**The Pool Girl**

by Leto Armitage

**Chapter 22**

By seven AM we had checked out and headed to the airport. Lavi lost out on the game so Melissa and I ended up in the row together, held hands, and read. Both stewards were men and uninteresting to Melissa so the flight was quieter. She said the Sanderson book was slow going but she was going to tough it out. I was reading the Nero Wolfe novel which was like visiting with an old friend for a few hours. Lavi was in the row ahead of us in a long conversation about building an Instagram following with a middle-aged man who was partially flirting with her but also apparently an advertising executive and genuinely curious about it. Once he complimented her dress I thought about dumping a glass of ice on his head but then decided to be an adult about it. Once the plane was on the ground it didn’t take us long to get a cab and be headed home. It was in the cab that I got the call.

I answered and heard a bored young man, “Mr. Carlo?”

“Yes?”

“This is Brian from Quality Cleaning Services.”

“Hi, Brian, to what do I owe the pleasure?”

“Good morning, I’m just calling to let you know that Mrs. Kowalczuk won’t be cleaning your house anymore. We just found out this morning so we will be arranging a replacement, probably in the next 48 hours.”

“Is she all right?”

“She’s fine Mr. Carlo, she contacted us this morning and said she was going to skip your house.”

“She’s not sick is she?”

“Uh, no but we will be finding you a new cleaner.”

“She’s quit?”

“Not exactly, she’s decided to not clean your residence anymore. We do allow for employees who don’t feel comfortable in a given residence...”

“Not comfortable?” I was really confused.

“Apparently she spoke to someone in your neighborhood and learned about your living arrangements, something about young women...”

I felt my temper start to rise and cut him off. “Monday mornings are when she cleans. So, she didn’t clean this morning?”

Brian, whoever he was obviously didn’t want conflict but sounded very bored by it. “No, Mr. Carlo, she didn’t.”

“I have guests over today, this is a problem for me. Why didn’t you send someone else over immediately?”

“Well, Mr. Carlo, I just got to it and all of our staff are busy...”

“Well, you can remove my account.”

“Now, Mr. Carlo...”

“No. Your service is a matter of convenience and it’s no longer convenient. Don’t send anyone and don’t expect payment.” I hung up, pulled up my bank app, and canceled the recurring one to the cleaning service.

I leaned my head back against the seat and Melissa was rubbing my shoulder. “Is everything all right?”

“Just some bullshit. Apparently my house cleaner got wind I’m living in sin and quit. So, I guess I’ll have to get some spit and polish done when we get home.”

Lavi, “Don’t worry about it. I’ll sweep, dust, and make sure the first-floor bathroom is clean. It’s not a big deal.” She smiled at me and leaned into my arm. “I’ll tell you what, I’ll take over the basic cleaning in the house. It’s not that much and it’ll give me something to do while Melissa is cleaning the pool and doing stuff outside. You can even pay me just like you do her. Not like a job though, that’d be weird.” She got a devilish grin and rubbed against me like a cat. “Does daddy want to give his lioness an allowance for doing her chores. I’ll be a good girl and do what daddy wants.”

I laughed at Lavi but her teasing meant I needed to re-arrange something in my pants to be comfortable. Melissa leaned into the other side of me and made doe eyes at me, “What about me daddy, do I get an allowance?”

“You don’t want to get paid the same way anymore?”

Melissa dropped the act and got serious, playing with my shirt, “Honestly, it’s kind of weird, getting paid to just take care of something in our house. I want to keep doing it though.”

Lavi, “And I’m kind of excited. When Melissa is doing stuff and I’m just sitting there it feels awkward. I’d feel more like it was my place too.”

I thought about it a second and then said, “All right, how’s this then? If they’re just your regular part of chores then instead of payments I get you two credit cards and just try to keep it reasonable but that way if there is an emergency or anything you can be covered.”

“Sounds good,” they said together. They had their hands joined in my lap, and although they weren’t teasing me it made for a light pleasant pressure against my manhood.

Lavi looked at Melissa, “I hate to ask but do you think mommy-dearest could behind this thing with the cleaners?”

Melissa sighed, “I’ll see if I can get a look at her phone to see if she called anyone. This kind of thing isn’t like her though.”

“You know her passcode?” I asked. “I mean usually, people paranoid about others like she has been with tracking you keep their stuff really locked down.”.

“I don’t know the code,” she replied, “but I set her phone up for her so my thumb is set up for finger recognition on it.”

Lavi’s eyes went wide, “That is damn sneaky. Are you sure you’re not Slytherin? I’m kind of proud of you. And turned on, which is weird.”

Primly and in all seriousness, Melissa’s only reply was, “I don’t think green is my color. But Ravenclaws are sneaky too, we’re just smarter about it.”

Lavi’s vocalized thoughts continued, “Malfoy as a girl might be kinda cute though...”

Melissa, “Ewww! I don’t need that image in my head!”

I grinned, “Stay away from fan fiction then.”

Melissa put her free hand up as if to swear an oath, “I will.”

I didn’t say it but I wondered to myself if Melissa’s mom did have something to do with it and if Melissa was giving her too much credit.

Once home we disembarked from the cab and made our way into the house. On the front steps was the farm delivery I’d arranged for this morning. I took it inside and we divided up duties. Melissa took luggage upstairs and Lavi got cleaning supplies out of the hall closet while I took the delivery to the kitchen.

The paper was still on the kitchen table where I’d left it for Mrs. Kowalczuk, including the special instruction to take certain things out for defrosting. I briefly considered just skipping it. Lavi, unaware I had planned to do something, had told the squad I wasn’t fixing anything today. I could just let it ride but that felt like admitting defeat somehow. I removed the frozen plastic blocks that kept everything cold and looked at what I had: chicken breasts, artichokes, prosciutto, greens. I could take the chicken and cut it up, make something that could be eaten with toothpicks, have fun with making something with a bite. I got out sherry, ginger, garlic, sesame oil, and some honey just to make it sweet too. It wouldn’t be hot but have a lot of flavors. The artichokes and prosciutto would go well on a flatbread which wouldn’t have to rise and I’d made a batch of spicy honey using a very light dilution of habaneros that would set them off. I got to work.

Ten minutes later Lavi and Melissa both stuck their heads in, with Melissa leading the charge. “What smells so good?”

I made a shooing-away motion. “I’m getting the food ready. Everything else ready?”

They came into the room. Both had changed into tight workout shorts and light tops with sports bras underneath. Melissa put her arms around me and kissed my neck. “You’re a stubborn man.”

“I love you too,” I replied. Soon after I had things ready and retreated to the bedroom to watch a comedy. After practice, the girls came in and we snuggled for a while and they went home.

Tuesday I came out after everyone else left and we ended up naked in the pool, playing. There wasn’t any coordinated sexual activity but we all played. I ended up fucking Melissa on the steps and Lavi gave me a blowjob while I sat on the edge. Melissa and Lavi lay on a lounge and scissored and kissed while I rubbed their backs. And then they left to be with their other families. We all texted each other before bed and it felt strange to not roll over and bump into a warm body. The bed felt huge.

I’d really looked forward to Wednesday since they would stay the night. By the time I came downstairs, the girls had finished cleaning and I started dinner. We had Peruvian chicken with steamed vegetables and some fresh bread I’d made that morning. After dinner, I sat in the middle of the couch and the girls took what was becoming their standard position, lying with their feet in my lap. That meant I always had feet to rub. Lavi proposed a horror movie I hadn’t seen and which I enjoyed more than I thought I would. Horror movies were never going to be my first choice, though. After it was over I proposed root beer floats using some locally made root beer and vanilla ice cream I’d made the day before. We sat outside on the loungers.

Lavi looked at Melissa, “Still doing the swimsuit trip tomorrow morning?”

“Sure. Zahra’s excited?”

“She’s bubbly.”

“Awww...”

“So,” I was trying to choose my words carefully, “this swimsuit thing, does her dad know I’m going to be here?”

“Pretty sure,” Lavi said.

“Does he know she’s getting this suit?”

They looked at each other. After a noticeable pause, Melissa said, “Probably not.”

Lavi, “But we don’t know for sure.”

I looked at Lavi, “Are you planning on keeping it here for her?” Lavi nodded affirmatively. That answered my question. I leaned back and closed my eyes.

“It’s not like he can expect her to come over and wear that thing she has for swimming, it’s like a hundred degrees out!” Argued Melissa.

“I have no idea what he might expect,” I responded plainly. Melissa looked ready to fight, “And he’s been really nice to me. I don’t want to deceive him about anything.”

Melissa got a look of consternation on her face and then deflated. “Fuck, I hate when you’re like this.”

“Like what?”

“Noble. Last time it was getting in the way of fun, too.”

“I recall you overcame it.”

“Yeah, fortunately for me you don’t get like this very often.”

Lavi giggled and sipped her root beer. I stood up. “I’m going to call him. Be right back.”

Melissa, “Right now?”

“You have to rip the bandage off.” I wandered down to the office to make the call. I don’t know why, but it’s where I made a lot of calls. I hate calling people so I guess it’s a psychological crutch. I sat at my work desk and made the call. The phone rang twice and a young man’s voice answered, “Hello.”

“Hi, this is Robert Carlo, is Dr. Tahan available?”

“I’ll check, sir.” The voice sounded like a teenager but was respectful. A moment later he said, “he is going to take the call in the study, sir.”

I heard a familiar voice say, “Robert, it’s good to hear from you.”

“Yussef, I apologize for interrupting you tonight.”

“Not at all, what can I do for you?”

“Well, this is a bit awkward but you know that Zahra is coming over here for a party Friday, correct?”

“Yes, yes, the cheerleader party, I know that. You will be there as one of three adults, correct?”

“Yes, and no boys other than myself.”

“Very well, she told me.”

