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NY Afternoon

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GREG GUIFFRIDA{NY
AFTERNOON

His torn Nike canvas sneakers slipped on a patch of oil in the street. One knee bumped the asphalt, but no one saw. He continued his stride and pretended he did it on purpose, like an impromptu dance step. He walked past a shiny hot dog cart and nodded to the large bearded man slumped over it. The sun burned through the umbrella above and glistened on the man's forehead.

"Hot enough for ya?" the vendor asked, hoping to sell one more warm soda before retreating indoors.

He smiled sympathetically and continued walking. Four more blocks to go. Beads trickled down his forehead, creeping out of his thick curly hair. He was ten minutes late, and she was impatient.

Maybe she'll wait, he thought. Maybe not.

He couldn't even think of running. He was too weak to step onto the curb, much less run. Besides, his shoes would probably fall apart. The blue swoosh hung by its tail, slapping the sidewalk. The laces trailed behind. He would have bought a new pair, but he needed the gas money to get to the city.

He had called her a week ago, hopes soaring. She sounded tired when she picked up the phone, and more tired when she heard who it was. Her voice was quiet, the words hesitant, as if she was about to yawn at every break. After one minute he regretted calling her, even though he had spent months convincing himself he needed to. They chatted. She didn't care, he tried to sound like he didn't. He told her he was coming to town next week and he'd love to see her. How's Wednesday?

Another yawn almost crept out. She knew she needed an excuse, but something kept her from finding one. She heard the words come out, but they were far away, echoing. Wednesday's fine. Where?

Capri Blu. One o'clock.

He always did this. She sipped from the bottle of San Pelligrino on the white tablecloth. Her finger traced the wet circle that the bottle left. It was a cool morning so she had asked for a table outside. She regretted it as the afternoon sun climbed. Her long hair draped over her back. Her shoulders were shaded, but her body cooked underneath the blanket. The smell of her conditioner sat in the air.

Oh, Jesus. He still has those shoes. She was disgusted for a minute, then she remembered Florida. He stuffed his wallet and keys before they went swimming. With her eyes wrenched shut from the glare, she could see it. His plaid bathing suit, the empty wine coolers. The water was warm and dirty. She kept falling out of her bikini.



He saw her smirk. She was sitting back in the wicker chair watching through the tables on the patio. He bumped into a waiter and ignored his dirty look. He tried to read her eyes behind the blue sunglasses, but couldn't. She sat there, revealing nothing. Her cheeks were red from the sun.

He got to the table and paused, half-expecting her to stand up and hug him. She didn't. With a tired shrug he collapsed into the chair, grabbing a cloth napkin to wipe the sweat off his face. He realized that he looked like shit, especially to a beautiful blonde in a small sundress, who had better things to do.

She sat there, waiting for him to say something. A few pregnant moments passed as his mind raced. He had never put much thought into what he would actually say to her. She watched flakes scatter to the ground when he scratched the side of his head. She sat there, waiting. Uncomfortable silences made her comfortable.

He sat up and opened his mouth, but only let out a quiet sigh. He felt powerless as she tossed the last splash of water in her mouth and picked up her purse. The chair creaked sadly as she stood up, looking down at him.

The sunlight blazed from her white dress, which draped over her breasts and flowed onto the table. She looked down at the dirty, unshaven face squinting up at her. He felt his stomach twist with the urge to grab her shoulders, push her back into the seat, and scream out every dream he had about her for the past three years. Florida, Maymont, the Flagship motel. His fingers clenched the armrest.

But she left. She walked right past him, sticking a soft hand out to brush a curl off of his forehead. The hem of her skirt swept his arm. He listened to her heels click away from him, boiling in the draft of her perfume.

He couldn't turn around to watch her walk away. The chair held him prisoner, the sun beat him. He stared at all that was left. A lipstick-smearred empty bottle of water, a wrinkled napkin.

