this toy so beautifully.”

“Oh fuck!” He was combusting, having no idea what was happening to him. Sparks danced across his skin, his insides lighting up like fireworks.

“Come for me.” Her strokes became rougher, the vibrator relentlessly pegging him. “Just let yourself fall, baby.”

Shit, he wanted that too.

“I’m here to catch you.”

That was his last straw. He fucking exploded. Her hand slipped over his cockhead, catching his cum in her palm and fucking him rougher to milk more right out of him. He felt as if his soul left his body. His vision whited out, blood rushing through his veins so violently that he could hear it in his ears. When he came back to himself, Hope was spoiling him with kisses and slowly pulling the toy out. He felt... empty.

“You did so well, .”

Fuck ! He felt like passing out.

“You’re shivering, baby.” Then she draped something over him. “Let me get you a shirt.”

He didn't want her to leave, but he had no energy to make his mouth move. A moment later, she pulled a shirt over his head and guided his arms through the sleeves.

“Can you get on the bed? ”

He didn't feel like moving, but with her help he pushed himself up anyway, collapsing onto the mattress. What the fuck was happening?

Hope pushed a pillow under his head and covered him with a blanket. “I'm here, baby. You can relax now.”

She combed her fingers through his hair and held him, kissing wherever she could reach and whispering sweet praises. He wasn't sure when or how, but somewhere along the way, he dozed off.

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

held Decan until he'd dozed off, then she carefully slipped out of bed and went to the kitchen. There, she added some extra cheese to two frozen pizzas and slid them in the oven. She filled up Mr. Grumps's food and returned to the bedroom with water and juice.

Decan was still passed out, and she felt... indifferent. He'd seemed to enjoy himself, seemingly loving the feeling, but she was worried that she'd pushed him too far. She climbed back into bed, running her fingers through his still damp curls until she heard the timer go off.

"Stay here, baby. I'll be right back."

Not that Decan was going anywhere. He let out a soft grunt and when she returned with the pizzas in hand, he had his half open eyes on her. She sat his food on the nightstand and offered him the water, which he gratefully accepted with an appreciative grunt. He gulped half of it down, then wordlessly pointed at his sweatpants. Once he'd dressed himself, he took his pizza in his lap.

sat next to him, unsure how she should express her concern. "I think I broke you, and I'm sorry."

He crooked his brow at her and grinned. "You made me come so hard I passed out. Not sure what you're apologising for. "

"I'm afraid I took it too far."

Decan sighed and reached out to cup her cheek. "You didn't. It was amazing. You

were amazing.” Then he chuckled. “I never thought I would say this, but I’d like you to do that again.”

She closed her eyes and leaned into his touch. “Thank you for trusting me.”

“I’m glad I did.”

Once they’d eaten, Decan curled up under the blanket while cleared the dishes away. With Mr. Grumps in her arms she returned and was pulled to Decan’s chest, falling asleep the moment she slid under the cover.

The next morning, she woke up still in Decan’s arms but with something soft and fuzzy nudging her face. She opened her eyes to be greeted by Mr. Grumps’s unamused glare.

“He wants his breakfast.” Decan laughed and scratched his new friend’s ear. “He says we slept too late.”

“So demanding.” She stretched and kissed Decan’s cheek. “Let’s go serve the king his breakfast.”

But Decan wasn’t ready to let her go, pulling her into a deep, passionate kiss instead. She melted into him, but before she could fully appreciate him, a ball of fur pushed between them, and she had to giggle.

“I regret giving you a home,” Decan grumbled, but he smiled when he ran his hand over Mr. Grumps’s back .

picked up the little homewrecker and carried him to the kitchen, filling his food bowl and starting the coffee. When Decan entered the kitchen, she handed him his drink and perused the fridge for something to eat. “What would you like to do today?”

Decan sighed and when glanced over her shoulder, Decan was twisting his mug from left to right in his palms. "I wanted to go see Marco."

The fridge closed then, giving him her undivided attention. "At the car meetup?"

"Yeah, but only if you're willing to come with me."

"Of course I'll come with you. What changed your mind?"

"I don't know. I just want to go and if I feel shitty about it, I would prefer to have you there."

"I'm perfectly happy to be your knight in shining armour. I just have one condition."

Soft, hazel, puppy eyes peered up at her. "You do?"

"You have to keep me from embarrassing myself with my lack of car knowledge."

That conjured a smile on his face. "I'll make sure of it."

She closed the distance between them, guiding him in for a kiss by a finger under his chin. Though Decan didn't need much convincing. He followed her, the kiss soft and full of appreciation. This was a huge step for him, and she was over the moon to be chosen to be by his side.

After breakfast they got ready, his eyes nearly popping out when she stepped out of the bathroom. She spun around for him, her cheeks hurting from the grin on her lips.

"Do you like it?"

"You look stunning. But I thought you said you didn't like dresses."

“It’s not a dress.” She stuck her hands in the pockets, pulling the fabric taut and revealing that it actually was a jumpsuit. “It’s a one piece.”

“You look like a snack.”

walked over to where he sat. “And I love when you show off your tattoos with those sexy V-neck shirts.” She leaned down and kissed him, her fingers snatching his hair tie out, letting his curls fall over his shoulders. “Much better. Let’s hope I can fight off all the ladies once they lay eyes on my man.”

“ Your man?”

“Who else’s would you be?”

Decan groaned, squirming. “Fuck, I’m hard again.”

And now she was blushing. “Sorry.”

He rolled his eyes and pulled her into his lap, his fingers trailing over her bare legs. “Don’t be.”

When they pulled up to the meetup, Decan was visibly tense. The moment he was settled in his wheelchair, was massaging the back of his neck. She let him take the lead as they made their way to the parking lot filled with luxurious cars—ones was afraid to even get too close to.

“Is Marco showing off his car?”

“Yeah, they have an open section. ”

“Does he know you’re here?”

Decan shook his head. “I didn’t want him to be disappointed if I chickened out.”

She leaned down and pressed a kiss to his hair. “You’re doing great.”

Decan took a deep breath, seeming to inhale her words before showing her the way to some less expensive—but no less supped up—cars. When she saw Marco, she waved and his jaw dropped. He stared as they came closer, almost as if he’d seen a ghost.

“Hi, there,” she greeted, amused at his dumbfounded expression.

“H-hi,” he stuttered, his eyes flickering between them.

“I think we short-circuited him,” she laughed, gesturing to the car next to him. “Is this yours?”

“Y-yeah.”

The car was an old Mustang that Marco seemed to have poured his whole heart and soul into—along with his life savings. “So, this is your fancy car and the other is just for your day to day life?”

“What the fuck, man?” Marco blurted. “ Years of me begging you to come back and five minutes after she waltzes in—”

“Stop right there or we’re leaving,” interrupted. “I didn’t ask him to come, he wanted to. If you start giving him shit, we can turn around and never look back.”

Marco stared at her for a moment, then took a breath and ran his hand over his face. “Okay.”

“Thank you,” she chirped and walked around his car to look inside. “So, you do it all

yourself? ”

“Most of it, yeah.”

“It looks nice. I mean, not that I have a clue.” Out of the corner of her eye, Decan tensed again. followed his gaze to someone rushing up to them.

“Trust Fund Baby!” The man shouted. He was covered in tattoos, from his shaved head all the way down to his arms. “Fuck, it’s been years.”

“Yeah,” Decan mumbled, taking the hand the guy offered.

stepped up next to Decan and shook the guy’s hand as well, the other resting on Decan’s neck.

“Subtle,” the man jabbed. “I’m Tay.”

“.”

“A beautiful woman you have there. You still live around here?”

“Galleria Area, actually.”

“Fucking snob,” Tay laughed.

“And you’re still a dick,” Decan countered with the ghost of a smile across his lips.

“Can’t change now. People are used to it.”

The two fell into car talk, and that’s when checked out of the conversation. Her eyes trailed to Marco who was eying her carefully. Kissing Decan’s hair, she gave his neck



a squeeze and left the two men to their chat. “What’s on your mind?” she asked Marco.

“You didn’t put him up to this?”

“Cross my heart,” she said, fingers dancing over Marco’s car as she rounded to the trunk. “He said he didn’t want to tell you and disappoint you if he couldn’t show.”

“Why would he think I’d be disappointed? ”

“Because even as we got out of the car, he wanted to turn around and leave. He doesn’t want to let you down.”

“I’ve asked him so many times before.” Marco sounded troubled, upset even.

“You’re upset that he came here with me.”

“A little.”

“You’re a terrible liar. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to make you feel bad.”

“Now I like you even more, because you’re not even judging me.”

“Fine. Fuck off you jealous prick. Decan is my man now.” tried and failed to keep a straight face.

Marco playfully knocked her arm. “Why are you so damn nice?”

“Nice? I just called you a prick!”

“Yeah, with a huge grin on your face.”

“Thank you for saving him.” Marco only cocked his brow at her, so continued, “He said you pulled him out of the car and stayed by his side during recovery when no one else did.”

“That’s what brothers do.”

“I’m sure it couldn’t have been easy. So, thank you.”

“I suppose I should thank you too.”

“For what? Stealing your best friend away?”

“For walking up to him that day in the coffee shop. And calling him.”

“Well, he’s a cutie pie. How could I have passed up that opportunity.”

“You and I both know that other people would’ve seen the wheelchair and looked the other way. ”

“I like the premium parking.” Then she sobered. “I just hope that I can make him see how amazing he is.”

“You’ve made a good start.”

The two of them had slowly circled the car as they talked. When returned to Decan, he shook Tay’s hand again before the man walked off. “Do you mind if we look at the other cars?”

“Not at all.”

“You two love birds should circle back around after you’re done so we can have

lunch together.”

“We’d love to,” she agreed.

When the show started to dissolve, they met back up with Marco and after confirming that Laura was meeting them for lunch, they agreed on the Galleria Mall.

kept a hand on Decan’s thigh as he drove, her thumb brushing the denim. “Why did Tay call you a trust fund baby?”

“Because I am.” He grinned over at her. “That’s how I bought my apartment. My family is well off and my parents’ only condition for me gaining access to my trust fund was to graduate college.”

“Oh. So I really didn’t have to feel bad for that dinner date, huh?”

“Not one little bit.”

