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23 - Shop
Trigger Warning: Mentions of eating disorder/struggle with food
 "What the fuck?!"
I fell o the bed, sheets tangled in my legs as laughter ran through the
room. With a groan, I sat up, hand to my head as I rubbed the sore
spot in hopes of erasing the pain. I blinked heavily, trying to get rid of
the sleep crusting my eyes as I looked around the room at my
position on the floor.
Zayn, holding onto a fishing rod attached with a small ghost at the
hook, looked at me sheepishly as he clumsily reeled it back in
towards him, Ayesha taking it from him before expertly completing
the task. I shot him an accusatory look to which he raised his hands in
the air, pointing a finger at the man responsible for scaring the shit
out of me.
I snapped my head in his direction, my glare shooting daggers as he
leaned against the wall, arms crossed with a small smirk on his pretty
little face. I was vaguely aware that our entire friend group was seeing
my grouchiness first thing in the morning, from my peripheral seeing
Alex recording the entire exchange.
"What's wrong, Sophia? I thought ghosts didn't exist?"
That made me get up, Zayn shouting run as everyone but Dean
rushed out of the door, giggling with their phones out as I stomped
my way over to him. He didn't look intimidated in the slightest. In all
honesty, he seemed more smug.
"Oh, yeah." I sco ed, repeatedly stabbing a finger at his chest with
every word. "Laugh it up, pretty boy. Just wait until I get you back."
He tried to bite my finger making me retreat, turning so my back
faced him as I walked back over to the close. Though, I completely
forgot I was still wrapped in the sheets making me let out a small yelp
as I tipped forward, closing my eyes to brace for impact when familiar
warm hands gently pulled me back to an upright position, setting me
back on my feet.
I breathed a sigh of relief, letting Dean help me unravel myself but
before I could stomp away like the immature toddler I was being he
twirled me so I faced him, his face still holding that amused look.
"Sophia," He teased, brushing his lips against my jaw. I pressed my
hands against my mouth, covering it as he tried coaxing me to let my
anger go. "Come on, sweetheart. I know you aren't upset."
I tried to say: "Are you invalidating my feelings?" But it came out in
more of a mu le due to my hands still pressed against my mouth in
attempts at covering my breath.
He raised his eyebrows, amused at my antics. "I was just teaching you
a lesson."
"How about I teach..." You trailed o, running out of his hold and
towards the bathroom. However long I thought I was going to make it
quickly dissolved as he li ed me o the floor, a loud laugh escaping
my lips as he plopped me down on the bed. I tried scrambling away,
hands clawing at the end of the sheets as Dean flipped me over with
ease, laughing at my poor attempts.
"Admit you aren't mad at me anymore." He said, fingers digging into
my sides making me gasp for air in between my giggles.
"Never! This is manipulation!"
"No," He said innocently, stopping for a few seconds to give me
reprieve. "It's merely a suggestion."
"How about I suggest you suck my dick!"
That caused him to start up all over again until I was tapping out,
admitting defeat. "Alright! Alright! I'm not mad at you anymore! Free
me of this torture you glasses wearer!"
He let go of me, watching down in amusement as I struggled to catch
my breath as I pointed a finger in his direction. "I wouldn't be mad at
you in the first place if you just hadn't scared me in the first place!"
"You'd think I'd let you get away with calling me a 'scaredy cat'?
Which, by the way, is a term nobody but old people use."
"Yeah, sure, make excuses, pretty boy. But these lips," I gestured to
my mouth. "Are o limits now."
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He smirks and I flush wildly, burying my face in my hands as I
mumble on why he has to insinuate that at this truly serious moment.
"I didn't insinuate anything, baby. That was all you."
I hu, brushing hair away from my face as I slipped o of the bed. He
let me, watching me trek all the way to the closet, pulling out another
pretty sundress along with some new underwear. I didn't bother with
a bra, not needing it with this style of dress. Before shutting the
bathroom door I popped my head out, narrowing my eyes at him.
"I was serious about the no kissing."
I relished his smile dropping as I shut the door, giggling loud behind it
as he realised it was all a joke. Soon a er I had completed my entire
body and skin care routine with a smile still attached to my face,
pulling on the sundress and letting my hair down from its bun since I
