



UNCAPTIONED



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No One Talks Like That

The invitation is for dinner. The reply concerns capacity. *"I'm honoring what my nervous system needs right now."* You had asked whether Saturday suited. Apparently, Saturday has implications.

You type *"Another time,"* then reconsider. It sounds insufficiently attentive to the disclosure. You add *"Thank you for communicating your needs,"* and stare at the exchange. Two friends have successfully avoided arranging a meal.

The phrases are familiar: holding space, sitting with discomfort, protecting peace. They offer ready language when your own words are difficult to find. Then, gradually, they begin arriving before you've worked out what you mean.

You're annoyed, but *"I'm noticing some resistance"* sounds more considered. You don't want to help, but *"I need to respect my limits"* gives the refusal a little professional standing. Soon, an ordinary disagreement requires translation. *"That upset me."* *"I hear that this is bringing something up for you."* It was. Specifically, what you just said.

The tone remains gentle. Each person acknowledges the other's experience while taking care not to acknowledge their account of events. By the end, both feel unheard and can describe this with considerable fluency. Later,

someone sends a message that begins, *"I've been reflecting on our interaction."* You miss the days when a quarrel could start without a foreword.

Your Boundaries Are Not Holy Texts

The casserole dish has been at your friend's house since November. You ask for it back. Your friend explains that requests accompanied by expectations feel controlling. You consider asking without expecting the dish.

"I'm setting a boundary around pressure," they add. There is no date for its return. You hadn't realized the dish had become part of their recovery. It was advertised as oven-safe.

The next invitation arrives a week later. Could you bring something? You decline. *"No explanation needed,"* your friend assures you, then asks whether something is wrong between you. You say you'd rather not discuss it tonight. They remind you that healthy relationships require communication.

Their boundary closed the subject. Yours appears to have opened a case. By morning, you have received a long message about the importance of showing up for people. It acknowledges that everyone has limits, then explains why yours are disappointing.

You begin a reply about mutual respect. After several revisions, it contains enough careful language to conceal the fact that you're furious. You delete it. *"Please leave the dish on your porch. I'll collect it at six."* Your friend replies that you seem upset. You are. You'd also like the lid.

The Etiquette of Disclosure

"How are you?" "Tired." Your friend settles into the chair. *"No, how are you really?"* You had hoped tired would qualify. They lower their voice to the register used for difficult revelations and expensive sleep recordings. Take your time. This is a safe space.

It's also a café, and the person at the next table has stopped typing. You say it's been a long week. *"What's underneath that?"* Thursday, mostly. You decide against saying so.

A second friend joins you and is brought up to date on your reluctance to be brought up to date. Both assure you there's no pressure. They're here whenever you're ready. Neither changes the subject. You offer a small disappointment from work. It seems sufficient to explain the fatigue without requiring anyone to move their chair closer.

The response is immediate. *"Thank you for trusting us with that."* You had mentioned a meeting running late. Still, the atmosphere improves. You've supplied something they can receive. One friend shares a similar experience. The other asks where you feel it in your body.

At this point, mostly in your jaw. The server arrives to ask whether you'd like anything else. *"Another coffee,"* you say. She writes it down without asking what the coffee represents.



No Is a Conversation Starter

You decline the next invitation. *"Thanks for asking. I'm going to stay home this time. Have a lovely evening."* "No explanation needed," comes the reply. You're pleased. For several minutes, the matter appears settled. Then: *"Just checking we're okay?"* You say you are. *"Your message felt a little distant."*

You reread it. You thanked them, stated your plans, and wished them a pleasant evening. There is no obvious place to insert proof of affection without reconsidering dinner. You add that it's been a busy week.

They understand completely. They only wish you'd said so at the beginning. Without context, people are left to fill in the gaps. You apologize for the confusion. *"Please don't apologize for having needs."* The exchange has now taken longer than deciding what to bring would have.

You start to put the phone down. *"One thing, though. When you withdraw like this, it affects other people."* By nine, you've explained your week, reassured your friend, and agreed to communicate more openly. You're still staying home. They hope you'll use the time to reflect.



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