Laura was already waiting for them in the parking lot, pulling into a hug before doing the same to Decan. “You’re missing someone.”

“Probably having trouble fighting off all the ladies because he’s driving his sexy car today.”

“I heard that, dumbass,” Marco muttered, approaching from behind them. He held out his hand to Laura. “Hi, you must be ’s other half.”

“Basically.”

They parted ways to grab their different cravings at the food court, then met up at one of the tables in the middle. Though Laura seemed distracted, so followed her

gaze—right to her ex-girlfriend. Then Lisa started walking their way. Before she could reach the table stood and stopped her in her tracks. “You should leave.”

“I was just going to say hi.”

“She doesn’t want to talk to you.”

“Maybe you should let her make that decision,” Lisa snarled, trying to duck around her.

Without taking her eyes off Lisa, asked, “Laura, would you like to speak to Lisa?”

“No, thank you.”

“She’s made her decision. Now leave before I cause a scene.”

“You don’t need to be such a bitch about it.”

“I’d consider it if you hadn’t cheated on my best friend. Go. Now.”

“I didn’t cheat!” Lisa defended.

“Oh, really? Should I show our friends the screenshots and let them decide?” Defeated, Lisa left, and returned to her seat, where Decan watched her with wide eyes. “Sorry.”

“Why are you apologising? That was hot.”

“That’s the sign of someone getting lucky tonight,” Marco chided, giving Decan a playful punch. “Well played.”

Decan rolled his eyes, but the grin he flashed her was full of optimism.

“So, Laura, have you two been friends a while?” Marco asked.

“Since high school. And you two?”

Marco turned to Decan with a conniving grin. “It was junior year that you beat the shit out of me, right?”

“Yeah,” Decan returned, a fond smile curling his lips.

crooked a brow at her man. “And that made you two best friends?”

“How else? What made you two decide to be best friends?” Decan countered with a laugh.

“ was the only girl who didn’t mind hanging out with me after I came out. All the others thought I would turn them gay.”

“And was always a firm believer in dick, despite that?” Marco teased.

Laura laughed. “Yes, she has.”

“No friend zone situation going on here?” Marco cheekily pressed.

“Nope, not at all.”

“Shame,” Marco frowned playfully.

The four of them got along really well. could easily see an alliance forming between Laura and Marco.

“Let’s go to the waterfall,” Laura suggested after spending hours strolling through the mall. “I’ve wanted some new pictures of us for ages and now we have someone to take them.”

“Damn, I see how it is—only using us for our photography skills.” Marco playfully frowned, but he willingly followed Laura as she dragged all of them along .

Once at the waterfall, Laura handed her phone to Decan and pulled with her to pose. Once they had some options, Laura went to check them and seemed ecstatic with Decan’s photography skills.

Then with a bright grin she ushered Decan to replace her. “You two better get some cute pictures in.”

When Decan hesitated, of course Marco jumped in. “C’mon. You two look cute together.”

Decan didn’t seem very comfortable when he closed the distance between them, so she leaned down to him, twirling his hair around her finger and kissing his cheek. “I’m sorry she’s being so pushy.”

Instead of an answer, Decan pulled her in for a more passionate kiss. “It’s not that I don’t want a picture with you, it’s just—”

“I know, you don’t have to justify how you feel towards me. I get it.”

“Perfect!” Laura cheered, already moving towards the waterfall where they took even more pictures—this time just the two of them. The only exception was made for a picture with all four of them.

By the time they got back to Decan’s place, was exhausted. She let Decan feed Mr.

Grumps, who'd been a good boy by solving his treat puzzle again and collapsed on the couch.

"Are you staying another night?" he asked.

"I'd love to." While Decan busied himself in the kitchen with dinner, held Mr. Grumps in her lap and spoiled him with attention. "How are you feeling?"

He took a moment before answering. "Good, but also... strange. It was hard being back and knowing I'm not the same guy from all those years ago."

"Do you regret going?"

"Yes and no. I feel like it was necessary, but now I'm upset to have that reality check cashed in."

"I think you did really well."

"Thank you." Before she could get up, Decan brought her dinner to her. "We could watch a movie and cuddle. You look exhausted too."

smiled. "Sounds like my kinda night."

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Hope was already dozing off when he climbed into bed and snuggled in close from behind. She melted into his arms that wrapped around her, and felt like a perfect fit. He tried to hide his growing erection, but she knew him far too well. A dainty hand reached, palming the hardening bulge behind his sweats.

“We don’t have to do anything,” he assured. “I know you’re tired. I just can’t help it.”

“Looks like we’re sleeping in tomorrow then.”

That was all the permission he needed. His fingers pushed under her pants tracing her stretch marks before he slipped between her cheeks. “You said you liked it too, didn’t you?”

“I did,” she hummed, arching into his touch.

“Please, little thief. Will you let me fuck you like you did me last night?”

She moaned and nodded eagerly.

His breathing intensified, nose skimming over the back of her neck. “Will you guide me?”

“Of course, I will.”

“Do you want the plugs?” he asked but couldn’t resist pressing his fingers against her tight hole .



“And the vibrator please.”

He pulled away long enough to collect what they needed while Hope stripped bare. Moulding to her back once more, he handed her the vibrator, massaging a generous amount of lube into the skin around her hole. He was gentle, trying to keep her focus on the kisses he spread along her neck.

“Just like that,” she hummed, the toy buzzing between her thighs. “You’re going to do so well.”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he admitted, terrified to give her a similar experience to before.

“You won’t,” she promised, rocking onto his fingers, forcing more pressure. He added more lube just to be safe, then pressed one of the plugs into her. “Don’t be afraid, baby. I can take it.”

He shuddered, humming into the crook of her neck and pushing the toy deeper.

“Just don’t push it all the way in. Stop at its thickest point. I don’t like the feeling of it being pulled out again.”

He felt her relax, her hips rolling between the toys encapsulating her. She was using the vibrator to take her focus away from the discomfort, just like he’d focused on her hand on his cock. He grew painfully hard from the memory alone.

“I trust you, baby.”

“Oh, little thief, you can’t say those kinds of things.”

He swallowed a moan, muffling the pathetic sounds coming from him with his lips

against her neck. He gave her time to adjust to the plug's size, making sure never to push it too deep, just as she'd asked him. Then he lubed up the second, larger toy and pressed it into her .

“Good, don't stop,” she moaned. He loved hearing her, even more he loved how she relaxed into him. She shifted slightly, reaching back to give his thick cock a firm squeeze. “I'm ready for you.”

“But I'm so much bigger,” he protested, terrified of hurting her.

“Trust me, baby.”

He let out a breath, added more lube to himself, and lined his cockhead up with her entrance. The buzzing between her thighs intensified as he pressed past the first ring of muscle.

“Oh fuck, you're so tight,” he groaned, precum mixing with the lube and slicking her up even further

She whimpered. “Take it slow, baby.”

He needed every ounce of restraint he possessed to hold himself still while Hope adjusted. She was so tight, he almost blew on the spot.

“You're doing so well, giving me what I'm craving.”

Hope rocked back into him, and he gave a slow thrust of his hips. “So, fucking tight.”

“Don't stop, baby,” she begged, and he shuddered. As much as he loved begging for her, it was just as pleasing to hear. “Go a little faster.”

He couldn't have slowed if he tried. It was hell to keep himself from coming instantly. The whimpers that escaped her were soft and sweet, a melody he'd grown addicted to. "You feel so good, little thief."

"More," she begged. "Please, baby."

How could he resist? While his grip tightened around her waist he pressed further. Then her whole body trembled and fell limp, a soft cry escaping her. "Too much?" he asked .

"Perfect," she whispered, a waver in her voice.

Fuck. Had he hit her sweet spot? Just thinking about it had him ready to come. He rolled his hips, grazing that spot again and the resulting moan had his cock jumping. Holding off would be so fucking hard. He found a rhythm, pumping his hips and making her emit those beautiful noises over and over. Addicted, he couldn't wait, loving how she trusted him so deeply that she gave herself to him entirely.

"You feel so good," he breathed, his cock thrusting into her.

Hope was completely limp, her body his to please—to use . He reached his hand around her and searched for the vibrator that she'd dropped. With it in hand, he placed it over her clit once more.

"No," she gasped, attempting to jolt away.

"Please, little thief. I want to feel it inside of you."

Hope panted, but spread her thighs for him to push the vibrator into her. Immediately he jerked, feeling the vibration through her walls tickling his oversensitive cock.

“Fuck I’m going to come.”

Hope fought for each breath, his cock slamming into her. “I’m yours, baby.”

He thrust fast and hard, careful not to bury himself completely. He didn’t want to hurt her, but he desperately needed the release. His fingers tingled, gripping her hip like a vice as his orgasm crashed into him, fierce and relentless. His body wasn’t his own, aftershocks trembling the muscles and his cock pulsing until he was sure there’d be nothing left. He stilled, wrapping his arms tight around her.

“Don’t pull out,” she breathed. “We’re going to make a mess. ”

She leaned into him as he spoiled her with lots of kisses. “You okay?” he asked, afraid he’d taken it too far.

She nodded, pulling the vibrator from her pussy and turning it off. “Loved every second of it.”

He held her for a while before she moved, pushing some fabric between them and then climbing out of bed. In the dim light he saw her use her panties to stop his cum from dribbling down her thighs. He scolded himself for not having tissues close by and made a mental note to add some to their stash. He rolled onto his back and before he could reach for his chair, Hope returned with a wet cloth for him.

God, he loved her.

He practically froze. That thought scared him to death. They’d only just met and he was head over heels in love with her. But how else would one describe that cosy, heart-fluttering feeling she gave him by doing the simplest of tasks. Because that’s what she was doing: making him feel comfortable and cared for without it being a burden. Not once had she made him feel inadequate or incapable.

Hope kissed his cheek before returning to the bathroom to wash the toys, then she collected their dirty clothes and threw them in the laundry hamper.

Once she'd climbed back in bed, he held her tight as she slipped into sleep, his thoughts still buzzing around the thought of loving her. Was it really that easy to fall in love? And to fall so fast?