didn't want it to get wet. I had already taken a full shower yesterday,
and with my type of curly hair I could only wash it once a week
otherwise it would lose immense moisture.
Styling it quickly by parting it down the middle and placing two hair
clips to one side, I put back on Dean's necklace— one which I should
probably start calling mine and slipped on a few rings. I was slowly
building up my wardrobe, only letting myself splurge once a month
knowing despite having a job, anything could happen and I needed
to be cautious.
Today, however, we were going shopping and because it was vacation
I let myself o the hook just this once. Besides, I deserved it
especially since it was almost the end of the year meaning me and
Dean would be graduating.
I paused, letting that sink in. Graduation; a day I truly never thought
I'd see. To be honest a year ago I imagined myself dropping out of
school by this time, still without a job as I stayed with Devon. Most
likely as his wife.
I let out a breath, shuddering at that thought as my eyes found Dean's
ring around my neck and I clutched it tight. I was present and here.
The past didn't matter anymore because I was here now, surrounded
with people who loved me.
As I applied some sunscreen, I rubbed it in, followed by mascara and
some tinted lip balm that deepened the hue of my lips. To be honest,
I was never a huge makeup wearer partly because I couldn't a ord it
and partly because I just never had the time. Either I was always
studying or always working, and it seemed pointless to apply
something that would melt o in an hour tops.
Though now, I grew a deep appreciation for it. While I still liked to
keep it very light and simple for everyday wear, I let Vanessa, Ayesha,
and Alex teach me a few tips and tricks in case I ever wanted to try
something di erent one day. They loved makeup, had drawers and
drawers filled with di erent products that they said I could borrow
any time I liked. God, I fucking loved them.
I exited the bathroom, glancing around to see Dean had cleaned up
before making my way downstairs. I had noted that the time was ten
am, the smell of breakfast cooking as I walked in. The group was
scattered, an empty stool beside Ayesha as she stared dazed down at
her plate. At the movement of me pulling out the stool she shook her
head, as if to get rid of the trance, as she looked over at me with a
weak smile.
"Sophia," She said so ly, the dark circles under her eyes prominent.
"Hi. I'm sorry for pranking you earlier, it was just funny to see you
look so scared."
I playfully glared at her, nudging her shoulder with mine as I waved
o her apology and asked her to show me the video. Alex beat her to
it, tears in her eyes as she played it on repeat making me place my
head in my hands before she laughed, kissing the side of my face in
apology.
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I wasn't truly angry at anyone, feigning my annoyance until dropping
the act all together once Zayn had o ered me his stash of chocolate.
Dean had set plates of food in front of us, everyone finally digging in
as we conversed about our plans for later. All of the seats were
occupied leaving Dean standing, and I waved him over so he could sit
down rather than me. He had just spent half an hour feeding
everyone, I'm sure he must have been tired.
He rounded the counter, wrapping an arm around my waist as he sat
before pulling me to sit on his thigh. My eyes widened, looking back
at him to which he smiled, kissing my cheek. "Thank you for the
seat."
"Shouldn't I be the one thanking you? You just cooked for everyone."
He shrugged, looking away as a tinge of red flushed his cheeks. I
so ened, understanding that he wasn't one who liked to call out for
his good deeds and took his face in my hands, pressing small kisses
to his lips.
"Thank you for feeding me, pretty boy."
He only smoothed my hair back, nodding to the full plate in front of
me and it was my turn to blush, nervous and avoiding his gaze. "I
kind of...thought we could share? Unless you don't wanna, which is
perfectly fine! Cross contamination and all."
At that, he laughed, holding me close.
"You're so fucking precious it kills me."
Our little moment was interrupted when Ayesha tapped my shoulder,
looking at me with another weak smile that was starting to
deteriorate. I gave her my full attention, now concerned as I took her
in. She looked worse for wear, looking like she hasn't slept in a few
days.
"Ayesha? Is everything all right?" I said it low in case she hadn't
wanted the unnecessary attention, the only other person hearing our
interaction being Dean.
She pretended to be confused, clearing her throat. "Yeah! I'm great,
Sophia. Vanessa was just wondering if we should go shopping or