“And it’s a pool party.”

“As in swimming? She is a good swimmer. I’m not worried about that.”

“Uh, I was more concerned about the swimsuit and appearances. I found out that Melissa and Lavi were planning to take her shopping for a new one tomorrow morning.”

“Oh,” he replied. I left it at that for a moment as he gathered his thoughts. When he spoke again he said, “Do you know what kind of suit?”

“Knowing my wives they will encourage her to ... wear whatever she wants.”

He said something that I think was Arabic but I couldn’t understand at all and then he sighed deeply.

“Robert, I find myself in difficult waters and the wind is against me.”

“How can I help?”

“My daughter ... you have not had children so I don’t know if you can understand. Did you know she is the middle child of seven?”

“Uh, no, I did not. I do want you to understand that Melissa and Lavi aren’t trying to undercut you, they’re just thinking of their friend.”

His voice sounded heavy. “My father was very fond of old sayings. There is one about mistaking foes for friends but my father would always add onto it his own bit that it is just as bad to mistake friends for foes. I understand but it does not mean I approve. I do not know what to do. Zahra is her mother’s daughter, she absorbs what is around her and changes like mercury.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sure it’s been hard for her without her mother.”

“She was my third wife and had cancer. She died young but she lived every moment. I have not married again since.”

Huh? Wasn’t he married now?

He continued. “Zahra reminds me more of her every year, it has not been easy for Zahra, six siblings by two other mothers, and no mother for her to cling to so I have tried to be mother and father which I’m not good at. And my wives seem united in only one thing - that I spoil Zahra.”

I paused, did I... “Yussef, you said when wives ... do you have more than one wife?”

“Robert, you didn’t know? Didn’t Zahra tell you?”

“No, I think I would have remembered.”

He laughed, he had a rich baritone laugh, “Yes, one lives here with me and one remains home in Kuwait, she did not want to come to the United States but I return several times a year to visit.”

Well, that explained a few things.

He continued, “Let me tell you, that your wives are so close is a blessing. I’m uncomfortable about their form of closeness but I am jealous too. Zahra told me they would raise the children with both as equal mothers. Oh, when one feels slighted over another. Maybe God has blessed you, my friend.”

“I’m not really religious...”

“Are you an atheist?”

“No, I just ... I don’t feel like I know any kind of truth.”

“You will know God is real one day, hold no false idols before you to blind you and you will see it in time, I have faith.”

I didn’t know what to say so I said, “Thank you.”

“Now, Zahra,” he said.

“Yes.”

He sighed again and seemed to be collecting himself, “I know that I run a difficult balance with her. I would wish her to embrace our traditions but she is so much an American now. And ... if I am, to be honest, I am weak. I would rather she reject tradition and still love me than run away from me.”

“And that means?”

“It means I will look the other way but for the love of our savior, please keep the suit at your house. If my wife finds out about Zahra’s behavior she will be Herodias calling for my head on a platter. It will be the perfect excuse.”

“Excuse?”

“My wives never liked Hadiya, Zahra’s mother, and Zahra has inherited their disdain for her mother. She rebels in little ways. I should have sent her away to live with Hadiya’s parents but I was greedy. A man should not love one wife more than others but Hadiya was special and even when she was young Zahra reminded me of her mother so I kept her near. And as she has become more American ... another saying from my father involved how if you sail two ships too close you shouldn’t be surprised when both hulls become damaged. That is how it has been.”

“I promise you there will be no boys there and I will do nothing.”

“Thank you. I believe I can trust you to keep her safe. God be with you.”

“And with you.” I hit the end call button. Fuck, I needed a minute to absorb that. A minute passed as I sat and then I decided to be a big boy and head back upstairs. I walked back to the poolside to find Lavi and Melissa giggling.

“She didn’t?!” Lavi said.

“She did.”

“Who did what?” I asked.

Melissa turned to look at me. “T’wana called Ji a skanky cunt for coming to the party on Friday. Apparently practice was one thing but this was too much.”

“Huh. Well, I got some interesting news of my own.” I laid back down and retrieved my root beer with melted vanilla ice cream in it. Melissa especially looked apprehensive. “He’s not exactly fine but he gives his approval so long as there are no other males than myself and...” I looked at them both “the suit stays here and her...” step-mother wasn’t quite right “his wife doesn’t learn about it, so no pics that include her on Instagram or anything like that.”

They both launched arms up in victory, “Wooh!” “Yeah!”

Melissa stood up saying, “I think you deserve a reward.”

I laughed, “I don’t...” She began to take her shirt off. “ ... don’t think you’re wrong, that was very noble of me and I do deserve a reward.”

Lavi grinned and undressed. Soon Melissa was taking my shirt off and I lifted my hips so Lavi could pull my pants and underwear down. I stared at them as they finished, Melissa tall, built, and every bit the girl next door. Lavi meanwhile was muscular but curvy and dark-haired with curly hair. I was aroused and stiffening. Melissa pointed at where I was getting firm and said, “Lavi love, if you would.”

She said nothing but sank to her knees and took me in her mouth. She suckled on my length and any softness in me evaporated. After I got hard she stroked me and pushed her head up and down letting it pop out with a wet sound as I shuddered. She giggled and said, “That’s what I like to hear. Tell me you like me sucking your cock.”

I ran my fingers through her hair, “I don’t want you to ever stop sucking my cock.”

Melissa was sitting on another lounger, playing with herself. Lavi looked at her as she stroked me, “Do you like me sucking on his cock?”

“Fuck yes.” She was watching intently and seemed to have trouble sitting still, pushing her hips up at her own hand moving between her thighs.

Lavi flicked her tongue under my head lightly a half dozen times and I moaned out, “Do that again,” I said. She did and I moaned my appreciation.

Looking at Melissa, Lavi asked, “Ready?” Wordlessly Melissa got up and straddled me, slowly lowering herself on to my dick. Lavi held me still and spread Melissa’s lips to guide me in.

Melissa sighed, “That’s what I wanted,” as she began pushing herself up and down. I lay back, letting her do all the work and pace herself. Lavi wasn’t inactive and reached out to play with Melissa’s nipple so I occupied myself by reaching out to find Lavi’s clit and wetting my thumb gently rubbed it which made her shake her hips at me. Melissa leaned forward and braced herself against my chest with her arms and began to speed up. Lavi let go and stood by the lounge just watching as I transferred my hands to Melissa’s breasts cupping each. “That’s it, play with my tits while I bounce on you.” She moaned more, began a chant of “oh, oh, oh, OH” and then went very still grinding her hips into me. Her eyes closed and I felt echoes of her tremors. Then she smiled and started again faster, slamming up and down on me so that I felt the lounge shift occasionally when she came down and she came again quickly. Soon she had cum three times and Lavi was laughing.

Lavi grabbed her face and kissed her passionately. “Enough slut, my turn.”

Melissa jumped off gleaming with sweat and smiles. “Your turn my lioness,” she said as she stood aside but not before roughly pinching Lavi’s nipples, which made Lavi’s knees buckle for a split second.

Lavi lowered over me but braced against me immediately, not quite having the height or leg strength Melissa did. My dick was right at her opening and I reached out and cupped her ass cheeks. She looked me in the eyes. “You want this pussy?”

I answered by shoving up with my hips and pulling her down at the same second. She was already wet but not loosened, it had to hurt her a bit, it did me. I growled into her ear. “I don’t want it, I need it.”

She threw her head back and I swear she purred as she ground against my pelvis. “Did you hear that baby,” she looked towards Melissa. “Our hubby said he needs this pussy.”

Melissa smiled and kissed Lavi, “Oooo I like that.” Then Lavi began to fuck me. She got a regular rhythm going as soon as she was loose and kept it up. I kneaded her ass like bread dough in my hands. Melissa stood there rubbing Lavi’s back and watching us.

“I am never going to get tired of watching you fuck her,” Melissa said.

I was about to say that sounded good to me but got distracted when Lavi began clenching tightly and sped up as she almost fell and I felt a sudden stab of pain in my shoulder as Lavi exhaled something like a muted scream through her nose as she bit me.

Then she sat up, panting, and caught her breath, her breasts gorgeous in the setting sun. I pushed Lavi back and started to climb on top of her but suddenly felt a hand on my dick. It was Melissa who was looking at me with those pitiful little girl eyes, “Do I get another turn?” she asked.

I stood up and Melissa bent over. I had that animalistic urging in the back of my head that needed something and wasn’t going to take no for an answer. Standing behind her I pushed in without resistance. I grabbed her hair and pulled her head back. “You’re mine, mine.” I was already close. I pushed and she pushed back and the lounge chair moved forward but we went with it, shuffling and fucking. I had barely begun fucking her when I started to cum and just as quickly she chanted, “I’m going to cum, don’t stop, don’t stop, don’t stop.” As soon as I felt it hit her I lost all control and came.

We stopped and I hugged her from behind. “Well, it’s a good thing you were close,” she said “or we’d have ended up pushing the chair all the way into the pool.” She giggled and I didn’t have anything to say so I kissed her again. Lavi had gone to get a bottle of wine and I decided to turn on the hot tub. Soon we were enjoying the heat and gently splashing water at each other while grabbing anything that looked inviting. At one point Lavi came again with Melissa’s fingers in her and each of us sucking on one of Lavis’ generous nipples.

It was quiet and we were enjoying just being there when some neuron connected in the back of my head with a question. “So,” I started, “neither of you said how your families were when we got back from the trip.”

Lavi shrugged. “Dad is keeping the line of if I’m happy he’s happy but I know him, he won’t really relax until it’s been a while but he doesn’t want to put that on everyone else.”

Melissa sipped her water, “Rian is keeping his opinions to himself, whatever they are. Bringing it up would be like setting off firecrackers around a big grumpy animal so he’s not saying anything.”