He dozed off himself, his mind dizzy from the words swirling there. He only woke back up when his phone started ringing. He groaned, frustrated to be woken so rudely

Hope stirred too and suppressed a yawn. "Everything okay?"

fumbled for the offending device and checked the screen. "Yeah, just my mom." He kissed her and made sure to tuck her back in after leaving the bed. "Sleep a little longer."

She hummed in agreement and curled back up.

With Mr. Grumps on his lap, he went to the kitchen and returned his mom's call.

"Hi sweetheart," she answered right away.

"Hi."

"You sound sleepy. Did I wake you?"

"Yeah, but it's fine. Everything okay?"

"Yes. I just wanted to go over our vacation details."

Oh, shit. With all his focus on Hope the past few weeks, he'd nearly forgotten his upcoming family vacation. It was an annual thing: booking a resort for a few days to make sure they all spent some sort of time together since everyone had moved out.

As his mother went over the details of flights and suites, he started the coffee machine and fed Mr. Grumps.

Shit.

Mr. Grumps!

How could he have forgotten?

"Mom?" started in that tone that usually meant he'd done something wrong.

"Yes?"

"I did a thing, and I may have forgotten about our vacation while doing so. "

"Oh no, what have you done?"

"I adopted a cat."

There was a long pause, then a laugh. "Since when are you a cat person?"

"Well, Mr. Grumps had a spell on me." Shit . He couldn't just leave the poor cat.

"I'm so sorry, Mom."

Another laugh as she relayed the message to his dad. "That will make things a little more complicated. So will I see a picture of this mysterious new friend you've made?" He quickly sent one from the hundreds he'd taken since bringing the cat

home. “Ah, I see why he’s called Mr. Grumps.”

“I’ll see if Marco can watch him.”

“Well let us know if you figure it out.” And with another disbelieving laugh, she hung up.

“Shit,” he mumbled.

“What happened?” Hope yawned, stepping into the room.

“I forgot about our annual family vacation when I adopted Mr. Grumps and now I don’t know what to do.”

She crooked her brow at him and started the coffee machine for her own hit of morning caffeine. “You forgot about a vacation?” Then she laughed. “You truly are a trust fund baby.”

glared at her, but he’d never let on that it bothered him. “Thanks.”

With a grin, Hope leaned down and kissed his cheek. “I’ll watch him.”

“Well...” he started, unsure of continuing after the trust fund jab. “I was going to ask you if you would like to come too. ”

“On your family vacation?”

“Yeah.”

She bit her lip and leaned against the counter, staring into her mug. “I would be meeting your family.”

“You would,” he confirmed

“And you’re ready for that?”

“Is that too fast for you?”

She slowly shook her head. “No, I just... it means you’re serious.”

“I am.”

Their eyes met, Hope’s suddenly shy and hesitant. “What if they don’t like me?”

“They’d better, because I like you.”

She still worried her bottom lip, searching his face for any hint of a lie. “Do they know about me? Because now I feel bad I haven’t told my parents about you.”

“I honestly haven’t told them either. I was going to tell Mom, but then I got distracted with Mr. Grumps.”

Hope giggled. “Will Marco watch him for you?”

“Does that mean you’re coming along?”

“When and where are you going?”

“Cancun in three weeks.”

“I haven’t put in a vacation for this year, but I can talk to my boss. How much is it going to be?”



“For you? Not a dime.”

“But that’s a huge expense.”

“Remember your rule?”

“I call for a review when it comes to luscious vacations.”

“Well, you didn’t have much say in the location and I think it’s only fair that if the decisions are already made, I should pay. If we ever plan a vacation together, we can split it. How about you talk to your boss first and then we worry about money?”

“Fine, but know that I feel bad for taking you up on that offer.”

“Come here.” Hope set the cup on the counter and sat her fine ass in his lap, wrapping her arm around his shoulder. “I appreciate that you don’t want to take my money. It means a lot to me. But please know that I want to spoil you and adding a second person to a room I’ve already paid for will be nothing.”

“I believe you.”

He pulled her into a kiss and then spoiled her by cooking her a late breakfast. She spent a little more time with him, but left early in the afternoon to run some errands and clean her apartment that she’d hardly spent any time in over the last couple of days.

Once she was gone, he rang Marco, hoping he wouldn’t rip his head off.

“Hi, man.”

“Hi, I have a request, and I would appreciate it if you agreed.”

“Where is the body and who’s car are we taking?”

“Funny, but this one is more on the legal side. I need someone to watch Mr. Grumps while I’m in Cancun—with Hope.”

“I hate you.”

“I thought you might say that, so I’m willing to pay.”

“Fine but only because I think it’s fucking adorable that you’ re taking her to meet your family.”

“She still has to see if she can take time off, so if she can’t, she said she’ll watch him.”

Marco teased him a little more, but took it as a yes, letting out a sigh of relief and continuing to start his workday.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

A few weeks later, Laura stood by 's side as she packed for her romantic getaway. Clothes littered the bed, going through a gruelling selection process with approval from Laura.

“I like those rompers, but maybe I should take you dress shopping,” Laura said, holding up one of the outfits.

“I do need a new swimsuit.”

“A bikini?” Laura asked, a hopeful lilt to her voice.

stopped that idea in its tracks. “You know I hate wearing a two-piece.”

“Fine , a sexy one-piece it is. Will you be staying right on the beach?”

“Yes. Well, Decan said it’s an all-inclusive resort with a short walk to a private beach.”

“How would that work with his wheelchair?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I guess we’ll find out.”

“Are you nervous to meet his family?”

“Peeing my pants kind of nervous.” She collapsed onto the bed and looked up at her best friend. “What if we don’t get along? They seem so... posh when he talks about them.”

“Well... They’d be foolish not to love you. You’re a catch.”

“I thought you said you’ve never had a crush on me,” laughed.

Laura rolled her eyes and pelted with the rumpled piece of fabric in her hands. “Take the damn compliment.”

“Fine. Thank you.”

“Just be yourself. The minute they see you and Decan together, they’ll know you’re meant to be.”

The night before the trip, had trouble sleeping. They had an early-morning flight so by the time she climbed out of the Uber in the drop-off lane, she was nothing more than a ball of nerves.

Inside the terminal, made her way toward Decan on shaky legs. He wasn’t alone and judging by the head count, she seemed to be the last one to arrive—what a great first impression.

“Hi,” she greeted sheepishly.

Decan held out his hand and ran his thumb soothingly over her knuckles as he introduced everyone: his mom, Cally, and his Dad, Daniel. Then his siblings, Samuel and Lilly. Lastly, Lilly’s husband, Aron.

“It’s nice to meet you all.”

“Can we hug you?” Samuel asked. “Mom said it might be too personal—ow!”

Cally had just slapped him on the shoulder. She had the same beautiful curls as all her

children, neatly tied up with a defined bow. “I didn’t it want to be awkward that is all.” She st age-whispered to Samual. “And now you’ve made it awkward.”

smiled, opening her arms. “I don’t mind hugs.”

That seemed to break the ice. They checked in together and made their way to the security line. They had pre-check, but that didn’t seem to speed up the process for Decan. They couldn’t let him go through the metal detector, opting to give him a physical pat down and swabbing his wheelchair.

“Fucking hate it every time,” he mumbled, following his family towards the gate.

She had her hand back on his neck, soothing him with soft strokes to his hair. “Does flying bother you?”

“Depends on the staff and airline. The transfer out of the wheelchair can be a shitshow. Some let me do it on my own, others insist on helping me into the seat. It’s worth it to get to travel though.”

“I’ve never been to a resort.”

Decan turned his head and kissed her wrist. “Well, you’d better be prepared to relax and be spoiled. What are you looking forward to the most?”

“The food and the spa. I saw they had couples’ massages. I was hoping you’d go with me.”

“Of course. I think the rest of the guys will be doing lots of golfing and Mom and Lilly will be at the pool most days.”

“Do you think they’d let me golf too? I’ve always wanted to try.”

“Are you kidding? Dad will be your best friend for even asking.”

When it was time to board, Decan was luckily able to handle himself. She'd only flown a few times in her life and never in business class, so she was a little starstruck to say the least. Decan let her have the window seat and held her hand during take-off. Though the flight was short, she dozed off to Decan's fingers massaging her neck and her hand on his thigh.

When the time came to deplane, they waited for everyone else to pass by before Decan transferred himself back to his chair. The family chatted away, but was too shy to contribute.

“So, how did you and Decan meet?” Lilly asked as they were driven to the resort in a minibus.

“I saw him reading a book that you rebound for him and needed to know where he got it from.”

“Oh gosh,” Samuel groaned. “You shouldn't have told her that. She'll take credit for you two meeting all your life now.”

Looking back, saw Lilly roll her eyes. “No, I won't.”

“Please,” Samuel disagreed. “It'll be in every wedding speech you give until the end of time.”

“I'll bet against it,” Aron said, turning to his wife. “You better not disappoint.”

Cally leaned closer and gently squeezed 's shoulder. “You'll fit right in.”

wasn't sure if Cally knew how much that meant to her but if Decan's smile was any

indication, he was just as relieved.

Check-in was a breeze and when saw their room, her jaw dropped. It was a modern suite with an ocean view and a jetted tub on the balcony. There was a king-sized bed and a large marble bathroom. The spaces between furniture were large enough for Decan to fit by without having to squeeze. The best though, were the treats on the bed and the towels folded to look like swans. “Wow.”

“Told you to be ready to be spoiled.”

She dropped her backpack and walked out onto the balcony, a warm breeze and the salt air tickling her nose. “This is gorgeous.”

Decan came up behind her and rubbed the small of her back. “I’m glad you like it.”

“Like it? I love it!”

He chuckled and took her hand in his, kissing her knuckles. “Good.”

soaked in more of the stunning view before they needed to meet everyone else for lunch. She was in heaven, seeming to try one of everything. Decan’s family was wonderful as well, and she found it easy to get along with them. His mom was asking curious questions about her, from work to family and how she got him to adopt Mr. Grumps. Decan’s hand was on her bare thigh, teasing under the thin fabric of her romper. He wasn’t shy about being affectionate with her in front of his family, kissing her side here and there.

When they retreated back to their room with the intention of changing for the pool, she couldn’t hide her fatigue any longer. “Sorry. I’ve been so nervous the past few days I just couldn’t sleep.”

“And all of it for nothing. They adore you already.”

