

Want

Natalie emerges from the bathroom in a lime-green dress.

“Are you ready, honey?” she says, her voice ringing with delight. She steps into the bedroom, heels clicking on the hardwood. The sweet, floral aroma of her perfume drifts in after her. Scott peers over the newspaper he's been studying to look at his wife.

“What?” she asks with a mischievous smile. “Is this too much?” She spins for him, her long, loose curls swirling around her. Her diamond-studded gold bangles jingle in the quiet room, and then the noise is absorbed by the heavy silence.

Scott admires his beautiful wife, as she walks toward him. Their eyes meet; Scott falls silent, captivated by Natalie's green eyes, even more striking in that dress. Natalie raises her eyebrow curiously as she waits for his response.

“You look stunning, as always,” Scott says as he folds his paper and lays it on the bed beside him. Scott adjusts his tie as he stands, then smooths the wrinkles out of his slacks. He steps closer and brushes a stray hair off of her face, cautious not to mess up her carefully-crafted curls. *She is stunning* and he'd never thought otherwise. He kisses her cheek and then walks to the full-length mirror to straighten up his hair.

Scott had been worrying about this night for the past month. Tonight was their anniversary and, as always, it would be an immaculate event. As tradition dictated, it would begin with a limo ride to an opera or some private concert. A six-course meal at the city's most renowned restaurant. Then, the honeymoon suite at *La Chateau*, private massages on the balcony overlooking the bay, and always, always something dripping with diamonds.

Scott's thoughts drift to his last meeting with the board. He can feel his pulse rising, the anxiety begins to build inside of him like a summer storm. As if she could see the uneasiness on his face, Natalie wraps her arms around his back and lays her chin on his shoulder. He knew he couldn't disappoint her, not now. So with a deep breath, he forces the thought to the back of his mind and manages a smile. *She needs tonight. Then we'll deal with everything.* Scott turns within her arms and they stand there, just holding each other in the walk-in closet.

“We should go, love,” Natalie breathes. Their embrace ends and Scott turns to slip on his shoes. Natalie places her lipstick in her clutch and then looks towards him.

“I'm ready,” Scott says as he grabs his wallet from the desk, and casually slips the letter from the doctor under the stack of bills. *Out of sight, out of mind, right?* Scott turns and Natalie laces her arm through his and softly kisses his cheek.

The Cross' had a picturesque marriage, a relationship that exuded pure happiness. They shared a deep and passionate love; the envy of those stuck in unremarkable matrimony. Four

years after the two said “I do,” the subject of children was a near constant. Natalie longed to be a mother; she talked and talked, endlessly fantasizing about a baby.

“I hope that they have your eyes,” she’d rave, “and your laugh.” After trying unsuccessfully month after month, Natalie was becoming more and more depressed. Scott began to worry, so he scheduled an appointment with his doctor to ease his mind. Last week, he received a letter confirming his worst fears. His infertility broke his heart, but Scott was more troubled that he couldn't give Natalie the house full of kids she'd always dreamed of. After sharing the news with his wife, Scott felt even worse. Natalie became quiet and even stopped eating. She never blamed him, but Scott became immersed in guilt. Her depression finally began to subside when their anniversary night drew near.

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After an exquisite rendition of the Italian opera, *La Traviata*, the couple arrives at the newest restaurant in the city, *Del Mar*. The young hostess shows the Cross' to their table. After pulling the chair out for his wife, Scott takes his seat across from her. The flickering candle casts a warm glow on Natalie's face.

“This place is just gorgeous,” Natalie marvels as she takes in the atmosphere. “And look at that view!” she exclaims looking out the window. The restaurant stretches off the wharf, jetting out into the vast, black waves. Soft moonlight dances on the water's surface shimmering, replicating the starry night. The salty air waltzes in through the open windows and brings with it the rhythmic music of crashing waves. A waiter walks past their table with a tray full of beautifully-plated entrees. Scott closes his eyes and breathes in.

“It smells delicious,” he says with a smile. Natalie picks up the wine list and begins to weigh the options. Scott watches her as she studies the text, her face fixed in concentration. He smirks, knowing that no matter how long she looks at the menu, she'll order a Mai Tai with extra cherries, just as she always did. The waiter, a young, dark-haired man materializes as if he'd been watching her too.

“May I suggest the 1996 Dom Pérignon?” he inquires, looking at Natalie. Natalie lifts her eyes from the menu to the waiter.

“Actually, I'll take a Mai Tai, with extra cherries please,” she answered, naive to the waiter's subtle surprise.

“And for you, sir?” the waiter asked. “We have a smoky Highland Park 30 Scotch. It's been very popular recently.”

“Just water for me. Thank you,” Scott replies. Natalie's eyebrows raise in inquiry, but Scott deflects it with a smile. He picks up the menu and begins to analyze the entrées; his eyes scan, searching for something less pricey. His concentration breaks with the quick return of the waiter.