“The big grumpy animal being your mom?” I asked.

“Yep.”

“And how is she handling it?”

“Same as before, ignoring it. She did the same thing when I dyed my hair blue last year and when I dated the guy from the chess club.”

“I like the natural blonde but the blue was cute,” offered Lavi.

“What do you think about some blue streaks, maybe light blue that kind of blend in?” asked Melissa, pulling a few strands in front of her to look at.

Lavi, “That would be super cute.”

Melissa, “Anyway, how was my other mom?”

“Oh,” said Lavi, “She wanted to hear all about the trip, everywhere we went. I told her about the dinner on the beach and us dancing and she’s now talking about how we totally should do some kind of marriage ceremony. She’s been on the internet looking at hand binding ceremonies and all kinds of stuff.”

Melissa seemed excited by that. “That would be awesome!”

“Seriously,” said Lavi, “I showed her the rings and I thought she was going to cry.”

Melissa snorted, “I think I could plant my left hand on mom’s face and she’d pretend she couldn’t see them.”

They both giggled and then Melissa looked at me. “How about your mom.” She put a lot of emphasis on the word ‘your’.

“What about her?”

Melissa fussed at me, “Robert, really, she’s your mother.”

I took a placating tone to show I wasn’t trying to fight, “And I love her but I’m not living with her, I don’t need her approval.”

Lavi gave me the look, the one that said I was being dense and stupid and maybe insensitive. I just had no idea about what. So, I looked at her and asked “What?”

Lavi rolled her eyes so strongly I’m surprised she didn’t give herself a concussion. “Have you told her?”

“Oh, yeah. I called her a few weeks ago and told her all about it.”

Melissa, “And you didn’t tell us!?”

“Does it matter?”

Them together: “YES!”

If I hadn’t been sitting in a hot tub I would have backed up. “All right, all right.”

Melissa, “Details.” Lavi, “Now.”

“Not a whole lot to say. She was kind of weirded out. I think she’d thought I’d get married before and decided since I was a dedicated bachelor.”

“And,” Melissa asked, “did our ages come up?”

“I told her everything. She did seem kind of concerned that maybe I was being taken advantage of but I told her once she met you both she’d understand.”

Lavi, “When will that be?”

“I was thinking that once you have your school schedules we can plan a weekend visiting her.” The girls looked at each other and something transmitted I couldn’t read. “But, changing topics, I nearly forgot but I was going to tell you both something else.” Melissa made a ‘go on with it’ gesture. “When I talked to Dr. Tahan I found something out. He is polygamous. Zahra’s mother was his third wife.”

Lavi, “Uh, wow, whoa!”

“That does explain things,” Melissa added, “and I don’t blame her for not telling people. She already draws attention from the assholes for how she dresses, that would really open her up to harassment.” So a pact was made right there to keep it secret for her.

The rest of the evening was simple. We eventually moved to the bed and by the time I got sleepy I put down my copy of Some Buried Caesar, kissed the girls good night, and drifted off as they still chatted quietly. Thursday came and went. I had Thursday and Friday off and spent Thursday largely watching movies, making pizza dough, and getting ready for Friday. When Friday arrived I woke up and started prep work. Melissa and Lavi would arrive early to help me set up but the others would arrive about noon. The party would go until whenever people wandered off but I had plenty of food.

I also made large amounts of my homemade sangria with fresh fruit. I knew that alcohol was not a mystery to the girls but I wasn’t comfortable with providing alcohol. I figured the sangria was very low in alcohol and they’d appreciate being treated like adults. Fate likes to laugh at us when we make plans. But right then my thoughts were on Melissa bringing coolers for ice and I was firing up the outdoor wood oven when I heard the patio door open and saw not only Melissa and Lavi but June, Grace, and Sylvia come through.

“Hi ladies.”

Lavi and Melissa skipped up to me and gave me kisses. Lavi was hugging me when Melissa added, “We all came in June’s SUV.”

“Well I’m pleased to see you,” and I gave her another kiss.

Sylvia clapped her hands together, “Put us to work!” So, I did. Soon everything was falling into place as Grace and Melissa were directing everyone. They really did work well together and seemed to bounce off each other’s energy. June was assigned to get the grill ready and Sylvia was helping me bring ingredients out. That was when the sangria was discovered. Soon we all had a drink in hand courtesy of June, who seemed to find it a much higher priority than getting the grill going.

June approached me, “So, Robert, how would you feel if I ran to the store and bought something a little more potent to add to the sangria?”

And I had been worried about the teenagers wanting to spike the punch. “Just us three?”

“Cross my heart and hope to die.” She even did the whole crossing motion over her chest. I internally sighed, I’ve always been bad at telling girls no.

I shrugged and said, “Sure.” She almost hopped and yelled over her shoulder, “I’ll be right back!” She returned a short while later with a potent strawberry flavored vodka that did blend well with the sangria. After fixing new drinks for myself, Sylvia and herself she got the grill going and assigned herself to grill duty which freed me up. Before long the keep warm area of the grill was filling up with chicken patties, burgers, and sausages while I put chili and coleslaw out along with the buns that Melissa grabbed from a local bakery.

In fact, it was as Melissa came back with the buns that Lavi, and she looked at each other and said together, “Last errand.” I wasn’t sure what this meant but they stood there in their jean shorts and simultaneously lifted up their t-shirts to show swimsuits underneath. Lavi’s was her black metallic one while Melissa’s was a red, white, and blue American flag bikini.

“Comfy time!” Grace yelled and removed her own shirt to reveal the top of a shiny turquoise one-piece suit and I could see that the sides were absent making it reveal a lot of skin. Grace is not as statuesque as Melissa but she has a tight body and I could see the muscle definition from the back. I tried averting my gaze but that’s when June took her top off. Fortunately, it was a floral print top of a conservative one-piece. She still looked like she could do some cheering of her own. It was more conservative than the younger ladies but she did have a healthy chest.

Averting my eyes yet again I ran into Sylvia’s gaze. I think I gave her a look that indicated a certain question. She held her hands up. “I think I’ll stay like this.” That was fine with me. This was going to be a long day and most of the squad hadn’t even arrived yet. Some of that fortified strawberry sangria was starting to sound better and better. That’s when the knock came on the door in the back fence and I saw an African American girl step through with full lips and long blonde hair. She was wearing yellow capri pants and a light blue top with sleeves that ended at the elbows and flared out like bellbottoms.

Almost instantly she was grabbed by Melissa who brought her over.

“Robert, this is Amber, Amber, this is Robert.”

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Carlo.” She held out her hand.

I shook her hand, “Robert, please. You were in Europe until this week?”

She laughed, “Yeah, I’m playing catch up with Mellie and Grace’s training but the family did the tourist thing in Spain, France, Italy.”

“Sounds like fun. Well, grab anything you want and hang out.”

With that Lavi turned on the music and pop music started playing across the backyard. I decided to go ahead and put the first pizza in. A few minutes later a gaggle of teenagers came into the yard that I hadn’t met and I was pretty sure I hadn’t even seen pictures of some of them before. The girl who came through first I did recognize as Ji. In her wake was a taller girl, obviously related but with more delicate features that had to be Xinyi. If I hadn’t been told in advance that she was the younger sister I would have thought she was older. Honestly, I would have believed she was in her 20s if you’d told me she was. Following next was a redhead with pale skin and freckles. She had a broad smiling face with just a tiny bit of baby fat left and her hair was vibrant red and fell straight down her shoulders. The last girl in the line came through while looking at her phone. She had light brown hair and glasses but was cute. All were wearing bathing suits with sarongs. The first three were all wearing bikinis, though of the two sisters, only the one I assumed was Xinyi was maybe an A cup. The brown-haired girl wore a white one-piece that looked more functional for swimming than decorative for lounging.

They were waving at everyone when the final squad member walked up behind me and said, “Hello.”

I almost jumped from surprise but smiled and turned around to say hi to Zahra. Melissa must have let her in the front door to change. And change she had. She wore a modest white bikini. The bottom was wide and reminded me of men’s briefs style underwear. The top had large cups and thick bands. They weren’t the only thick things either. Unless padding was deceiving me this she was in Melissa territory up top. She also had her hair swept to the side and was smiling. I reminded myself that stray thoughts were very inappropriate.

What I said was, “Glad you could make it.”

She had her fingers interlaced and her hands held to her chest and she stood on her tippy toes. “Mellie told me about you calling my dad. I just wanted to say thank you.”

“Well, you can repay me by having fun.”

She stepped up and gave me a tiny peck on the cheek. Contrary to what Lavi later reported to Melissa I did not blush a deep red. That side of my face had just been facing the wood oven, that’s all. I was saved by a very nervous tiny Chinese girl reaching me. Lavi had apparently intercepted the arrivals and said gesturing at me, “Robert,” and in turn, “Ji, Xinyi, Emma, Coraline.”

I saw Ji’s head tilt towards the wood oven.

“Hi, nice to meet you all. We have drinks, burgers, and sausages ready, and I’ll have the garlic pizza with artichokes, cauliflower and mozzarella out in a second. Up next after that is the sweet potato pizza with caramelized onions, feta, and ricotta, that one will be a red pizza. And last, I’ll toss on another white with balsamic mushrooms and onions.”

Ji looked at me as she asked quietly, “They’re all vegetarian?”

“Yeah, Melissa and Lavi told me you like vegetarian pizzas so I made these, and I went thin crust so you should be able to have a piece of each easily enough.”

“Wow, thank you.”

I smiled, “Don’t thank me yet. We don’t know if they’re good yet.”

She smiled. “Sweet potato? I’ve had one with regular potatoes but never sweet potatoes; that sounds really good.” I checked and confirmed the pizza was ready to come out so I pulled the stone out and transferred the pizza off before putting in the next one. Ji walked up next to me to look in the oven and jumped a bit when she realized she’d brushed against me then moved back as if in apology. “I’d noticed the oven when practicing. I wondered if you used it.”