“I know.” She groaned and flopped onto the bed, face down. “But if you told me beforehand, I still would’ve been nervous.”

The bed dipped as Decan sat next to her. “It’s okay to take a nap. We don’t have to do everything with everyone.”

She reached over her head and pulled a pillow closer. “Maybe just a few minutes.”

Decan kissed her head, and she felt him shuffle onto the bed before his fingers combed softly through her hair. With the weight of meeting his family gone, she dozed off, her mind feeling much lighter.

She only woke up when his lips brushed over her ear. “Little thief?”

“Hm?” she hummed, stretching her muscles.

“It’s been an hour, but if you want to sleep longer you can.”

“Oh, god,” she yawned and pushed herself up. “That escalated quickly.”

“You clearly needed it. Besides, you looked so peaceful I couldn’t bring myself to wake you.” Decan’s phone buzzed and he looked down with a grin. “Samual is asking if we’re trying to make them jealous or what could possibly be taking us so long.”

Heat trickled up her neck. “Oh, no—they think we’re having sex.”

“Yeah, they do.” He laughed and pulled his wheelchair closer, securing the brakes. “Prepare yourself for inappropriate jokes.”



“I’m guessing he won’t believe me when I say I was sleeping.”

“You’re on the money with that assumption.”

They changed, Decan’s eyes glued to her as she pulled out her new wine red swimsuit. When she covered herself with a light beach dress, he frowned. “You look stunning. You shouldn’t cover that up.”

She twirled and tossed her hair over her shoulder. “Don’t worry. I’ll take it off once we are at the pool.”

“Perfect.”

They didn’t have to search for long before finding his family beneath three beachy canopy beds—she wasn’t even sure what they were called—that overlooked the ocean and the rest of the resort.

“Ah, the long-lost honeymooners,” Samuel teased right away.

“Let them be,” Cally scolded. “Our cocktails should be here soon. You two can order then.”

took the free spot next to Samuel leaving enough space for Decan to be next to her. “Oh, I hope they have alcohol free ones. I’m such a lightweight.”

Samuel clapped his hands and threw her a mischievous grin. “Perfect. Time to share your deepest darkest secrets.”

“Sure. You start and I’ll join in later,” chided.

“I think is going to get on just fine,” Lilly laughed and looked over at her brother.

“She seems like she can handle misbehaved brothers quite well.”

“Do you have siblings?” Cally asked.

“No; it’s just me and my parents. I think I scared them off from having more kids,” she laughed. “Apparently I was quite the handful from day one.”

“I was the total opposite. I came along and they thought, ‘This can’t be that bad.’” Lilly laughed. “Then Samuel happened. Maybe they wanted nature to redeem itself and tried for Decan, but I’m not sure how well that turned out for them.”

Both men stared at their mother, who conveniently had her nose buried in the pages of her thriller.

“So much fucking support,” Decan grumbled, making everyone laugh.

After the first cocktails had been downed, Lilly insisted on pulling into the pool with her. The stairs into the heated water were out of earshot from the rest.

As soon as they dipped in, Lilly looked at her with the sweetest of smiles. “He seems so happy with you. We’ve known that he’s had girlfriends over the years, but he’s never introduced us to anyone.”

“I was really nervous to meet all of you.”

“I’m sure you were. Being introduced to the family is a big step for anyone and from what Decan said you two haven’t been dating that long.”

“A little over a month,” confirmed.

They swam alongside each other until they found some chairs in the water. “He’s

been so hard on himself since the accident,” Lilly continued. “It’s nice to see him... happy again. This is going to sound mean but I have to know. You are with him for the long game, right? You’re not just going to bolt when things get hard?”

“I am. I don’t like making promises, but my intention is to get to know him for a long-term relationship.”

“I know and I’m sorry for being so intrusive. I just don’t want him to be hurt.”

“I understand. He is your little brother after all.”

“I love him, even if he can be a pain in the ass. ”

“Are they this protective of you too?”

“Oh, you should have seen Aron’s interrogation. They watched him like a hawk. I’m sure there were threats involved too, but Aron refuses to tell me.”

“I think Decan is onto you too. He’s giving us a look.”

“Just know we’re happy for the both of you and hope it all works out. You two are super cute together.”

“Don’t tell him that. He takes his bad boy image very seriously.” They both laughed, and was relieved. Getting along with Decan’s siblings was a huge milestone. After all, Lilly might as well be her new sister-in-law. “Can I ask you a favour?”

“Of course.”

“Decan gifted me the book you rebound for him, but he said you never bound the rest of the series because you hated the cover.”

“Let me guess: you want a complete set?”

shrugged. “It would be nice to have them all match.”

“Show me a picture, and I’ll try my best to make them.”

The conversation went to their love of books, and Lilly confessed how she and Decan had gotten their obsession from their mother. After a while, Aron approached with a fancy-looking cocktail in each hand. “I thought you two might want a drink. All the gossip must have made you thirsty.”

“Well, aren’t you a wonderful husband.”

“The best actually,” Aron said with pride.

took the drink and let her eyes travel back to Decan, who was smiling at her. She felt a little bad for leaving him behind , but as if Aron was guessing her thoughts he grinned down at her.

“He’s thrilled that the two of you are getting along.”

followed Aron with her eyes until he sat down next to Decan. She waved at him rather shyly, like a teenager with her first crush. Decan grinned back and blew her a kiss that turned her cheeks as red as her swimsuit.

“You two are adorable,” Lilly hushed and leaned back, sipping on her cocktail. “If you two don’t work out, I promise to torture him by keeping you around as my friend.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

smiled, relishing the domestic feeling he got in watching Hope sunbathe with his sister by the pool. Every so often she tossed him a breath-taking smile that made his heart stutter. When dinnertime approached, Hope and Lilly returned with a tipsy sway to their step.

“Hungry?” asked, pulling Hope to his side.

“Starving actually.”

“We’d better change and get some food.”

As they made their way back to their room, Aron called after them. “No naps this time!” Judging by the tone in his voice, they still didn’t believe that all they’d done was sleep.

“You’re cute when you blush,” hummed, turning to press a kiss to her palm. He adored how she always seemed to find a way to twist those fingers into his curls. “So will you share the stories my sister so kindly shared with you?”

“Why? Is there anything you don’t want me to know about?”

“A few actually.”

In the elevator, Hope leaned down and kissed his hair. “I’ll never reveal my secrets. But she did share that you never introduced any of your girlfriends to your family. That made me feel pretty special.”

“You are.”

He watched Hope pick through her clothes, selecting a flowery romper that gave the illusion of a dress without the discomfort. She caught him watching, and twirled around with a bright smile, giving him a full view of what he’d claimed as his.

“Fuck, I want to skip dinner and hear you moan my name until you fall asleep.”

Hope’s tongue trailed along her bottom lip, gaze travelling to his crotch where his erection tented his jeans. “Maybe we can have our dessert here?”

“I love the way you think.”

They left the room amused to find that this time, Lilly and Aron were on the receiving end of teasing jabs. Hope sought out his touch every second she could. As promised, she declined dessert and stood from the table, earning a chorus of comments from his family. She smiled the entire way to their room, though, she was exhausted, and he caught her hiding her yawns multiple times.

When she retreated to the bathroom, he rummaged through his suitcase and found the silk bag containing the toys. He undressed and grabbed his comfy basketball shorts before laying down on the bed.

Hope didn’t bother hiding her fatigue anymore when she emerged from the bathroom, wearing nothing but a black t-shirt.

“I would like to fuck you to sleep,” he admitted shamelessly, halting Hope in her tracks.

Her lips curled into a sweet, dreamy smile. “Please do. ”

He patted on the mattress next to him and spooned her from behind, melting his body against hers. He made sure to support her head with a pillow before pushing his arm under her neck and hugging her closer to him. Lips brushing a path from her shoulder to her ear, he purred and slipped his fingers between her thighs. “I enjoyed today. You looked so stunning and all I could think about was wanting to reward you.” He loved receiving her praise, so he was delighted to find her quivering beneath his.

Hope reached over her head and placed a pillow between her knees, making herself more comfortable. With his thumb pressed to her clit, he sunk his fingertips into her. Her resulting whimper filled the air as her hand slipped into his shorts and wrapped around his shaft.

“I want you to come around my cock, over and over, until you fall asleep in my arms.”

Hope leaned into more him, her thumb brushing over his cockhead. “I want that too.” And with another moan, she breathlessly added, “Please, baby.”

His erection jerked in her grip, her thumb catching a drop of precum and working it into his skin. “God, I love when you call me that.” He closed his lips around her earlobe and sucked, reaching for the silk bag. “Choose one that will make you come—and fast.”

Hope dipped her hand into the bag, retrieving a small rose that he hadn’t used on her yet. He retracted his fingers and sucked them clean. Hearing the slurping, Hope tipped her head back and watched in awe. He took his time, enjoying her reaction. It was only when he reached down to shove his shorts out of the way that the trance broke. Hope arched her ass into him as his cockhead slid over her luscious cheeks and between her thighs. He thanked his lucky stars that he got the chance to fuck Hope bare, feeling her walls hot and wet around his cock. She rolled her head back and his lips found her earlobe again.

“You feel so good,” he praised, teasing the skin with his teeth.

Her moan was sweetened by the toy’s suction as she pressed it against her clit and made her whole body jolt in his grasp. He held her in his arms, one around her shoulders and the other tight around her waist as he slowly thrust into her, desperate to hold off his own orgasm. He knew she didn’t need him to fuck her hard and fast—the rose would work its magic all on its own. He spoiled her with his fingers dancing over her skin and his lips sucking little red love bites over her neck as he indulged in the feeling of her pussy contracting around him.

“You’re making me feel so good, little thief,” he purred.

Hope shivered in his arms, pressing the button on the rose and throwing herself over the edge. He held her and soothed her with gentle kisses through the shocks of the orgasm. Only when her body calmed again did he take her wrist in his hand and guide it back to her clit.

“You did so well. Let me have another.”

She whimpered, but pressed the rose back to her still sensitive clit.

“Shh, just like that. Take your time.” His hips thrust a little faster, moving of their own accord. His own climax tingled the base of his spine. “Fuck you feel so good. I’ll be coming with you. ”

“And then I can sleep?” Her voice quivered, and he softly nipped her ear with his teeth.