swimming first."
I held eye contact for a few more seconds, her eyes wavering as she
looked down, avoiding me all together. My stomach lurched, not
wanting to pry but also feeling heavy concern. I figured I should bring
it up with her later in private, not wanting to put her on the spot.
I turned to look at Dean who gave me a 'whatever you want, I want'
look, before his eyes set back on Ayesha. His suspicions from the
other day turned out to be right, and I could feel his heart pounding
against my back.
"Shopping," I said brightly, trying to take away attention from either
Ayesha and Dean and put it on me. "Going swimming in the
a ernoon will be more fun. The sun isn't as bright and the water is
cool but not freezing."
They agreed, talking it amongst themselves as I saw Vanessa pull up
something on her ipad, Zayn, Brandon, Alex and Alyan all mentioning
di erent places to which she typed down. I focused my attention
back on the pretty hijabi to my le who was doing her best not to
burst out crying at this second.
I was unsurprised when Dean spoke out first, calling out Ayesha's
name quietly until she broke out of another trance.
"Are you alright?"
She nodded her head up and down, reaching over to take her glass of
water before she saw how shaky it was and hid it so no one realised.
Because she knew we had, she turned to us, widening her fake grin.
"I'm just a bit anxious." She whispered, nodding her head at us.
"Nothing to worry about, I promise."
I glanced at her full plate of food, seeing this entire time she had only
been drinking water while the rest of us were too busy and hungry to
notice. And to think about it, last night when we planned out to go to
dinner together, she told us she wasn't that hungry and skipped out.
Despite us also missing lunch because we had accidently spent an
extra hour relaxing in the resort's saunas.
I didn't want to assume anything, though I couldn't help but come to
the worst conclusion as my body straightened. I looked at her more
clearly, seeing she was constantly twisting a ring around her index
finger so clearly trying not to fall apart in front of us.
"Ayesha—"
She stood up suddenly, accidentally knocking her plate against her
glass as it slid forward with her abruptness. Everyone paused at the
loud clanking, looking her way as she shrunk under the heavy weight
of eyes. I saw Zayn studying her more thoughtfully as well, his eyes
moving up and down her slightly trembling body before connecting
with her small fidget habit, back straightening and a tense expression
like he had known what it meant.
"I'm feeling a little nauseous today so I think I might skip out on the
shopping and go back to sleep. Thank you for breakfast, Dean. It was
amazing like always."
She immediately took o to her room, speed walking up the stairs
without a glance back and like everyone, we all looked to each other
in rapid concern. Vanessa put down her ipad slowly, as if sudden
movements would knock someone over and turned to Zayn which
surprised me. I didn't think anyone had noticed his reaction to
Ayesha either.
"Zayn," She said, clasping her hands together. "What's going on?"
He looked down, a hand coming up to rub at his mouth. "I can't tell
you."
"So you knew she had been acting weird these past few days and
didn't do anything about it? Or tell anyone? How could you—"
"'How could I' what?" He cut her o with a glare, standing up from his
seat.
My eyes widened, body sti ening, getting myself prepared to hear a
fight. While my heart knew it wasn't at all directed at me, sometimes
my head could mess up and become one shut-downy mess. Dean
held my hand, interlocking our fingers while his other rested on my
thigh and started tapping that familiar rhythm. He pressed me closer
to his body knowing his presence calmed me down. My heart was still
racing though, and I chanted to phrase 'shut the fuck up' because this
wasn't about me and it wasnt fair to Ayesha if I brokedown.
"How could I keep her secret despite it fucking wrecking me? How
could I stand there, fucking oblivious, as my best fucking friend shook
like a damn tambourine?" His voice slightly rose, but Brandon placed
a hand on his arm causing Zayn to glance in his direction, then in
Dean's, and finally in mine as his eyes so ened when looking at me
and he willed himself to physically relax.
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He turned back towards Vanessa, the look in her eyes filled with
nothing but worry for her best friend since elementary school, and
slowly sat back down, releasing a sigh as his voice came out way
more tender than before.
He rubbed another hand down his face, shaking his head. "I don't
know exactly what's been going on...not what's been happening