“Yep. I could show you how to make pizza dough if you’re interested.”

“Really?” She looked up at me.

“Yeah, it’s not hard at all. It takes practice learning how to get a circle when you flatten it out, but if you’re okay with some lopsided but delicious learning experience it’s not hard at all.”

“That would be kind of awesome.” She smiled.

“Great. I’m going to get the last pie ready inside, you girls enjoy yourselves!” I waved and stepped inside. It was cool and quiet and I took just a second to breathe deeply and look out the glass doors. A few girls were bopping to the music but mostly they were talking. June and Sylvia were lying on loungers, drinking, and chatting. Lavi was pouring water for the JV squad members, soon to be varsity I guessed. Ji was cutting the pizza and blowing on a piece while eating it piping hot. I would have burned my mouth trying to eat it like that. She looked happy. The only one I didn’t see was Melissa. So, I went looking.

I found her upstairs in the bedroom, gathering up piles of beach towels we had bought in Miami as gifts to take downstairs. I walked up behind her.

“Hey, babe.” I put my arms around her. She had taken off her shorts and was walking in just the red white and blue bikini. “What’s going on?”

“Not enough towels down there if we’re going to be in and out of the pool so I saved these to give you today. They can use them and take them home.”

“That’s smart.” I kissed her neck and held tight.

“Robert, I’m trying to be a good hostess.”

“I’ve got something you can welcome in.” I ran my hands under her bikini top.

“You’re impossible, I’m being responsible.”

“I’m not and you know how to say stop.”

“Robert, really?”

“Really.” I bit her neck gently and played with her breasts.

She struggled in my arms, testing to see how loosely I’d hold her. I tightened my grip and pushed her over and ground against her bikini covered ass.

She struggled against me and pushed back, surprisingly strong in her efforts but when I had to let go in with one arm to undo my shorts she didn’t struggle against that direction where she could have easily slipped free. “Do you want to do this right now? With our guests out there, with a bunch of young impressionable women who’ve probably never had a really delicious cock stretch them out and show them how much fun a good fucking can really be? Do you?”

“Well, we can stand by the window so they can actually see,” I offered.

“You’re a bad man.” Her legs opened just enough to make it easier for me while at the same time elbowing me a bit. “Let go, you brute.” She sounded more petulant than upset.

“After.” I got my cock out and pulled the bikini bottom to the side.

“You are being unreasonable!”

“And you’re getting,” I pushed in, “fucked.” She fell forward onto her knees on the bed and I followed, fucking her hard from behind. I didn’t worry about anything but the pressure that had been building in my balls. “Fuck fuck fuck ... I’m not going to last long...”

“Come on you bastard, get your fucking rocks off you horny goat. Ug uh uh uh, “ She finished her dialogue by biting the bedspread as she came and I quickly emptied inside her. God that felt good. She rolled onto her back and smiled broadly, “Come here, I’ll clean you up.” I scooted over and she took me in her mouth cleaning me up. I was partially hard again by the time she finished and she tucked me back in. “Damn satyrs. I’m going to have to clean up.”

“Life is hard.” She smacked me on my butt as I left. I was grinning. I went downstairs and started laying out the third pizza when Melissa walked past with the towels.

An hour later the pizzas were done, every obligation was complete and I sat down on a lounger next to Sylvia. I had barely put my head back when Lavi plopped onto my lap. She leaned over and gave me a kiss and whispered, “I saw you and Mellie when you came downstairs you naughty man.” She wiggled her butt.

I whispered back, “A gentleman never tells.”

Sylvia looked at her daughter, “I don’t suppose it would matter if I said that wasn’t a ladylike way to sit would it?”

Lavi put a finger to her mouth and wiggled her butt on my lap. “Well, we have a system here. Mellie spanks me if I’m naughty and,” she wiggled again, “Robert does things if I’m nice.” So, the family wasn’t excluded from her messing with people. Good to know.

Sylvia drank her sangria calmly, “I’ve thought a few times Melissa could spank me. Damn, she’s grown.”

Lavi stopped all motion and her eyes went wide. “Mom!”

Sylvia waved a hand dismissively, “And no, Mellie will always be a little girl to me but I’m not blind and ... well, I’ve done things you don’t know about. And another thing,” she, obviously feeling the enhanced sangria, wagged a finger at her daughter, “I don’t want to hear it.” What Sylvia didn’t know was that Melissa had come to stand right behind Sylvia’s lounge. Sylvia continued, “You might as well know that I know what a well-fucked look looks like and you have it every time you come home from here. I just don’t know from which one.”

Melissa leaned down so that she was right behind Sylvia’s ear but wasn’t quiet in what she said. “Maybe both,” offered Melissa. “Simultaneously.”

Sylvia’s eyes bugged, “Fuck a duck!” Melissa started giggling. Sylvia continued, “All right, I walked into that one. How much vodka did you put in this June?”

“About the right amount it seems,” June said grinning.

It was almost five and everyone was still going strong. The girls had been in and out of the pool and I’d taken to reading while the party went on to avoid watching the various wet glistening bodies. I mostly avoided watching them anyway, I’m neither a saint nor want to be one so I indulged a tiny bit. Coraline had taken up residence near me in a chair and after half an hour of building up courage had gone full-on fangirl on Sylvia asking about the motivation of the fifth Skyward book which she had just announced. Apparently, the protagonist, now well into her teenage years, was going to be in her first real relationship and have problems superpowers couldn’t solve.

I got up and went into the house to fix the salad I’d planned to put out. I was mixing the greens when Xinyi came in. Without warning I found myself facing her as she got between me and the sink. “Hi, Mr. Carlo.” She was tall, almost as tall as Melissa so I only had to look down a little.

“It’s Robert.” I took a step back but found her hand on my arm.

“Robert, I was hoping we could be friends.” She smiled. This had so many red flags written on it even a blind Italian referee at the World Cup would call this one. I backed up more and she double-stepped right into me. I could smell pure strawberry vodka on her breath. Someone had snuck some drinks from the bottle.

I put my hands on her shoulders to push her away when I heard a sharp intake of breath behind me. The patio door had just opened and Lavi and Grace stood there with an empty pitcher in hand. Lavi went from bewilderment instantly to a cheery disposition, turned behind her, and yelled out the door, “Mellie, babe, can you grab Ji and come help me real quick!”

Xinyi ran over to Grace, and I thought I heard her say something like, “Help me!”

Fuck me. Five minutes later I was in my room waiting for Melissa. Melissa and Grace were in another room with Xinyi. I sat on the bed just waiting with Ji studying me and Lavi fidgeting without any focus on her phone. It seemed like an eternity but Melissa came back in. Ji and Lavi both stood but I was fine sitting. Melissa took a deep breath.

“So, the short version is what Xinyi says is that Robert grabbed her and said she’d just be making trouble if she told anyone because it’d make me upset but she owed him for hosting us here.”

Lavi relaxed. “So, she’s lying,” she said.

Melissa, “Yep.”

Ji looked confused. “What do you mean?”

Melissa and Lavi did that microexpression communication thing that seemed like telepathy to me. It ended with Melissa saying out loud, “Well, uh, what your sister said didn’t make sense.”

“What didn’t make sense?”

“Any of it really but especially the part about me.”

“So, you wouldn’t be mad about it?” She clearly had trouble believing this.

“More than that,” Melissa said hesitantly. Melissa looked to Lavi for some kind of silent confirmation and apparently got it. “Okay, this is just between us right? What Xinyi did, what I’m about to tell you? I’d like this to all be private.”

Ji nodded, “Does that mean she can still make the squad?”

Melissa was very serious. “I don’t know, it’ll depend on what she says when we talk to her. We can’t have someone doing stuff like this.”

“That’s fair but you still haven’t made sense.”

Melissa took a deliberate breath. “I know she’s lying because I’d not only not be upset I’d be thrilled. If she jumped in bed with Robert I’d rush into the room to set up a camera to record if I couldn’t stay. It’s...” she looked straight into Ji’s eyes, “it’s a thing for me. I’d HELP him. And Robert knows this and he’d want me there for it.” I nodded, it was true. “And I know he’s not the kind of person that would have done this even if it weren’t that.”

“So...” Ji didn’t seem to know where to take that and Melissa’s cheeks were scarlet.

“Yeah.” Melissa nodded gravely.

“You’re sure?” Ji didn’t want to be convinced by this, I could tell.

Melissa, “I know you don’t know Robert but one hundred percent, she’s lying. I know him, I know his moods. I’m not saying he can’t be, well, aggressive but even if he was interested that’s just not how he’d do it. That they owe him?” That last sentence was oriented to Lavi.

Lavi sighed and looked at Ji, “That’s so not Robert. It’s ridiculous how “not Rob” it is. If she’d said he tried reciting poetry to seduce her I’d still not believe it but at least it’d be in the ballpark of possible. And pulling this after sneaking vodka from Grace’s mom, really? This is every kind of stupid.” It was silent a few seconds before Ji broke it.

“Fuck.” She said it like she was slamming down something that weighed heavily. “You know, most of us thought you,” she gestured to Melissa, “were with him and her,” she pointed to Lavi, “but that it wasn’t really, you know...”

“Robert is as much my husband as Melissa is my wife,” Lavi replied.

“Oh.” Ji looked at the floor trying to figure out what to say.

“Has she done anything like this before,” asked Lavi.

Ji, “Nothing like this but she’s lied about stuff and played the victim.”

Melissa added, “And could you smell the alcohol on her?”

Ji looked pained, “Yeah, I snuck a shot too.”