“Yes, little thief, then you can sleep.”

He took her faster, holding her close and noting how perfectly she fit in his arms. She



let herself be used, every muscle of hers relaxed into him, her pussy clenching as she pushed herself over the edge for a second time. Her walls pulsed around him, and his cock jerked and spilled deep inside her.

His heart pounded in his chest, his body coming down from the high as he nuzzled into her neck. “You’re perfect.”

“I don’t want to move.”

“You don’t have to.” He reached for the tissues on the nightstand and used them to wipe her clean. “Do you want some panties?”

She nodded, so he scooted to the foot of the bed and pulled her suitcase closer, fumbling through until he found what he wanted. He helped her slip her feet in before cleaning himself and pulling her close. She was out cold before her head lay on his chest.

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

During breakfast, had taken a risk and had asked to join the men on their golf adventure. They'd been ecstatic, even after she'd revealed how horrible she would be. With the sun beaming down on them, she watched Daniel closely. He was explaining how to stand and swing properly. Samual and Aron stood to either side of her with beers in their hands. Decan had stayed behind with the woman, supposedly making sure they didn't get so drunk that they burned to a crisp.

"So, what do you think?" Samual asked, studying her with a curious expression. "Is Decan a keeper?"

His father shot him a stern glare. "Samual, knock it off."

"I just want to know if she wants him or the luxury vacation."

"Him," she said firmly, but trying not to make it sound bitchy.

"And you don't care he's in a wheelchair?"

"Fuck, man," Aron groaned, giving her an apologetic look. "She clearly doesn't. Have you seen the way she looks at him?"

"He always gets excellent parking," she quipped. "Oh and that bedroom? Super spacious."

And with that, Samual fell quiet. She did awfully at golf, missing the ball more often than not. When she did hit it, it wasn't anywhere near where it needed to be. She didn't understand the point system either, but she had fun and that was all she cared

about. The three men adopted her, helping her get the ball close enough for her to get at least one into the hole—or whatever one would call it. But she had to admit that the golf cart was the best part of it all. Daniel was sweet and thought it was funny that she'd been able to get Decan to adopt a cat without even trying. He'd only recently retired but was still dabbling in the trenches of stocks, having a good gut feeling about trades. Samual worked in finance, while Aron worked as night shift nurse in a small emergency room.

When they returned for an early dinner, she dropped herself onto Decan's lap and laid her arms around him. Like a magnet, his lips found hers, pulling her into a deep embrace that left her dizzy and breathless.

"You're in a good mood."

"Only because the guys were more than patient with me," she laughed, running her fingers through his hair. "Have you been at the pool all day?"

"Yes, with a book in one hand and one eye on my mom and sister."

"I think she did great for her first time," Daniel said.

"You're too kind." She gave him a nervous laugh. "I'm sorry about the club."

"You have a wide swing; I should've learned the first time."

They found a table at a different restaurant—apparently the resort thought it to be too boring to just have one—and started dinner with a bottle of wine being popped open. With her hand on Decan's thigh, she let her thumb smooth the denim of his jeans.

He leaned in for another kiss to her cheek, his lips brushing over her ear. "I was hoping we could try out that tub on the balcony tonight."

Lilly spoke up before he could answer. “Oh! Show the videos Marco sent you of Mr. Grumps.”

Decan pulled out his phone and showed her a video of Marco unsuccessfully trying to goad Mr. Grumps into playtime “He stayed all day. He says Mr. Grumps felt lonely but I think he just wanted to play my video games.”

“Because your TV is bigger than his?” she asked.

He nodded, pausing the video and pointing at the Xbox in the background. “Pretty sure he’s going to hunker down and eat all my snacks.”

“Who needs enemies when they have a best friend like that?” Aron laughed.

Decan gave her the phone so she could scroll through the other pictures Marco had sent. “At least neither of them will be alone.” With the last scroll, a photo of herself popped up. One of her by the pool with her ass on display.

“That one is for my eyes only.” Decan chuckled with a kiss to her ear.

After dinner, Decan let the tub fill with water while she stocked them up with refreshments from the minibar.

“Do you need help getting in?” she asked as he pulled his shirt over his head.

“I might. ”

felt awkward that someone might see them naked, but then the thrill of it sent a shiver down her spine.

“Can you hold me under my arms and make sure I don’t slip?” Decan asked.

“Of course.”

Stripped down to her underwear, she stepped inside and sat on the rim while he positioned himself next to her. He let his pants hit the floor and then used his gorgeously strong arms to transfer onto the rim and slowly sink himself into the steaming water.

“Thank you.”

“I didn’t do anything,” she said, kissing his hair. She quickly lost the rest of her clothes and settled between his knees, biting back a moan from the temperature of the water.

Decan reached around her, adjusting his legs and wrapping his arms around her shoulders. He began to speak, his lips finding that sweet spot on her neck. “You make me feel safe. I can ask for help without feeling inadequate. Being around you feels like being home, even out in public.”

She leaned into his touch, blanketing his arms with hers. She had no words to tell him how good his words felt—how soothing they were to her soul. She could only hope that she poured the emotion into everything she gave him.

“I always wondered what it would be like to not be able to hold my woman’s hand. But your hand finds my neck as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. Not once have you ever made me feel as if I was less independent than you—less of a man because I can’t stand tall next to you.”

“You need to stop talking because I’m going to cry if you don’t.”

Decan’s lips sealed around her skin and gently sucked as he tightened his arms around her. “But how would you know how I feel about you if I never told you?”

She rolled her head back and closed her eyes, soaking in the warm water, his touch, and his words. “I wouldn’t.”

“How would you know that you make me feel special? That you make me feel warm and fuzzy. You wouldn’t know how much I trust you or how much I relish your simple company.”

“Decan...” she breathed, her heart swelling with love from every word coming from his lips.

“Yes, little thief?”

“You made me cry.”

“In a good way?” But judging by his tone, he already knew the answer far too well.

“In the best possible way.” She tilted her head and found his lips, claiming them in a tear-stained kiss. “But how am I supposed to match those beautiful words?”

“Do you feel safe and sound in my arms, little thief?”

“Yes.”

“Do you feel respected and adored?”

“I do.”

He kissed her again. “I’m thankful you do, and I hope you always will.”

They stayed in that bath, watching the sunset until the water was cold and their skin started to prune. She made sure to dry his hands and the rim of the tub so he wouldn’t

slip, then helped him onto the rim. Again, she didn't have to do much. His workouts definitely did more than help him keep his gorgeous figure. With the windows open and the sounds of the ocean waves crashing, they fell asleep, tangled up in each other.

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Being with Hope felt wonderful. His fingers were laced through hers between the massage tables in the resort's spa. He could hear a subtle hum as the knots were kneaded away from her shoulders. He'd opted for a hot stone massage, the tension from his back easing with each new stone.

He loved how they could simply... be. There was no pressure to hold a conversation. Simply holding her hand and running his thumb over hers was all he needed. With his mind at ease and his body relaxed, he drifted into a state of pure content. On past vacations, he'd always avoided the spas, but this one was different—this one was special. And if he were honest with himself, he prayed all his future vacations would be the same—that his life would be the same.

After the massage, they shared an intimate lunch by themselves before heading to the beach for the day. It was a long walk, but they took their time. After all, they had nowhere else to be. They'd reserved a lounging bed right off the wooden walkway. Hope helped the few steps over the sand, assisting him to walk by his arms around her shoulders. He would've felt uncomfortable asking for help from anyone other than his family, possibly even Marco. But Hope had changed that for him—she made helping him natural.

"I want us to do something, but it might be..." She trailed off, her gaze avoiding his. "Well, your family has asked me a few times how serious I am, and I thought maybe we could talk about it."

"What did you have in mind?"

Blushing, she withdrew a small notebook from her bag. "I researched a few questions



someone should ask a partner before getting serious. There were a ton, but I picked through them.”

“These are ones that you felt were the most important?”

“Yes, but we can always add to them.”

“I like that idea.”

“Why don’t you read through them since I already have?”

took the notebook and skimmed over the questions. He had an answer for most of them, but a niggling feeling settled in the pit of his stomach. “What happens if we disagree on them?”

“That’s actually one of the last ones.”

Hope was right, the last one read: How Do You Handle Disagreements Or Fights?

He thought over it for a moment, then looked back to Hope. Her whole body was tense, her eyes hesitant. “I used to be a hothead. I couldn’t handle criticism well and took everything as a personal insult. Now, it depends on the situation. If I’m not able to listen to your side calmly and understand where you’re coming from, I’d like to suggest giving each other some space and addressing it once we’ve cooled down.”

Hope nodded along with him. “I’ve noticed I get hurt easily by criticism, so sometimes I feel defensive right away when someone disagrees with me.” Her eyes trailed to her lap where her fingers fidgeted with her jumpsuit. “I cry, especially when I’m angry and I often feel as if I can’t explain my side of view the way I would like.”

“So, would it help to take some time away from the situation and return to it once

you've collected your thoughts?" he asked.

"Yes. I think finding a middle ground is always the goal, but sometimes it should also be okay to agree to disagree."

He slowly nodded, liking her approach. "Not forcing something on the other person that they don't want."

"That's exactly it."

"I like the whole agreeing to not agree part." He moved to the next question. "What are your financial goals and how can we try to reach them?"

"I'm actually content where I am now. I don't have any debt and right now, I'm comfortable. I always thought of debt as being a big burden, so I try not to spend what I don't have." Hope smiled and gave a nervous laugh. "Seeing money in my savings account makes me happy."

"What about big purchases down the line like a house?"

"I mean, I pay rent now so it would be simply switching to a mortgage. But I don't want a potential house eating up all my money. I think a mortgage is an acceptable debt, though I don't want it to suck up my whole income. What about you? Do you have any debt?"

He nodded, hanging his head in shame. "I have medical debt. Since I was driving recklessly, the insurance didn't pay—which I understand. My parents wanted to pay it off for me, but I refused. I already owned my apartment outright, so I took the money I would have been paying in mortgage and that goes to my medical bills. Though I try to stay healthy, I'm at higher risk for more health issues along the way so this might be something that never goes away."

“Can I ask something unrelated to the list?”

“Of course.”