“Your Mai Tai, miss,” he says placing the tall, slender glass onto her coaster. Natalie smiles at him and then takes off the blue, paper umbrella and places it on her napkin. She begins to stir the glass' sunset-colored contents with her straw.

“Your water, sir,” the waiter says as he sets down the glass with a clink. The condensation forms small drops of dew on the frosted glass. Scott's eyes move from the glass to Natalie, as she picks a cherry out of her glass and rolls it into her mouth. As Scott admires his wife, his thoughts begin to wander.

“Do you remember that summer...” Scott starts, reaching for her hand.

“...when we had picnics under that old cherry tree?” Natalie finishes as she places her hand in his. Scott smiles and nods. Natalie always seemed to know exactly what he was thinking.

“Yes of course,” she continues, “that was my favorite summer.” Scott's mind continues to drift back to her cherry-stained lips and the long kisses they shared in that tree. They were young then, just barely out of college, and struggling to pay for their teeny-tiny studio apartment.

“I bet I can still tie the stem with my tongue,” she says with a playful wink.

The conversation continues, fluid and effortless, the way it used to be. Their reminiscing carries on through dinner, dessert, and Natalie's third Mai Tai. The two are still laughing when the limo returns.

The limo driver opens the door and the lights begin to glow, bringing life to the sleek, black interior. Natalie raises her long, green dress and climbs inside. Scott follows her, then the driver closes the door. A few moments later, the engine roars to life. Natalie, a bit tipsy from her Mai Tais, slides across the leather seat, reaching for the champagne in the ice box. She grabs the corkscrew, two glasses, and the bottle. Just as she begins to scoot back towards her husband, the driver turns onto the boulevard. Natalie sways with the unexpected turn, falling into Scott. She lands gently in his arms, giggling. Scott wraps his arms around her as she lays her head on his shoulder. They stay like that for awhile, the only movement is the rising and falling of their breath. Scott moves a stray hair from Natalie's face and tucks it behind her ear. She tilts her head up, gazing into his eyes. They hold eye contact for a moment, seeming to communicate their affection for one another without words. The glowing buildings and neon signs speed past, flashing a kaleidoscope of colors into the car. The street lights brighten and fade illuminating Natalie's face for brief moments. Her eyes shift from innocent to mischievous as she remembers what she's holding.

“Open please?” she asks holding up the cold bottle of champagne. It uncorks with a pop, bubbles flooding from the top. He pours, the foam rising in the flutes like the frothy tide.

“To us,” Scott said, raising his glass.

“To us,” Natalie repeats as the glasses clink. They both sip the bubbly concoction. Then Scott leans in, craving the familiar feel of her lips on his. Natalie hesitates, less than an inch from

his face, and then gives in. Scott feels her soft lips as they press against his; the stress and fear he's been holding in begins to melt away. Her kisses become more sultry; he feels her tongue as it traces his lips. It'd been awhile since she'd kissed him like this, with this passion. The money, the baby, all of it dissipates, evaporating like a dense fog on a sunny spring morning. Block after block their steamy embrace continues, as if they'd been holding back. The car slows and then stops altogether. Seconds later the limo door opens, shedding light into the backseat.

“Thank you, John,” Scott says to the driver as he steps out of the vehicle. John nods and heads to the trunk to fetch the suitcase. Natalie slides to the edge of the seat, elegantly sliding her legs out of the door. She lifts up the length of her dress and reaches for Scott's hand. They walk past the doorman, through the double doors, and into the grand foyer of the hotel. The lobby's far wall is entirely glass, making it seem as if it stretches into the sea. From the high ceiling, hangs a gleaming chandelier that makes the light dance. The concierge greets the couple and then whisks them upstairs to the honeymoon suite: a large, secluded room with a whirlpool tub, separate bedroom, and wide balcony overlooking the ocean.

“I hope everything will be to your liking. Your masseuse will be right up,” the attendant says with a smile. “Call if you need anything,” he adds. Scott nods and thanks him as he shuts the door. Natalie begins to slip off her heels and stroll into the bedroom. Scott listens as she ruffles through the suitcase.

“Scott?” she calls through the door as she unfastens her earrings. “Could you come unzip me, please?” Scott joins Natalie in the bedroom and gently undoes her dress. His hands trace her figure, stopping at her hips. He leans in, trailing kisses along the back of her neck.

“I love you, Natalie Cross,” he whispers and kisses her neck once more. Then he reaches up to help her unhook her necklace.

A quiet knock comes from the door. “I'll get it,” Scott says, walking into the adjoining room and two masseuses enter. Natalie walks out of the bedroom in a thick, white robe, the fluffy fabric engulfing her slender figure. Her hair is tied up in to a sloppy bun.

“We'll meet you on the balcony when you're ready,” one of the masseuses says as she heads through the patio door and into the night air. Natalie watches as the masseuses begin setting up the tables and then she smiles at Scott, a sort of thank you, in fewer words.

“Let me just get out of my suit,” Scott says walking into the bedroom.

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