“I think she might have had a few more. So her judgment was impaired,” said my lioness, “She wants to join the squad, she sees older girls interested in our love...”

Melissa cut in and had her arms crossed, “And the lying is harmful and it’s a problem.” I recalled not that long ago Melissa did some lying when convenient but as I valued still having all my body parts I kept my mouth shut.

Ji walked over to me. She stood close to me and bowed deeply. “I’m really sorry Mr. Carlo. This was unacceptable. She’s my sister and I’m responsible.”

I started to put my hand on her shoulder but stopped myself. “It’s Robert and you’re not. She’s a big girl, big enough to get herself into big trouble and take her lumps herself.”

“I’m tempted to lump the bitch,” said Lavi.

Melissa turned to Ji. “Can we leave this with you and Grace? I don’t think Lavi and I need to team up on her here.”

“Should we leave?” asked Ji.

“No,” replied Melissa. “Let’s keep this between us. Everyone will know something big is up if you two leave and you brought Emma and Coraline with you.”

“But,” Lavi added, “she better keep some distance from the three of us for the rest of this party. There will have to be an accounting.” Her tone sounded like she was ready to bury a body. Weeks ago Lavi’s father told me she was way scarier than him. He was right.

I don’t know what was said but I went down and finished the salad. Before they left the kitchen Melissa and Lavi both made a point of giving me long loving kisses in front of the door where everyone could see us.

Melissa pinched my ass. “You know if she had just asked...”

“I would have still said no.”

Melissa pouted, “Party pooper.”

Lavi grabbed her roughly and pulled her in for a tight embrace and kiss of her own.

“How’s that for a party?” Lavi asked.

“I like,” her wife replied.

They went back to playing in the water with Emma and Amber. I sat back down just as June went to the bathroom and Sylvia dropped a frisbee onto the patio and sat back down herself. “That salad took a long time to make,” Sylvia said looking at me.

“Sure did.”

“Is everything fine?”

“Why wouldn’t it be?” I might have sounded more convincing if I wasn’t still tense as hell.

“Robert, Grace and Lavi go in, they call for Melissa and Ji, Xinyi is nowhere in sight and you’re in there. It doesn’t take a genius to know something is going on involving Xinyi. Now, it’s your house but...”

“But I’m also a guy.”

“Yeah.”

I sighed. “Some things were said that weren’t even close to true. I got lucky in that she picked bad lies.” I looked over at June, “Vodka might have been involved too. Fuck. Maybe I should install a lock on a cabinet.”

Sylvia patted my arm. “It’s okay. This stuff happens. Lavi got into her dad’s scotch when she was fifteen. She spent most of the night puking her guts out. And for the record, I’m glad the little bitch picked stupid lies, I wouldn’t want to have been wrong about you.”

“Little bitch?”

“Call it like I see it and until you hurt one of my girls you’re family.”

God, that felt good to hear. “Thank you.”

“But there is a bright side,” she said.

“And that is?”

She smiled. “School starts in two days. It’ll only get crazier from here.”

**Chapter 23**

The next two weeks were manic. The girls got schedules and I assumed that by the end of the second week we would be falling into a routine. I was wrong. Week one was nothing but chaos and I barely saw them except for Wednesday. By Saturday afternoon Lavi was in a mood and frustrated. Melissa just looked tired. We all snuggled on the bed for hours, had lazy sex, paid half attention to movies, and recharged emotionally. The week had been hard on all of us, having been so close so much for the last few weeks and then apart from each other this one. One decision we came to was that we needed more blocks of time together and with weekends needing to be figured out we decided that Thursday nights would be our time as well as Wednesday.

Weekends were harder to figure out. Saturdays Lavi went to temple with family and Sundays Melissa to church. We floated about every possible combination of these including all three of us going to both, which I wasn’t in favor of. In the end, we decided to mostly keep the status quo. We would spend Saturdays together as a family but while Lavi was at temple Melissa and I would have some alone time. When Melissa went to church on Sunday mornings Lavi and I would have some alone time and then see her parents in the afternoon. Despite an earlier, naive, plan to always share time with me they were alone a fair bit due to life. Lavi admitted she liked some alone time with Melissa and wanted some with me. Melissa felt the same. Lavi’s only conflict was that she always had family dinner on Saturdays and it was special. I asked if we could host it here and after a frantic phone call with her parents, it was done. I was now obligated to make meals for a Jewish family dinner every Saturday despite not being Jewish. I was reminded of John Lennon saying that life is what happens when you make other plans. I offered to cook a Sunday meal for Melissa’s parents and she agreed to take me up on it if her mother ever acknowledged my existence.

Through all this, a lot of life changed for me. Melissa continued to come every day possible to clean the pool but every now and then it was impossible. This meant about once a week I found myself cleaning the pool, which amused me. When Melissa did come, so did Lavi and Lavi did some cleaning around the house. Both had steadily increased their clothing stored in the closets and occasionally one would even pop over to look for something they may have left which were always pleasant surprises. When I was in high school you had six classes per day and they were the same every day. Now it was more like a college schedule, and I couldn’t keep track of theirs though I added both their schedules to my calendar just in case I needed to know. Melissa had the jeep most days and began running errands for me including a lot of pickups I used to pay extra for, which reduced some bills, making her insurance, I was pleasantly surprised to note, pay for itself.

Things were beginning to settle down by the third week. Practice for the girls was really ramping up as the following Friday was to be the first game for the football team and cheerleaders. It was late-August; the season didn’t properly start until after Labor Day so this was an exhibition game, to help the teams get the dust shook off with only a couple of weeks of practice under their belts. Melissa and Lavi caught me up on everything that had happened when they arrived Wednesday night.

We were all in the kitchen. I was cooking. Lavi and Melissa were going over notes at the table for some classes. Lavi was not enjoying her history class, and Melissa was quizzing her. I had earbuds in, watching TV while I grilled chicken breasts in the skillet. I heaped onions and mushrooms around them while the gravy was thickening. I suddenly felt arms around me and it was Melissa. I took my earbuds out as I felt her kissing the back of my neck.

“Done?” I asked.

“Lavi is as ready for her history test as she will ever be.” I flipped the chicken breasts and I reached awkwardly for the garlic butter as Melissa stayed glued to me.

“Bah fucking humbug.” That was from Lavi as she was piling books up at the end of the dinner table and got out plates. “Robert, seriously, have you ever had to know which English king came after which English king?”

“Honestly, no. I don’t remember anything from my history classes.” I turned the heat down. “Most of the history I do know comes from looking up stuff related to books or movies.”

Melissa disengaged and grabbed a carafe with homemade apple cider out of the fridge. Soon we were all eating.

Melissa, “Still coming next Friday night?”

“Couldn’t keep me away,” I said. “I look forward to the cheerleader skirts.”

Lavi, “Unfortunately we wear shorts under them.”

I grinned, “You don’t have to on the way home.”

“Perv.” Melissa smiled as she said it. “So, you’re driving Lavi’s car?”

“Yep. Then you can ride with the team and back with me.”

Lavi, “Sounds good. I don’t really want to ride with everyone on the bus...”

Melissa cut in, “but it’s good for morale on the squad.”

Lavi got a salacious look and replied, “I can think of how you can raise my morale on the trip.”

Melissa swallowed the bite of onion and chicken before saying, “Not on the bus. The testosterone is high enough.”

Lavi snorted, “Seriously.”

“So,” I said trying to ask a question I’d wanted to ask for a few weeks now. “How has their response been to our relationship.”

Melissa, “Well, I haven’t said anything to Mrs. Remington, but I’m sure she’s heard. She keeps giving us looks during practice.”

Lavi, “I noticed. I’ve gotten some crude comments, especially from the football team but all over the school really.”

“Me too.”

“Like what?” I asked.

Melissa cut up a few more pieces. “They break down into two sets really. The ‘oh you’re into pie now’ and the ‘oh, tired of hot dogs how about some thick sausage’ ones.”

Lavi shrugged. “Pretty much the same ones I always got. I don’t think it’s completely gotten around about you Robert, I think the only ones that really know are the cheerleaders and they’re not volunteering.”

“Except,” Melissa speared a piece of chicken a bit harder than she had to with the fork, “T’wana. You can bet it’s just a matter of time.”

Lavi laughed briefly. “What?” I asked.

“Oh,” she replied, “I did get one high five from one of the stoner crowd. What did he say? Something like, ‘Melissa Milton, you scored!’”

Melissa looked aghast. “What did you say?”

Lavi blew her a kiss. “I told him the truth, I did in fact score the best prize in creation.”

Melissa still looked embarrassed but pleased also and went back to eating.

“So,” my other lingering question was having trouble coming out, “uh, what about Jerry.”

Lavi stopped chewing, saw me looking at her, and looked back down at her plate. Melissa finished her bite and put her fork down and took a drink before replying.

“He cornered me in the hallway last week.”

“You didn’t say anything about it,” I said.

“There’s nothing to say.”

“Really?”

Her mouth pulled back a little tight and then she took a deep breath. “He asked if we could get back together, he said he didn’t have anything against Lavi and it was fine I was seeing her.”

Lavi’s voice dripped with sarcasm, “How magnanimous of him. He better not have thought I’d be into him.”

“Is it?” I asked. “I mean, you were willing to sleep with me before you got to know me for Melissa’s sake.”

“Yeah, but you’re not a simp.”

Melissa, “That’s mean.” Lavi shrugged and when it was clear no apology was forthcoming Melissa continued. “I told him I didn’t appreciate him talking to my mom about me. Then he said ‘us’ and I said there wasn’t an ‘us.’ He said there was a rumor and I told him not to listen to rumors but that I was in two relationships now and there wasn’t going to be a third. I told him I liked him as a person, that I liked him so much I wanted it to work and tried to but couldn’t make it happen. It was mostly true.” She looked at Lavi, “So no, I didn’t say he was a nice guy or we could be friends.”