“You don’t have to answer.” When he gave her a nod, she continued, “Is paying off the medical bills some sort of punishment for yourself? I mean, if you’d paid them all in one chunk it would be done and over with. Why are you dragging it out?”

He focused on the notebook in his hands, squeezing it so fiercely that his knuckles turned white. Hope had hit something in him that he tried not to think about too much. “You could say that.”

When he said nothing else, Hope reached over and brushed the back of her hand along his arm. “What’s next on the list? Unless you had something else to say?”

He swallowed hard to find his voice again and asked, “What would you want to do about our finances if we were to stay together long term?”

“I saw a video about it once that stuck with me. That couple had four accounts: one for joint expenses, one for savings, and then a personal account each.”

A smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. “So, if you were to buy more books that would come out of your account?”

Hope laughed, the sound warming his veins. “Yes, but if I were to say... buy you a gift because you deserve it, that would come from my account too. I’m pretty sure there is more to that, but that’s a basic idea that I liked.”

“It sounds plausible.”

“Would you want a prenup? I mean your family has money, right? Is that something

they'd want?"

"I don't know how I'd feel about that," confessed. "I've never thought about it."

"Maybe that can be something for a future list."

He looked back down and read the next question. "How can I help you when you're stressed?"

"Oh, I liked that one. I'm such a mood-pleaser if that is even a term. Sometimes I just need space and someone to throw snacks at me from a safe distance. Other times, I just need someone to hold and listen to what I have to say. I don't always need advice, just someone to vent to."

"I'll make sure to have an emergency snack stash," he chuckled. "I often just need space, or distraction. The gym helps me deal with shit and Marco's gotten really good at reading my moods. Sometimes I go for fun, but then when I'm going through a bad phase, the pain helps me distract myself from my own head."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Next question?" When Hope nodded, he read it out loud. "Do you want children and what would we do if we struggle to get pregnant?"

"I had to think about this one for a long while." Hope shrugged. "I still don't have a clear answer. Kids are precious but at the same time, they're a huge responsibility. I think for now, I'm happy with not having any."

"Are you open to them later on?"

"Yes, if my partner is too. I don't wanna do it alone."

sighed, and tried to find the right words to voice his opinions. “I used to want children, at least one, but now I’m terrified of it. I struggled to take care of myself for so long, that the thought of taking care of a child terrifies me.”

“Well, look at it like this: we’ll save a lot of money on strollers.”

looked over to see her smiling at him. “I love how openly you deal with the whole wheelchair thing. Some would’ve been afraid to hurt my feelings to say something like that.”

“Did I?” she asked, worry filtering through her tone.

“No, you actually painted a really sweet picture.”

“So, babies are a possibility if the circumstances are right.”

“Do you want to talk about your expectations around childcare and parenting? You said that you don’t want to do it alone.”

“I don’t. I think if we were to have a child, we would share the responsibility. I also don’t see myself as a housewife in any sense. I would be willing to stay home for a little while, but I don’t want to give up work permanently.”

“I think the thought of staying home alone terrifies me because I’m afraid of not being able to care for them,” he confessed. “But I do believe parenting should be a joint effort, same with household chores. Just because one stays home to take care of the children doesn’t mean the other gets away with not helping around the house. ”

“I think you would do wonderfully.” Hope leaned over and kissed his cheek. “I think the fear of not being able to be a good father will make you a perfect one.”

took a moment, letting her words soothe his soul. “How much alone time do you need?”

“I think I mentioned before how I enjoy being alone right now after living with roommates, but I think it would be different if we lived together. What I would need really depends on my mood.”

“I think it’s important to do things without each other. You still want to be your own person while still being in a relationship, and I don’t want to lose myself in the partnership.”

“I agree. I also wouldn’t want to be questioned every time I decide to go to the store alone or simply want to go for a walk.” She started fidgeting with her jumpsuit again. “I mean, obviously we’d communicate, but space is important.”

“There is a thin line and if it’s balanced well, it doesn’t make the other feel controlled.”

“That’s exactly it.”

“How do we deal with our in-laws?” he asked, moving to the next question.

“You haven’t met my parents yet, but I think I’m getting along with your family so far. I think spending time with them is good and necessary, but it’s also good to let them know where that stops.”

“Set boundaries that we agree on and both enforce,” clarified.

“Yep. ”

couldn’t help but laugh at the next question. “Oh, great transition from in-laws. What

are your expectations on sex?”

Hope giggled and that beautiful blush tinted her cheeks again. “I like how it is now. Maybe it’s just a honeymoon phase, but I enjoy that I’m comfortable enough to try new things with you. I hope that we always stay open for each others’ feelings and suggestions.”

A warm, tingling feeling settled in his stomach and made his next words come easy. “You make me feel comfortable and safe. I like that we have a safe word and that we can trust each other to know when to use it. I’d rather not put a number on how often we should have sex because I don’t want it to be an obligation. If I ever feel like it is, I trust that you would be open to communicate and speak about it. Things always change, and I have a goal to be open about it when they do.”

“I like how you always take care of me,” Hope continued. “You make sure I’m comfortable. It makes me feel safe, and I think I’d like to adopt that goal as well. So whenever something changes for me, I’ll sit down and tell you.”

“What does marriage mean to you?” he asked, moving on to the next question.

Hope took a deep breath. “I put that question on there because it was mentioned a lot. It made me realise I’m in this for the long haul. Even if official marriage is something you don’t want, I want this to last. Wedding or no wedding, it means home and safety for me and someone I can trust unconditionally who only cares about my wellbeing.”

’s heart swelled. “I’m here for the long haul too. I don’t see marriage as some sort of goal, but as a stepping stone. I feel like some see marriage as the finish line, but I think it’s just an affirmation to the trust you have in someone.”

“I like that a lot.”

“I have a follow up question,” stated.

“I’m open to hearing it.”

“Since we both agreed that children are out of the picture for now, I think it’s only fair if we split the cost for birth control.” Hope stared at him as if he’d sprouted a second head. “Well, if we used condoms, we would both buy them, right? So I don’t mind contributing to the cost of your pill.”

“Can you be any sweeter?” felt himself blush, which only widened Hope’s grin. “My insurance covers it all. They’d rather shell out for birth control than childbirth.”

“Oh...”

“That was so damn sweet,” Hope reiterated.

He dramatically flipped his hair back and smirked at her. “Well, what can I say, I’m a little sugar cookie.”

Hope threw herself onto him and kissed him passionately, the weight of her body making his cock jerk. When she came up for air, she smiled at him. “So, you felt good about this whole questionnaire?”

“Yes, I really liked it. It makes me feel less anxious about your expectations for us both. Clarity is always a good thing.”

“I was afraid it would be awkward, but the little jabs from your family made me nervous because we hadn’t talked about it. I enjoy... us so much that I don’t want it to be ruined just because we didn’t talk openly from the start.”

He claimed her lips again, wanting nothing more than to reward her for being so



brave.

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

's heart raced as she pulled Decan to lie down on the cushions, grinding against his erection. She was over the moon that the conversation had gone so well. When laughter filled her ears she jolted away, the sound a shocking reminder that they were in public . But with no one else around, they'd felt like the only two people in the world. They were equally breathless as she freed Decan from her weight and dropped onto the pillows next to him.

“You’re going to make me lose my sanity, little thief,” Decan whispered.

“More like stealing it.”

“Just like you stole my heart.”

She curled herself into him, careful not to torture him too much.

The voices growing louder sounded familiar, and it was Aron and Lilly who appeared in front of them.

“I guess we weren’t the only ones trying to be romantic,” Aron teased. “Should we give you two some privacy?”

“No, you can hang with the cool kids,” Decan teased.

The four of them enjoyed the beach, with even taking off her jumpsuit to dip into the water. The sun, warm on her skin and the sand soft under her toes made her feel like she was living a dream. Cancun was nothing compared to the Galveston beach she was used to. She turned and found herself under Decan’s dreamy gaze, his eyes shining so

bright that they rivalled the sun itself.

That evening, they returned to their room, rather tipsy after a meal with his family. She stripped out of her clothes and sat on the bed, wearing nothing but one of Decan's shirts and watching as he revealed inch after breathtaking inch of his inked skin.

"How about you make yourself comfortable on the bed?" she suggested, unable to take her eyes off the growing bulge under his jeans.

He did as asked, losing his pants and lying comfortably on the bed with his head resting on the pillows. She set the bag of toys aside, double checking that the lube was there. Decan was hard, his cock jerking beneath the attention. Unable to see him suffer any longer she wrapped her hand around his shaft and leaned down to press her lips to his leaking tip. Her skin pebbled at his relieved groan, and her heart fluttered.

Wasting no more time, leaned over and took him into her mouth, flattening her tongue against his shaft to ease some of the pressure. He jerked and twitched, struggling to restrain himself from thrusting into her mouth. She bobbed her head until the taste of his precum coated her tongue.

With her hand slowly stroking him, she popped off of his dick. "Can I peg you tonight?"

"Yes, please," he said, eagerly panting and allowing himself a slow, tentative roll of his hips. "I would like that very much."

She adjusted her position, using her free hand to reposition Decan's legs. She lifted each leg, bringing his ankles together and letting his knees fall to the side. "How does it feel? Are you still comfortable?"

To her relief, Decan nodded.

“If it strains you too much, I want you to let me know.”

“I will, I promise.”

took his hand, sharing some of the lube with him and guiding him to jack himself as she lubed up the first plug. “I’ll be gentle,” she assured him, pressing the tip against his hole and returning her other hand to his cock.

Then, as she sealed her lips around his cockhead, she broke through the first ring of muscles. She flicked her tongue against him, pulling his attention away from the discomfort. Decan let out a pleased groan and arched towards her touch. took her time, letting him take the first plug to the widest point before switching to the next size up.

“Just like that, baby,” she hummed, kissing his cockhead.

Decan’s hand drifted over her side, to her ass where he grabbed her and pulled her closer. She spread her legs for him and let his fingers slide through her folds until he pressed against her clit.

She rocked onto his fingers, adding more lube and rewarding him with the large vibrator against his hole. He tensed out of reflex, but with one long, hard suck, his body relaxed and took the toy easily. With the tip of the toy submerged, snuck a glance at him. She couldn’t stop the butterflies dancing in her stomach. His eyes were closed, his lips curved into a pleased smile.