recently, that is. And I don't want to share her secrets a er she had
di iculty opening up to me. But I promise I've been doing my best to
help her. I would never wanna see her fucking hurt. That would...that
would kill me." He sounded so dejected at the end, his voice cracking
as Brandon set a hand on his back and Vanessa set one on his hand,
cupping his in between hers.
"Zayn..." Alyan said. "If it's serious, something that could potentially
damage her health, we need to know."
Zayn cursed under his breath, shaking his head. He seemed to be in
deep contemplation and I cleared my throat, speaking up.
"I know you guys don't...don't really know what's been going on with
me." I slightly slouched, not used to all eyes on me during serious
discussions. Dean squeezed my hand, encouraging me to keep going.
"And I don't know if I'll be ready to tell you guys anytime soon...but
what I do know, Zayn, is that a er I told Dean I did feel so much
better. I understand completely about wanting to keep secrets, and if
you still feel you aren't able to tell us that's completely okay. But not
telling someone nearly killed me. I'm not saying that it's that severe
with Ayesha...God I feel like shutting up now, can we completely
discard everything I just said?" I turned my face to Dean's chest,
grabbing fistfuls of his shirt as he stroked up and down my back in
order to soothe me.
"It's alright, Sophia. I understand what you're trying to say." Zayn
assured, making me pry my face from Dean and send him a weak
smile. "You're right, I should have told someone sooner. Honestly? I
was scared of her getting pissed at me and having our relationship
strained but...but I'd rather lose her and have her get help then keep
her and have her still struggle."
He took a deep breath, sipping some water as Brandon whispers
encouragement in his ear. We all braced ourselves, not knowing what
we were going to hear next. Dean wrapped both arms around my
waist, and I leaned back against him knowing he needed comfort at
this moment. I knew he was most likely feeling guilty for not noticing
the signs earlier, but that wasn't his fault at all.
I did a quick glance over everyone at the table, Vanessa, despite still
being angry at Alyan, leaned into his side and the empty seat beside
me was starting to have its e ects.
"You guys know how Ayesha's mom is, right? Kind and nurushing but
sometimes can say harsh things intending for it to seem loving?
Because of that Ayesha hasn't really had a good relationship with
food."
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Vanassa's eye glistened with unshed tears. "Does she binge and
purge?"
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Zayn shook his head, eyes glancing up the stairs where Ayesha had
run o . "More of...a restriction? I don't know how to describe it
exactly. Or the sole reason why she does it. But on days she feels
stressed or overwhelmed, or just not that good about herself she
won't eat for several days. I didn't notice it at first, she was really
really good at hiding it. But the closer she and I got in university the
more I started to notice the signs. I confronted her about it and you
know Ayesha, she pretends to be annoyed at everyone and
everything when she isn't. And she rarely gets genuinely angry too
but she blew up on me." He scratched the back of his neck, looking
down in shame.
"I'm not the best at approaching these types of situations...I never
really grew up learning what eating disorders were so I most
definitely had triggered her. But then she just started crying,
something I had never seen her do before, confessing what was going
on and then begged me to not tell anyone. I had never seen her look
so...broken. Desperate. So I agreed and didn't tell anyone since...well
now I guess."
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"It's alright, Zayn. It wasn't your fault. I'm sorry for insinuating earlier
that it was. You were just trying to be a good friend." Vanessa said.
Zayn sco ed, shaking his head. "Not that good of a friend since I
didn't notice it starting up again."
"How could you have? This isn't university anymore where we see
each other everyday. We all have jobs now, live separate lives and
hang out every so o en. Don't blame yourself for something you
can't control. I don't want you to lose yourself in that." Brandon said
from beside him, looking just as heartbroken as everyone felt.
I know they were all secretly blaming themselves though, especially
Vanessa since she hadn't noticed at all and they were best friends for
a decade.
"I tried to help her the best I could, you know? During her break, I
would bring her food and eat with her so she felt more comfortable.
When she became stressed I'd take her out to the park and we'd sit