She was looking at her plate. “Was it hard?” I asked.

“Yeah, I did the ‘rip off the band-aid’ thing, but I know it hurt him. I think he’s also gotten shit from the team about him turning me gay or something.” Her voice was soft and a little weak. Lavi grabbed her hand and squeezed it.

I thought about saying something but decided it would be trite so I got up and got the bananas and caramel from the stove. It was too easy for me to blaisé about it, I’d never even met the kid. Did I really call him a kid? Shit, he was about the same age as Melissa and Lavi.

I put the dessert on the table and rubbed at Melissa’s shoulders and kissed the top of her head. She slumped a bit and let me work my fingers into her muscles. Changing the topic, “So, there will be ten games?” I asked.

Lavi, “Yeah, once a week. There could be a few more if they win regionals but the team isn’t that good.”

“How far away do the games get?”

“Well, if we were to win regionals it’d be all over this part of the state but I think the furthest we’ve gone is maybe two hours away. The practice game is at a high school on the other side of town.”

“So the nationals you’ve done have just been for cheerleading competitions, not for football or anything?”

Melissa rejoined us after collecting herself, “Yeah. We travel less often but further for cheering. A lot of the smaller schools don’t even compete. We have one event somewhere this semester but the football season will be over by winter break and after winter break is when we’ll really get going. The whole football season is just warmup for us.”

I blinked. “Wow, I didn’t know it was so competitive.”

Lavi and Melissa smiled at each other with that telepathy thing again. A few minutes later we were in the living room, caramel, and bananas in bowls and I was being introduced to a cheerleader movie called “Bring it On”. Two hours after that I looked at them.

“Why did we just watch that?”

Lavi smiled warmly, “Because we tricked you into watching it?”

I’d walked into that. “That was not a good movie,” I replied.

Melissa had her head in Lavi’s lap and feet in mine, “It’s a classic,” argued Melissa.

“Seriously?”

Lavi, “Cult movie, at least.”

“It was special,” I allowed.

Melissa, “Nothing enjoyable?”

“I was amused by the kid reading the Naked Ape during the football game.”

Her toes poked me in the stomach. “Seriously?”

“Seriously? I guess the dancing did surprise me. I always wondered why you didn’t do more dance since you like it, but if cheering is like that I guess you do.”

Lavi, “I’d forgotten there were guys on the squad in the movie. We could use a few for lifts.”

“So, Claire Kramer or Kristen Dunst?” I asked Lavi.

Lavi, “Claire was the bitchy blonde?”

“Yeah.”

She stretched which did very nice things for her chest. “Neither. Dunst isn’t blonde enough and I prefer to be the bitchy one.”

“Eliza Dushku?” Asked Melissa.

Lavi stroked Melissa’s hair. “I could eat her with a spoon.”

“Gabrielle Union?” I asked.

She looked at me. “I wouldn’t need the spoon.”

I think Melissa and I were both trying to hold it in but within seconds all three of us were laughing.

“Our football team isn’t that bad though,” said Lavi. “I mean they’re not good but they do win games.”

I rubbed Melissa’s feet, “What happened with Xinyi?”

Melissa, “She’s an alternate. If she keeps a good attitude we’ll add her into the team after three or four games. She actually is talented.”

“But,” said Lavi, “if she pulls any more shit...”

Melissa finished, “it will be next year before she has a chance.”

Saturday came around. Lavi was at temple and I hadn’t bothered to get out of bed except to get coffee and was reading. I heard footsteps and looked up to see Melissa was in the doorway. I got to see her skip forward and then was stretched out with me. She wiggled out of her pants and blouse without getting up and soon was gloriously nude, her clothes thrown around the bed. She laid her head on my shoulder and was playing with herself. I put the bookmark in and laid the book on my side table.

I rolled over so I was facing here. “Horny?”

She kissed me and pressed against me.

“Very,” she replied when the kiss finally stopped. I kicked the sheet off and pulled my boxers down. Melissa’s hand grasped me immediately and stroked gently.

“Any particular reason?” I pulled a strand of hair away from her face and tucked it behind her ear.

“You’ll think I’m silly.”

“I already think you’re silly.”

She pouted but replied, “Fine, I was in bed last night and it felt weird. I had to imagine, like trick my brain into thinking you and Lavi were there with me to help me go to sleep.”

I looked in her eyes. “Now, you’re a silly girl but that wasn’t silly, I do that every night you aren’t here.”

“You do?”

“Uh-huh.”

She kept stroking me but rubbed her face against my chest. “Maybe it just means I’m not the only silly one.”

I ran my fingers through her hair. “Maybe so. Still doesn’t explain why you’re horny though.”

“I was tense going to sleep, tense waking up. I walked over here and I came in the front door and it was just like this ball of tension was gone in my gut. It kind of freaked me out but then I realized what it felt like. It was like when I would be gone on trips and I finally got back to my room, my little refuge, and was safe again. But now that’s here.”

“I’m following but how does relaxed equal horny?”

She sounded like I should understand this. “I don’t know. But once I was relaxed it was like my uterus was screaming to get laid and I found you in bed and it felt right to get naked and get you hard.”

“So ... you’re saying the only thing keeping this from being better is that my dick is in your hand instead of inside you?”

She grinned and looked up at me. “Uh-huh.”

“M’lady, I shall oblige.”

She rolled over and I was on my knees between her legs when she said “Stop!” I did. She looked at me, golden hair around her, one of my hands on her hips, her tracing a finger along with it. “Can you put on music?”

I laughed and grabbed her phone from where she had tossed it onto the bed and set it to going with the speakers in the bedroom and put her ever-shifting ‘fun’ playlist on. Soon the room was pulsing with light vocals and the very regular percussion of some K-pop song. Melissa was wiggling her hips and legs around as if she was dancing while lying down. Her eyes were closed and remained that way as I got between her legs again and slowly worked my way into her. I got there and didn’t even really fuck her. I just remained inside her and moved out a tiny bit and pushed back in. Melissa just kept her eyes closed and sighed contentedly.

“Anything you want to talk about?” She asked.

“Right now?”

“Seems like a good time to me. Just stay like this and spend the rest of the day with you hard buried in me. This is my happy place. If Lavi was curled up next to me and a couple of kids running around downstairs it’d be perfect.”

“Do you want kids as much as Lavi?”

“I didn’t use to. I used to be pretty ambivalent, like maybe one day I would, but now every time you cum in me I find myself imagining one of your sperm making its little journey and me swelling.”

I admit I was a little concerned. “You’re taking the pill though, right?”

“Oh yeah, but it’s not perfect, it could happen. I know it’d screw up so many things but...” She ran her hand over her lower stomach and didn’t finish the thought.

I thought about it, really thought about it, and buried in her I felt like my penis swelled as I imagined her large round belly with my child.

“Ooo...” she said, “someone likes the idea.” I felt her muscles squeeze me. I growled and grabbed her legs, pulling them up and bent them towards her chest. Exposing her as much as I could I began slamming into her.

“You like that?” I asked.

“Fuck yeah.” She grunted as she bucked her hips back at me. “I thought we were just going to relax here though.”

“That was your plan, mine is to fuck a baby into you.”

“Damn goat men, thinking with your dicks.” But she wasn’t unhappy about it.

We stopped talking and just fucked then, our light banter turned into enthusiastic sex. She came twice but never stopped bucking her hips as she did and when I came I found myself holding my breath as I concentrated on the sensation of emptying into her.

As I started softening I began to pull out but she scooted like a mongoose and got my dick into her mouth and hard again.

“Come on, scoot behind me.” She laid down on her side and I spooned behind her as she guided me back in. I reached around and held her as we listened to music and chatted. Eventually, hunger won out over our indolence and we went downstairs to make sandwiches.

While Melissa got out fixings I put on the brisket for later to let it slow cook. We then sat at the kitchen table, chewed on ham turkey sandwiches and drank coffee. Melissa started to go through the pile of mail that had been growing as Lavi deposited it there when she came in each day. Everything was paid automatically by bank draft so I didn’t look at it very often. I was going over the prep list for dinner when Melissa held one up and said, “HOA.”

I looked at her. “HomeOwners Association?”

“Yeah.” She took the letter out. “They say your grass is too high.”

I grunted. “Every few years someone gets a bee in their bonnet and goes around measuring everyone’s lawns and gets pissy about it.”

“It says they can charge you a fine.”

“Nah, the rule is it can’t be above a certain height but you only have to mow it once a week at the maximum no matter how high it is. The lawn guys I hire do that and often twice a week when we have a lot of rain like now.”

“Oh. Wonder if Rian got one of these; he’s really bad about mowing.”

“Really?” I had everything I needed for the brisket, veggies, and bread. “He seems like the kind of guy that would be really on top of that stuff.”

“He has grass allergies so he puts it off. And mom insists he mows it himself, something about that’s what the husband is supposed to do.”

“Well, I’m happy to let someone else do it.”

“Oh speaking of chores...”. I paused looking at my tablet and looked up at her. She grinned. “You don’t have to look so afraid.”

“I’ve heard of these honey-do lists. We men have newsletters. I’ve been warned.”

She smiled sweetly. “I’m not going to tell you to do anything but...” she reached out and stroked my hand, “what if I ask pretty please with sugar on top.”

“Topless?” I arched an eyebrow.

Without hesitation, she took her shirt off. She hadn’t bothered to put her bra back on and leaned over and hugged herself pushing her cleavage up. “Pretty please?”

It took a moment but I did look her in the eye. “I’m doomed.”

“I hope so.” She grinned. “So, I picked up the art prints from the crafts store yesterday. They’re all framed and in the garage along with a picture hanging kit.”

“You and Lavi picked spots?”

“Yep, I’ll show you.”