“You did so well. You’re taking it so much easier this time.”

She turned the vibrator on, amused when Decan’s body began to twitch. He looked

breathhtaking, a strong man melting only for her . She began to work the shaft in and out of Decan's tight channel, using the speed of his fingers to set her pace. If the vibrator moved faster, so did Decan, rewarding her by circling her clit.

"I have something else for us to play with. Would you like a new toy?" she asked.

Decan's eyes shot open and immediately found hers as he nodded emphatically.

She reached for the bag beside her again, his hand instantly replacing hers on his cock. "It's something for you to please me." First, she gave him the remote before showing him the new vibrator.

"I can control it for you?" he asked, studying the remote.

"Yes." She pointed at one of the buttons. "This one is to stimulate the clit and this one—"

"For your pussy."

Face on fire, she nodded. "Yes."

"Have you tried it out yet?" he asked, watching intently as she lubed up the toy and inserted it.

"Yes, I only like the first three settings. It starts slow and the third one is the highest." She grabbed a pillow and positioned it under her hips before laying her head on his stomach and pushing her arm under his leg. Her lips closed around his cock again, sucking and licking as she thrust the toy in and out of his tight hole. She twitched when her pussy started buzzing and her clit was assaulted in the best possible way. Her hips ground into the pillow, her moans muffled by his cock. His thumb crept back, circling her hole. Cold lube drizzled between her cheeks, then his fingers were

working at her again.

used Decan's cock as a distraction from the stretch, grinding into the pillow beneath her. Once she adjusted, it felt good, his finger gently dipping in and out of her.

She let herself fall into the bliss, her body chasing the release and her desperately trying to return the favour. When she upped the vibrations for him, he mirrored her and made her body tingle all the way to her toes. Her heart raced and her head spun. This was overwhelmingly good, and she loved it. She ground harder and faster, sucking Decan's cock to the back of her throat as she fucked him with the toy. He groaned and grunted for her, writhing beneath her until her orgasm washed over her. As if that was his permission, he groaned, shooting his cum down her throat and intensifying her climax.

She panted, desperate for air as she gently removed the toys from both of them. Only then did she collapse onto the pillows next to him. "You did wonderful."

"That was amazing."

She took another moment, and then sat up and kissed his cheek. She collected the toys, rinsing them off in the bathroom and returning with a cloth for Decan to freshen up.

Once she was back in bed, Decan pulled her on top of him and traced his fingers over her spine. "I already dread going home. "

"We can still do naughty things together at home," she assured, nuzzling herself against his throat.

"I know, but that also means I have to share you with the rest of the world. You have to go back to work, and we have adult responsibilities that we can't ignore."

Choosing to put off reality for another day, soaked in his caresses, drifting off into a deep sleep.

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

They spent the entirety of their final day at the pool. He was sitting on the stairs, watching Hope swim around in the water. She dove beneath the surface, emerging with a splash right by his knees.

smiled. “My little thief is turning into a mermaid.”

“Do you want to swim too?”

He took her face into his hands and kissed her softly. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Hope swam away and he pushed himself into the water. At first, he’d had trouble swimming but over time it had become easier. It still wasn’t the same, but he did enjoy it more now. Hope popped back up next to him splashing him with water before diving down again and swimming underneath him.

“Want a swim noodle?” his mom offered from the sidelines.

Hope popped up just in time to hear and held out her hand. “I’ll take one.”

A few moments later they were both floating in the water, her dreamy, playful eyes fixed on him. “Enjoying the view?” he asked teasingly.

“Very much so.”

“I want to take you to my favourite spot after dinner to watch our last sunset here.”

“Can we take dessert with us? I saw that tonight’s restaurant has strawberry cake.”



“Of course we can. Did you have fun these last few days? I mean, you looked like it, but did you get to do everything you wanted?”

“Yes. The biggest thing I wanted was to spend time with you and meet your family. I was thinking... Maybe we could meet my parents for lunch or something when we get back?”

“I’d be honoured.”

“I promise they won’t bite, but they’ve been excited to meet you ever since I first mentioned your name.”

After a wonderful final dinner with his family, stocked up his lap with strawberry cake and a bottle of champagne before leading Hope to his favourite spot of the resort. The lookout tower wasn’t often visited since most sought out the beach at sunset. As Hope spun in a slow circle, taking in the view, he set everything on the railing and pulled himself out of his chair. This was why he loved it here. He was able to stand and enjoy the view. The mangroves were just beneath them and separated the hotel complex from the beach, giving it a true feeling of a natural paradise. Hope’s arm wrapped around him, but he wanted to hold her like he would have his woman before the accident.

“Come here,” he husked, putting space between him and the railing. She obeyed, and he leaned against her, keeping most of his weight on his arms and kissing her neck. “Thank you for coming with me. I loved having you here, loved seeing how you get along with my family. Loved all the talks we had. And especially...” hesitated, but he was sure of his next words. “I love you. I know it’s still early to say that, but I feel them from deep within my heart.”

Hope turned and wound her arms around his neck, her fingers twisting through his hair. “You always seem to find a way with your words to express how I feel. I know

it's early, but when you know you know. I loved spending time with you and becoming closer to each other. And yes, , I love you too."

He dipped his head down and stole a kiss, soft and passionate. "I have a question, and you don't have to answer it now. You can take your time and think about it."

Hope rested her forehead against his and closed her eyes. "I'm ready."

"I would like you to move in with me and Mr. Grumps. I know you said you enjoy being by yourself right now, so maybe we can start slowly. One weekend at a time."

Hope smiled, and 's heart warmed. "I love that idea."

Hope kissed him again before she turned around and watched the sunset, the whole time he cherished her with his lips on every bit of exposed skin he could find. Once his arms got tired, he sat back down and Hope made herself comfortable in his lap, eating her favourite dessert and sipping on champagne.

He nuzzled into her neck, thinking that he could really get used to this.

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It had been a week since they'd returned, and Hope was unpacking a small suitcase with her personal things—the first pieces she would officially move into their home. He'd made room in the closet for her, freaking out about what he could do to start making his apartment feel like her home.

“Are you nervous about tomorrow?” she asked, threading some of her clothes on to hangers.

nodded. “I know you said your parents are looking forward to it, but what if they don't like me?”

“What about you is not to like?”

“Tattoos, self-employed, wheelchair-bound... I could go on.”

“Hot, attractive, accomplished, premium parking and accommodations everywhere...” Hope countered, leaning over to kiss his cheek. “They'll love you.”

He sighed, unable to push that stupid fucking seed of insecurity away. He knew that some people saw him as less of a man because of his disability and up until then he'd always been able to fight that demon in his mind. But meeting Hope's parents—more specifically her father—was screwing with him.

Hope sat down on the bed and took his hand in hers. “What 's bothering you the most? Is it really the thought of them rejecting you for being in a wheelchair?”

“Kind of. Isn't the man supposed to be the protector? Isn't that what a father would

want for their daughter?”

“You are my protector. You shield me from the world and fulfil my need for safety every minute we spend together. Do you think I would be with you if I felt unsatisfied in any way? You’re my safe space and luckily for you and me there are no mammoths or Saber-toothed tigers out there who want to eat us. You’ve created a bond with me that I feel safe and sound with. You’ll have my back and watch out for me, that’s all they care about.”

sighed, though he had to admit he felt a little better. “I know. I just feel insecure about not being what they hoped for you. I can’t even get into your apartment myself.” She let her thumb stroke over the back of his hand, clearly trying to find a way to make him feel better. Another sigh and he leaned in to kiss her cheek. “I appreciate what you said, and it helps calm my thoughts and worries. I’m just too much in my head right now. I didn’t mean to pull you down with me.”

She stole a sweet kiss before she asked, “Why don’t you text Marco to see if he’s free for some gym time?”

pondered the suggestion for a moment. “Will you come too?”

“I wouldn’t miss that sexy view for anything.”

The workout did help calm his nerves—at least for the time being. They threatened to invade again when they returned home but Hope could read him like an open book. Before he could let his insecurity grow and take over his mind, she stepped into the shower with him and sank to her knees. With her eyes on him, she took his cock in hand and her tongue darted out to lick over his cockhead. His head rolled back immediately, the hot water crashing down on his aching body.

“Good, baby. Just relax.” Her tongue dipped into his slit, and her hand squeezed his

length. “I’m going to make you feel better.”

Fuck. He groaned and speared his fingers through her wet hair. She was gentle, teasing even as she slowly explored his dick with her tongue. His mind was instantly dazed, robbed of all his sorrows.

Hope took him slow and steady, her hand covering the distance her mouth couldn’t take. Opening his eyes, he watched, entranced as she bobbed her head over him. She smiled around his cock, her hand dipping between her thighs to seek out her own release.

Hope moaned, the sound vibrating against his cockhead as they raced toward their mutual climaxes. She looked gorgeous, precious even and so damn hot. She was his, and knowing that made his cock pulse a drop of precum onto her tongue.

“Don’t stop, little thief. You’re making your baby feel so good.”

That time, he felt her smile—his eyes were squeezed shut in utter ecstasy. She took him faster and deeper, gagging when he tapped the back of her throat but the sound was so fucking arousing.

“You’re going to make me come so hard,” he praised, combing through her hair .

His heart pumped and his breathing became irregular as she repeatedly swallowed him to the hilt. Her hips ground against her fingers, the combination of her moans and her throat constricting around him, hurtling him closer to the edge.

“Fuck, I’m coming.”

The words had barely left his mouth when the first bursts of cum shot down her throat. Hope slowed her pace, sealing her lips tighter and drawing his release right out

of him. She watched, enjoying the pleasure she'd just gifted him. He shuddered, her suction prolonging his orgasm.

“Damn, little thief.”

“Feeling better?”

“Yes. Would you like me to make you feel better now?”

She turned and threw her hair over her shoulder. “Yes, with a massage please.”

He kneaded into her shoulders and spoiled her until she tipped her head back and grinned up at him.

“I would love to cook together tonight. Unless you had other plans?”

“I'll cook with you and then try to get some work done while you relax and read.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

They met her parents for a brunch not far from Hope's childhood home. She was greeted with open arms and lots of fuss from her mom, while her dad introduced himself with a strong handshake. “It's nice to meet you, . I'm Jacob and that woman suffocating our daughter is my wife, Adeline.”