and talk. I thought she was getting better...she seemed to be getting
better."
"I didn't know you guys were that close." Dean finally spoke up, voice
hoarse. Zayn shot him a weak smile, a small blush flushing his face.
"Me and Ayesha had similar schedules so we were always free around
the same time. And I guess...she finally had someone to talk about
her family problems with. I don't want you to feel bad, Vanessa, I wish
she had the courage to open up to you too. But me and Ayesha have
both grown up with immigrant parents making us understand each
other more."
Vanessa wiped away tears under her eyes, shaking her head with a
smile. "No, don't apologise for that ever. I'm so glad she had
someone she could turn to, someone who understood her. Thank
you, Zayn." She stood up, rounding the corner to hug him. "I couldn't
have asked for a better friend."
"So how do we help her?" Alyan asked once Vanessa was seated
beside him again.
"Eating disorders are really hard..." Alex spoke up, avoiding eye
contact with everyone. "It isn't something fixable but manageable.
Especially since Ayesha's was stemmed by her family, talking to her
mother can be an easy trigger. Honestly? The only way we can really
help her is be there for her. We know restriction is an outlet, right? We
can help her find other healthier ones. What does Ayesha like to do?"
"She used to love dancing...but because of school and now work, she
hasn't really had much time to fulfil her hobbies anymore." Vanessa
said quietly.
"Zayn, do you guys still talk o en?"
He shook his head, looking guilty. "Not as much as we used to."
"Alright," Alex nodded. "Remember, Ayesha won't get better until she
realises that this isn't healthy."
"She does..." Zayn cut in. "She knows it isn't healthy. We were talking
once and she brought it up. She was telling me about how she knew
it wasn't a good habit but it was all she had le ."
Alex looked surprised at that. "Oh...honestly, that is really good. Self
awareness is the first step to getting better. I guess my best advice to
you all is to not make a huge deal about eating food. Zayn did a really
good job of sitting and eating with her to not make her
uncomfortable, and he didn't force her to eat either. Constantly
bringing up food will make her think about it, and thinking about it
will make her want to restrict more. If she feels like restricting is all
she has, we need to silently show her that isn't true. Hopefully with
time and patience, she'll start to rely on dancing or calling one of you
if she's stressed and needs to talk it out. Other than that, there's
nothing more we can do."
A silence rang around the room when she was done. We were talking
quietly the entire time, in hopes of not wanting to wake up Ayesha
but now it seemed like our shopping plan was still on.
I climbed out of Dean's lap, standing on the floor with my hands
pressed against the table.
"I guess we should go and see if she's up for shopping then. Get her
head out of the house and be surrounded by clothes that she'll love."
Vanessa agreed, also standing up with a look of understanding
coming across all of us. We would be there for Ayesha, no matter
"You guys took me here as a trick!" Ayesha exclaimed, a drink in her
hand while she skimmed through the abundance of clothes. I
watched in amusement from across the aisle, a few midi skirts and
tops hung over my arm as I continued to scan through the articles of
clothing displayed.
"Ugh, Ayesha. How is it a trick if you love this store?"
She turned around to face Zayn, feigning annoyance. She looked way
happier than she had this morning, it now being mid-a erton and the
seventh store we have come across, one which basically had Ayesha's
closet as a store. Zayn was carrying piles of clothes, courtesy to
Ayesha, since she made him her designated shopping cart. I knew he
didn't mind though, he would do anything to make her happy.
"That's the problem!" She pointed at him. "You knew I'd love it here
and make me want to spend money on even more clothes. I'm
running out of closet space and it's all your fault."
He sighed, a smile of amusement on his face. "If I give you my closet,
can we stop shopping so I can sit down? I'm tired."
She looked at him and then glanced at the clothes in his arms, finally
nodding her head and then dragging him away to one of the couches
in the store. I continued my browsing, thinking about getting a new
pair of shoes today when Alex came up beside me with a dress in
hand.
"Try this on." She shoved it at my chest. I took the hanger from her,
glanding down at the material. It was a pretty sage green satin dress
that ended mid-thigh. The material was nice and so and before I
could say anything further, Alex was dragging me over to the dressing