“You have to stay topless.”

“Deal.”

She got up and I followed. In a few minutes, she was holding pictures in place, topless, while I marked where to put hangers in the drywall. I realized as doing it that a honey-do list might be tolerable with a topless Melissa helping me. Or Lavi. Or both. That chore was followed by laundry. I put things in and out of the washing machine and dryer while Melissa put things up. She had decided that I had a distinctly masculine approach to folding clothes. I preferred washing anyway so it seemed like a win to me.

After that, I started the dough in for the challah bread so that it would have time to rise before baking. The plan was for a three plait loaf though if I got comfortable with it I’d like to try a really fancy six plait ones at some point. I turned around after putting it in the proving drawer. She was leaning against the door frame, still topless, watching me.

“I thought I was supposed to be the one who creepily watched you,” I said.

“Nope,” she replied, “I’m the pervert, seducing the innocent older man with my feminine arts.”

“You seduced me when you said hello.”

“Then why did I have to strip down to a bikini and jump in your pool!?”

“I like to play hard to get.”

“Not anymore, you’re mine.” I approached her and she put her arms around me.

“I am.”

It seemed like a good time to kiss her so I did. Then I pulled my head back and she did the kissing. Maybe we needed a tie-breaker because we did it a third time and this time I pushed her back against the wall and grabbed her ass. She filled my hands perfectly in her tight pants.

Melissa, “We should take a shower before Lavi and her parents get here.”

I dug my fingers into her taut ass. “How about you take a shower and I just happen to be there at the same time?”

She took on her little girl voice she liked to tease me with, “Oh my! Do you think that’s proper?”

I sneered dramatically, “Don’t worry, I’m good at helping little girls clean the hard to reach places.” I used both hands to pull on her cheeks and make my innuendo clear.

“Well, so long as it’s all about proper hygiene...” She pushed me off her and wiggled her hips as she climbed the stairs. I was immediately behind her.

Once upstairs we both got clothes to change into and put them in the bathroom. I also grabbed a bottle of lube and put it onto a shelf next to the hair products in the shower. In the shower, we laughed and played with each other. I washed her hair and back while she did the same for mine. At some point, she noticed the lube and picked it up.

“Oh dear sir, what could be the intent of this?”

“Just something to help get the cleaning really deep in the dirty places,” I replied as cheesily as I could.

She put it back down. “Oh!” She used her mock innocent face and bent over, “I have a dirty place. Can you help me?”

I took the lube from her hand and stepped out of the stream of water. I played with the rosebud of her ass with my thumb and fucked in washing it before getting on my knees and tonguing it.

“Oh, good sir, you’re putting your mouth there!”

Drops of water ran into my face but I held her butt cheeks open with my hands and lapped at it. Honestly, doing this wasn’t terribly interesting to me but I knew Melissa loved butt play and loved the dirtiness of it and as she got excited so did I. Getting the lube I let it dribble and worked some in with my finger. Standing up my knees protested. Kneeling in the shower isn’t that much fun but this next part would be.

Lubrication plus experience made a huge difference and Melissa took me. She released a few grunts as I worked in but it was a radical difference from the first time we’d tried anal. I worked in and out slowly as she leaned forward and just braced against the wall.

“Oh yeah, fuck my ass baby.” I love it when she’s vocal. “Fuck my ass like you mean it, fuck me into the wall, fuck me until your cum is trailing down my leg. Maybe I should get you to fuck me before church tomorrow and go with your cum trailing down my leg, would you like that baby?”

Fuck. I responded by fucking harder.

“Oh, you do like that. Is it the church? No, you just want me marked as your’s don’t you.”

I almost spit it out. “Yes.” It came out harsher than I intended.

“Then fuck me so that I know it. Fuck my ass so that I can still feel it when I have to sit. AH YEAH!” She shuddered, clearly cuming. One of her knees started to give and I slapped her on the ass.

“Keep your position slut.”

“Yes sir. God, you’re thick, you’re going to bruise my ass ... no, don’t slow down, bruise it, make me feel it!”

I couldn’t take any more and I grabbed a fist of her hair and pulled her hair back. She shuddered again and shook happily against me.

I kissed her gently. “Are you okay?”

“Uh-huh.” She beamed. “I like getting you worked up.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“I trust you not to ... too much.” She grinned. I think she saw my concern. “I’ll tell you what. If I ever want to try ... really rough stuff, like where I don’t want you to stop even though I tell you to; I’ll set a safeword with you. Until then just stop if I say so. How’s that?”

“And you promise to say so?”

“If we ever go too far it’ll be because I really thought I’d be fine. Is that enough?”

“All right but I have the right to stop things too then.”

She nodded. “That seems fair. Now, my hair if you would?” She turned and I reached for the shampoo. This would take a while. One half of eternity later we were almost done when Melissa brought up something from the past. Melissa had been wanting to do this for a while and knelt while I released a yellow stream across her chest. I finished and looked to see what she was feeling.

“That was...” she seemed to search for words, “less interesting than I thought it would be.”

After one quick rinse off we were finally done and drying off. “You seem almost sad about it,” I said.

“I’ve watched videos, they seemed really turned on by it.”

“It’s their thing, not yours.”

She was putting her panties on. “I know but I want to do everything for you.”

I let her get her legs straight again and held her from behind. “Is the unbelievably hot nymph concerned about not being enough for the old wrinkly satyr?”

“I won’t be a nymph forever and you’re distinguished, not wrinkly.”

“No, you won’t be a nymph forever but you will be smart and kind and wonderful forever and ever.”

“What about when the house is in chaos?”

I asked back, “What do you mean?”

She was putting her hair back in a ponytail. I enjoyed watching it. “You like things calm and ordered and ... if Lavi and I have kids it’s going to be crazy - screaming babies and things constantly changing. Can I still make you happy then?”

“I didn’t grow up around kids. We didn’t have extended family. But I’ve been alone long enough. I don’t know what kind of dad I’ll be but I’m ready to do this for us including whatever comes with it.”

“To make Lavi and I happy?”

“Yes and no. I can’t be happy unless you are.”

“You got harder thinking about me pregnant earlier.”

“What can I say, satyrs like the fruit of their labors.”

She continued getting dressed and looked at my slyly. “Fruit is good for you.”

I grinned back, “And I hear nymphs are especially good at picking and delivering it.”

She smiled and in a formal voice, “Thank you for your help bathing, good sir. I’ll be sure to tell mommy you’ve been such a good friend.”

I laughed. “If you do I want a recording of her reaction.” With that, we finished getting dressed and just in time as I heard the bedroom door shut and Lavi walked in.

“Did I get here too early or too late?” She asked.

“Definitely too late,” Melissa responded and kissed her eagerly.

“So, when are your parents going to be here?” I asked.

Lavi looked at me. “They’re here.”

“Uh ... dinner won’t be ready for a while.”

“They know.”

“So... “ I was confused.

Melissa looked at me critically, “So, we socialize.”

“Oh.”

A few minutes later I was downstairs greeting Peter and Sylvia who sat at the kitchen table and Peter was putting out some kind of game with wooden tiles that had shapes of various colors on them. Soon, Lavi, Melissa, and Peter were engaged in the game while Sylvia surfed for something on her phone to play in the background while I began preparation for dinner. She was standing at the island while I got things out of the fridge.

“You know,” she said, “you don’t have to cook. We just order Chinese a lot of the time since we’re not supposed to do big stuff on Saturday.”

I shrugged. “I’m not Jewish though, I can do it for you.”

“Seriously, we often just make something on Friday and re-heat it or make sandwiches. You’re going to spoil us.”

“How about this,” I countered, “I’ll cook except when I don’t want to. We’ll order Chinese those days.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

Appeased, she went back to browsing. Soon the soundtrack to the Commitments was playing.

Sylvia again, “How can I help? I feel useless.”

“Just talk to me. They’re in their own universe over there.”

She laughed. “Yeah, they’re all competitive. I like the game, it’s simple but Peter has a bad habit of pointing out when something is statistically a better bet so I sit out a lot. Lavi does the number crunching in her head. One of them usually wins. Mellie does pretty well though. You should probably get used to the games, they’re one of Peter’s social tools. Give him a chance and he will suck you into mahjong without hesitation.”

“Melissa seems like a part of your family, not just a friend.”

“She really has been.”

“Is it weird, she and Lavi?”

“Not at all. They were always touching, always affectionate. This just builds on it.”

“I kind of wish I’d known them longer. I still feel like the outsider.”

Syliva put her hand on my shoulder. “I understand. I remember first moving to Israel with Peter. He knew everyone and I knew no one. I don’t regret it but it was hard for a while. Drink?”

“Please.”

“Wine?”

“Sounds wonderful.”

She busied herself while I got the cucumbers and onions out of the fridge.

“What’s that for?” She asked.

“Cucumber salad. I’m going to do some green beans too to go with the brisket and we have Challah...”

“I like green beans but I do admit I miss having them with ham.”

I smiled, “You’re still a southerner at heart. These have lemon and garlic but I grew up on green beans and leftover ham too.”

She froze. “Shit.”

“Shit?”

“Holidays. They’re going to be more complicated.”

“What do you usually do?”

“Well, we usually go to my mother’s for Thanksgiving and then every other year we go to visit Peter’s family for the winter break. The off years we try to make it just us but sometimes get guilted into visiting mom for a day or two.”

“And now you’ll need to juggle with Melissa’s family.”

“And yours.”

“It’s just my mom. I do visit her sometimes but not always.”

Sylvia, “I meant you three.” She nodded to the table. “You’re a family now. And, you’re not going to be welcome in my family. Lavi has always been a bit wild for them anyway and Peter is too...”

“Not Christian?”

“Exactly. And now ... well, some of my family would bite their tongues at the lesbian thing...”