“It's nice to meet you too.”

They found a spot and Hope was commanded to tell her mother all about the vacation and if she liked 's family. “It was so gorgeous and the views were so stunning. Oh, and I went golfing!”

Jacob raised his eyebrow at that. “How many people did you knock out with the club?”

“No one!” Hope defended, trying to look as innocent as possible.

interjected. “My dad quickly learned to keep his distance.”

“Don’t tattletale on me!”

He took her hand in his and kissed the back of her fingers. “They said you did wonderfully.”

She laughed. “Yeah, and secretly hoped it was my last time joining them.”

Hope’s parents were wonderful and though they asked about him, they did it in the most respectful way possible. They truly wanted to get to know him. When everyone leaned back with their stomachs stuffed, Jacob excused himself and once he was out of earshot Hope giggled.

“That’s him paying for us so we don’t fight over the bill.”

“Wait, what? No!” protested but he couldn’t have stopped Jacob if he wanted to. “Why didn’t you say so?”

Adeline leaned closer with a wink. “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure he’s distracted next time. Take it as his way of saying he approves. ”

As they made their way to the cars, Adeline guided Hope in the opposite direction, explaining that she had some books for Hope that she’d found in a sale.

Jacob stayed behind and judging by his posture, knew that the books were nothing

but a ruse.

“Hope seems very happy to have found you.”

“I couldn’t be more blessed to have her.”

“Will you take care of her?”

“Always. I’m not saying it’ll always go smoothly, but communication is key, and I think we can handle it.”

“Ah, yes. Every couple goes through rough patches, but it always made me and her mother stronger. And made me appreciate the bed after having slept on the couch.” He added the last part with a bright grin and a dreamy gaze towards his wife. “You two will do just fine.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Jacob gave him a wink and then headed over to his wife and daughter to help them carry the books while opened his trunk to load them up.

Driving off, Hope had her hand back on his neck while waving at her parents with the other. “You did so well, baby. They loved you.”

“We should get our parents together soon too.”

“Maybe a barbeque or something?” Hope suggested. “Dad loves throwing those.”

“I can already see him and my dad at the grill having an academic discussion on the best way to prepare the meat.”



Hope leaned over and kissed his cheek. “I love you so very much.”

“I love you too, little thief.”

The End

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Two Years Later

Decan

Leaning against the brick wall, Decan tried like hell to calm his breathing and straightened his black suit.

“Relax,” Marco chuckled, stepping up to adjust his tie. “It’s all going to be fine.”

“I’d like to see you on your big day trying not to lose your last nerve.”

Marco gave him a cheeky smile and peaked around the corner. “She looks gorgeous.”

“Fuck you.”

Decan had been forbidden to move so that they didn’t ruin their first look. They’d decided to do it in a small private circle and not at the altar.

With a wink, Marco gently slapped Decan’s cheek and squeezed his upper arm. “You and I both know she’s a keeper. Nothing is going to stop this woman from loving you.”

Tears burned the edges of Decan’s eyes and he squeezed them shut. Fuck, why did Marco have to say that right now? His best friend stepped back as footsteps approached.

“Decan?” Hope softly whispered from the corner and out of view.

“I’m here,” he assured her, reaching his hand out to the side. Her fingers laced with his and immediately he felt calmer. “How are you?”

“Nervous. I’m glad they put waterproof make-up on me. ”

“Have you eaten? Stayed hydrated?”

“Stop fussing over me! But you don’t have to worry, Laura’s watched me like a hawk today.”

A laugh told him that Laura, Hope’s maid of honour, was nearby.

“Close your eyes, baby.”

He did, listening to her heels clicking on the concrete as she turned the corner. His heart... frankly, the organ forgot how to function. Suddenly, the clicks stopped, and Hope cupped his cheek with her free hand.

“Open up.”

He found himself drowning in her ocean blue eyes before he could pull his gaze away and take her in completely. She stepped back still holding his hand and presented herself to him. The lace hugged her curves in all the right ways, the golden jewellery sparkling on her neck and wrists, while her hair was over one shoulder in a waterfall of brown curls.

“Breathtaking,” he gasped, needing a moment to find his words.

Somewhere, he heard laughs and sniffles mixed with the clicks of a camera, locking this moment in for the rest of their lives. He lifted his arm and let her twirl for him, nice and slow so he could absorb every glorious inch of her.

“Perfect.”

When their eyes met again, Hope's were glossy with tears. He quickly pulled the tissue out of his pocket, grateful that his dad insisted that he carry it. He carefully dabbed and soaked them up before they could spill and ruin her make-up. Hope took his jaw in her hand again, pressing her lips softly and carefully against his.

“I'll see you at the altar.”

“I can't wait to call you my wife.”

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Sipping on her drink, sat back and enjoyed the cool evening air—rare for Houston. It had been a while since they'd been able to go for a night out and it only showed her how much she actually missed it. Work had been suffocating her lately, so she was excited to unwind this weekend.

“That man hasn't stopped staring at us.” Before could turn around and see which one, Jessica stopped her. “Don't turn and make it obvious.”

“Then you have to give me details because apparently I'm the only one who can't see him.”

“Handsome,” Allison giggled. “But way older than us.”

“Looks like he has his life together,” Jessica added, obviously staring in the man's direction. “Well-groomed beard and that shirt looks expensive .”

“Maybe you should go over there,” suggested to Jessica. “Make the first move, you know?”

The waiter came over and set down a drink—one that none of them had ordered. “Compliments of the gentleman at the other table,” he explained.

looked up at the waiter, who seemed to find that rather cute and then finally turned to see which man had bought her the drink.

“Seems like he wants you,” Allison said before ordering herself another cocktail.

on the other hand, had to remind her heart to beat as she stared across the open space to the man who'd ordered her the drink. He was handsome and well-groomed—everything the girls had said—but what they'd failed to mention were those deep, forest-green eyes that often still haunted her nightmares. He was a carbon copy of his son, as if the man himself had aged a decade or two and now sat in front of her. She whipped around in her seat, and immediately her friends knew something was up.

“What’s wrong?” Jessica asked. “I think he’s rather handsome.”

“I know him.”

She couldn't look at them, her eyes trained on the cocktail before her. For just a few moments, she reverted to the girl she was eight years ago. Then, she remembered that she was no longer a doormat. She squared her shoulders, grabbed the drink, and stormed over to the man.

He smiled, eyes burning into her as he let them travel over her figure. The sundress she wore didn't leave much to the imagination. Clearly, he didn't know who she was. After all, they'd never met. She'd only seen him occasionally during school functions, and made sure to keep her distance.

“I can't accept this,” she said rather firmly as she set the cocktail on his table.

“And why is that?”

“Because I'd rather forget the memories of your son bullying me throughout high school.”

The man's brows hit his hairline, and his eyes raked over her body again. They paused on her left arm before he cleared his throat and met her gaze again. “I wasn't

aware of that.”

“I believe that was his point.”

“If I had, he’d never have gotten away with it.”

“I’m sure you’d have tried.” With that, turned and walked away, not wanting to escalate the situation.

Sitting back down, she was faced with curious and accusatory eyes from Jessica and Allison.

She sighed and relaxed into the lounge chair. “His son bullied me in school.”

“The boy that drowned your final papers?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, so you told him to fuck off.”

“More or less.”

“Well even if you said it in a kinder, more polite way, I’m still proud of you.”

“Thanks, Jessie. It did feel good.”

Allison frowned. “Shame, he doesn’t look that old.”

“I think he was a teen dad.”

Jessica steered the conversation away from the man, and relaxed. But it seemed that

Mr. Richman wasn't one to back down easily. It wasn't long before he appeared next to her.

"I'm sorry for what Luka put you through. I just wanted to say that I'm not my son." He handed her a small note. took it, hesitantly, but he seemed to relax. "There's no pressure."

She watched him until he climbed into a black supped-up truck and drove away.

"What does it say?" Jessica pressed, craning her head over the small table between them to see the note.

looked down and unfolded the scrap of paper. There, in neat handwriting, was his name and phone number. Her first instinct was to rip it apart but then Allison's words stopped her.

"What sweet revenge it would be to seduce his dad. Imagine his face when you're sitting across the Thanksgiving table as his potential new stepmom."

That did sound tempting.

After a while left her friends and went home, contemplating all night. She laid awake for ages, unsure of what she should do. Luka had made her life a living hell the moment he'd seen her so-called disability. Yes, having been born without her left hand had made her life more challenging, but she nor her parents had ever felt like she was less than ordinary. That night out had given her more to think about than she cared for.

The next morning, she'd been stirring her cereal around in the bowl so long it had gone soggy. Frustrated, she decided to just rip off the Band-Aid. Snatching her phone, she entered his number and fired off the text before she lost the strength to do



so.

Hi Boyd,

It's . From last night.

Hi ,

I didn't think I would hear from you at all .

I'm still not sure if this is a good idea.

Would you feel comfortable meeting up for coffee to talk?

Do you know a good place near you?

I enjoy the one in Discovery Green.

When are you free?

I can be ready in an hour.

Give me an hour and a half depending on traffic.

I'll see you soon.

Coming soon...

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 2:59 am*

Not long after, he arrived at his apartment building in the Galleria Area. He parked in his spit and then took the elevator to the 6th floor.

“Their menu did look good. But do they really walk around with stakes an like in a all you can east buffe?”

Her fingers were so soft and her gaze so focused that a light shiver ran down his spine. “Something about pretty things always hurting.”

“Why did you ass the skulls later?”

“And then I can sleep?” her voice was quivering and softly napped her ear with his teeth.

“Yes, little thief, then you can sleep.”

She nodded, so he pooped to the foot end of the of the bed and pulled her suitcase closer.

When he couldn't hold himself any longer he sat back down and she made herself comfortable in his lap, eating her favourite dessert and sipping on the campaign.

He decided to wear something casual, jeans and a black shit with a V-neck, teasing his lion.

“It's okay,” she whispered in his eye , grinding over his lap as much as he let her.

“You can come. ”

His hand found her ass, his fingers pressing onto her hole.

Once she had gone through her fist selection and narrowed it down to three she wanted to buy, he followed her to the cashier.