rooms, taking my clothes and leaving me in the stall with the dress.
I sighed, doing as told as I stripped and slid it on before walking out
to meet her at the front. They didn't have mirrors in the stalls,
unfortunately, so the only way I could see how it looked was the one
near the entrance of the dressing rooms.
Upon exiting I saw Alex sitting on the couches placed in the front,
waiting for me to appear. At my presence she jumped up, mouth
agape.
"Sophia, oh my fuck!"
"I doubt that's how the phrase goes."
"Oh my god!" Vanessa came towards us as well, looking down at me.
"I could honestly cry because that colour looks so good with your
skin tone and that dress was practically made for you."
I blushed red, turning to look at the mirror as they continued their
praises. My hands pressed against the material, dragging it up as I
tilted my head to look at myself from their perspective. I
looked...nice. Pretty, even.
Okay, who the fuck am I kidding? I looked hot, alright?
As I turned around, keeping my eyes attached to my body I didn't
notice Dean in the mirror, his eyes also on mine. I paused, my entire
body lighting up.
"You need to get it, okay?" One of them said, it was hard to tell who
since I was so hyper focused on him.
"Okay," I murmured, still not quite listening.
As they walked away to continue on with their browsing, Dean came
up from behind, setting his hands on my waist as he continued the
staring contest in the mirror.
"Have I ever told you how pretty you are?"
"Occasionally. Mind doing it again so I have a refresher?" I smiled,
turning my head so I could look up into his real eyes.
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"Sophia..." He said so ly. "You are so fucking pretty."
"Dean, is it bad to say that I want you to fuck me?"
He broke into a small smile, pressing a so kiss against my lips before
shaking his head. "No, not really. I would be more concerned if you
didn't, actually."
That made me smile wider, turning back to gaze at myself. Wow, I was
a treasure. I turned, wanting to see how I looked from behind before I
froze, noticing my back. My back that was covered by lash marks.
My back that Vanessa, Alex, and possibly the entire store saw.
Dean noticed the change in my demaner, his eyes immediately
turning concerned.
"Hey, Soph. What's going on?"
"I can't buy this dress."
"What?" He asked, looking me over as if to find a tear or a mess up in
the fabric. When he didn't he looked back at me, even more
confused. "Why? Is there something wrong with it, sweetheart?"
"There's nothing wrong with the dress, Dean. But there's something
wrong with me."
"Sophia what are you...oh." His eyes fell on my back in the mirror
making me spin around, not wanting to parade it o . The sundresses I
bought before covered my back, while this one had a large cut out on
that side that showcased everything. I looked down, swallowing as I
tried to walk over to change when Dean directed us o to the side,
wanting to go somewhere private to talk.
He took my face in his hands, pressing a kiss to my cheek before
talking. "There's nothing wrong with you, Sophia. You look so
beautiful in this dress, it's hard to keep my eyes o of you."
"My back..." I shook my head, tears pricking the back of my eyes.
Fuck, I felt like I was always crying nowadays and I hated it.
"Is nothing to be ashamed of. What happened to you is and will never
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be your fault and I'm so sorry that it happened at all. If you're not comfortable in this dress, we can go get a new one that's fine. But your scars...every part of you is beautiful. I adore everything about

I smiled at him through my tears, pulling him in for another kiss.

"How noticeable are they?" I turned, looking at the mirror again.

Vanessa didn't seem appalled by it when she was beside me. Maybe
my brain was overeating like it always does? My hand brushed over
the rough skin, inspecting closely. They were faint, having been a
couple months old. At first glance you probably wouldn't notice them

"Not that noticeable unless someone is standing really close to you."

I looked back at him, expression surprised. "Oh, like how you are

He nodded in seriousness, making me laugh so ly. God, I never wanted him to change. I pressed my hands against his chest, on my

"You never have to thank me for telling the truth. Are you going to

I thought about it, looking down. I did look hot in it...and I really did

tippy toes so I could give him a quick kiss in appreciation.

"Yes," I said, my smile spreading. "I think I will."

"Thank you, pretty boy."

buy the dress?"

at all. I relaxed, letting out a small breath of air.

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you."