“Bi,” I corrected as I started chopping cucumbers.

Sylvia laughed, “Not a distinction they would make and my older relatives probably wouldn’t bite their tongues. But the triad thing?” She paused looking for words. “They’d shit themselves into comas.”

I slid the knife off the cutting board at “into comas.” When the sound of the knife hitting the marble countertop rang out the game at the table paused as they looked at me.

“It’s fine,” I said. “Just slipped.” I gave Sylvia a dirty look. She sipped her wine. To Sylvia, “What do you usually do for things like Christmas?”

“Chinese.”

“More Chinese, really?.”

“Hey, ordering Chinese during big American Christain holidays is an American Jewish tradition, or at least convenient since they’re usually open.”

“How about Thanksgiving here?”

“You hosting?”

“Yeah. I’d like to try to get Melissa’s mom to come around.”

She pursed her lips. “You’re ambitious.”

“Is she really so bad?”

“Linda? She’s ... set. She thinks she knows how the world should work and she’s set to that. I watched it with Tommy. Her son should be straight. That he’s not straight means the world isn’t doing what it is supposed to. But at the same time, she loves him. And I mean that. She’d still throw herself in front of a truck to save him. So, is it good or bad?”

I put the salad together and leaned against the counter. “Can’t we change her mind about us, about Melissa and Lavi if not Melissa and me?”

Syliva replied, “I don’t know. I’ve always kept a bit of distance. Most of the squad moms are into their daughters being cheerleaders to some degree or in some way but for me, it’s been Lavi’s thing, not mine. I made fun of cheerleaders in high school. We’ve tried to support Lavi but she never really cared about it for herself.”

“She just joined for Melissa.”

“Exactly.”

“Won’t see you Friday night then? It’s just across town.”

“Nah, Friday is our date night.” Sylvia smiled, “We come at least for half time if the game is local but otherwise it’s our time. You will see Linda and other squad mothers though. You’re going to be inspected like you’re under a microscope.”

“How do you know I will be of interest?”

She grinned. “I’ve had discreet inquiries come my way.”

“What did you say?”

“I was as mysterious and suggestive as possible while saying nothing.”

I sighed. “Great.”

“Beware, English majors, we love drama.”

I groaned. “Lavi told you about that, eh? My own words coming back to haunt me?”

She was still grinning. “Welcome to the family.”

“I still can’t believe you’re kind of, sorta, my mother in law.”

“You know, I’d have slept with you in college if you’d hit on me.”

“Why? You said I wasn’t your type.”

“I admired you. I was impressionable like that. Most teen girls are.”

I shrugged. “Sounds awful.”

“I figured you’d say that. That was the one thing that kept me from assuming you were preying on them you know.”

The onion was in with the cucumbers. I stirred it all up and put the fork down. “I want them to move in.”

Sylvia sipped her wine. “I know. Peter and I have talked about it. It’s that age anyway. Next year she’d talked about college, we didn’t know where.”

“Where has she wanted to go?”

“Wherever Melissa went.”

“Ah.”

Sylvia looked at me. “You want to know the damndest thing?”

“What?”

“I never worried about that, not really. Lots of other things but not that. If Mellie had gone off to college and found love I knew Lavi would be happy with that. But she would be there, no doubt.”

“You know Lavi thinks of herself as selfish.”

“She is.”

I looked at her, vinegar in my hand. “Wow, you’re her mom.”

“Lavi is a woman Rob, a woman, a strong-willed and incredible woman that I raised. But I’m not delusional. I know how she is. She would do anything in the world to make herself happy and that means she would do anything in the world to make Mellie happy. I’m not saying she’s a monster. Mellie isn’t unique. Lavi cares about her grandmother, Peter, me, and I’ve seen it recently, you.”

“So moving?”

“I don’t know yet Rob, but we know she wants it and it’s going to happen.” I must have looked downcast because she continued. “Don’t be so glum. I’m actually thrilled. My little girl is moving to the next zip code, not across the country. You scored brownie points with me.”

“Because I’m local?”

“That’s half of it.”

“The other half?”

She pointed at the oven. “Brisket.”

Suddenly someone yelled “Double Qwirkle!” at the table and Syliva bumped my shoulder with hers. I rolled my eyes at her but smiled.

“Set the other end of the table,” I said.

Mustang Sally played from the speakers as she started to do so. After that we had dinner. The food was applauded and we started talking about holidays but we weren’t going to get it all figured out then. Lavi got the go-ahead to go visit my mother with me over Labor Day. Melissa was trying to get her mom’s blessing and said she was going, regardless. Peter floated the idea of us all visiting Israel during winter break though Melissa had said she’d be skinned for not being here at Christmas.

When I asked if we wouldn’t offend his family he shrugged and said, “My brother married a Muslim girl from England, they have no kids and my father has hardcore Palestinian feelings. I’ll still be a distant second in the source of the family shame department. Hell, my sister will love the scandal. It’ll bump her down to third.”

I looked at him and was about to ask why when Lavi provided the answer. “She’s a dyke. Granddad isn’t super thrilled.”

“Oh. And your grandmother?”

“Nana doesn’t care. Aunt Amira and her partner adopted two little boys.”

Ah, from what I’d heard that made sense. Her grandmother had priorities and they all involved babies. We played a couple of rounds of the tiles game after dinner and I enjoyed it but it wasn’t long before Sylvia was nudging Peter towards the door and we wished them well. I went upstairs with my two girls. We didn’t bother to close the bedroom door.

The next morning began lazily. I left the girls kissing and playing as I went downstairs to fix coffee and put on a pot of oatmeal with raisins. The girls, still flushed, joined me in panties and t-shirts. They sat as I brought them cups and bowls. Without prompting I brought the sugar bowl over to Melissa who of course added some to her oatmeal.

I blew on my coffee. “Pie not sweet enough this morning?” I asked.

Melissa almost choked on her coffee. Lavi looked at me. “I’ll have you know my pussy tastes like coca-cola.”

“That’s good. I plan on getting thirsty later,” I said. Lavi smiled in response and had some oatmeal.

Melissa had her phone out, “I thought the song was called, ‘tastes like Pepsi-cola’.”

Lavi sighed, “You can be very literal sometimes my love. I don’t like Pepsi.”

“Oh.” Melissa put her phone up. “Well, I have to get dressed, head back and ready for church.”

As she was standing I stood and kissed her. “I’ll miss you.”

“I’m so tempted to not go to church. But you’ll have Lavi here. You have fun.”

“You too.”

“We’ll see. Mom and I have to have a talk. She tried to change one of my electives and we had a fight when I overruled her. She didn’t seem to realize that being eighteen meant I could do my own school paperwork now.”

“Which elective?” Lavi asked without looking up.

“Guess.”

The look on Lavi’s face looked something like “I’d kill the bitch but you love her and that’s why she gets to live.” Melissa kissed her goodbye too. A few minutes later I heard footsteps come back down the stairs and the front door shut indicating she was gone.

Lavi finished her oatmeal and then stood by my chair. “Yes?” I asked.

“Scoot your chair back.”

I did and she straddled it and looked at me. Her large breasts pressed against me and she kissed me like I was the source of water to a woman who had been in the desert too long.

When she finally broke for air she said, “Damn, I like how you kiss.”

My hands were under her shirt and cupping her breasts. “I like everything about you.”

“You just want to fuck me.”

“Not just. Living with you is above it on the list.”

“So, even if I was fucking Mellie you’d still let me live here?”

“Sure, I like you, as a person as well as a partner.”

She smiled, “That’s nice to know.”

Me, “You know, it wasn’t that long ago I thought being alone with you would be awkward.”

“You’re not now?”

“Nope.”

Lavi looked at me, her eyes serious and soft. “I wanted to tell you something.”

“Okay.”

“It’s about me. So ... you know that most people said I was a dyke.”

“Yeah, but when Melissa first described you she said you were bi.”

“Right, but I’d never been with a man. Hadn’t you wondered why?”

“I guessed you’d just never met one you liked enough.”

She nodded. “That is true. The thing is I used to tease Mellie for her taste in older men. I figured if I ever found a man I liked it wouldn’t be anything like hers.”

I waited a minute but she just looked at me. “And?”

“And, this is the part that is hard to talk about because I feel like a total child saying it.” I waited. I really had nothing to say until she said more. Eventually, she said, “My princess thing?”

“The whole being a princess on your birthday?”

“Yeah. You were right. I wanted to be a princess and I wanted a knight in shining armor. I remember being a little kid and thinking the princesses and princes were both amazing but as I got older it seemed like I met a few princesses but no princes. Every guy was ... just a mess.”

I didn’t like where this was going. “And older men aren’t princes? If this is some long way of admitting you’re not...”

“No, no, no! God, no! No, I like you. I just want to put everything on the table. The why matters. When I don’t tell you things that are in my head it’s like lying and maybe I’m compulsive, but it drives me nuts. And I haven’t even told Mellie this stuff because it’s about you.”

Something she hadn’t told Melissa? “All right, go on.”

“So, I always visualized a young guy, like Heath Ledger in The Knight’s Tale, but it didn’t matter. I met cute guys but they were all asses. I wanted someone who believed in love and honor, who was sweet and brave. And that’s childish I know but...”

“But you found Melissa.”

Lavi smiled tightly. “She was everything a princess should be, not a little but ... a lot and right when I was figuring out that I really liked girls. I worship her Robert, I don’t just love her as she loves me, I worship her and it’s stupid and maybe not healthy but I do.”

“Have you told her that?”

“Yeah, but I know she thinks I’m just being poetic or something. I’m not. But that’s not what this is about. This is you, I worshipped her and then I met a man who was exactly like her.”

“Me?”

“No, her brother.”

“Oh.” That I didn’t expect.

“I guess you don’t know Tommy that well but he’s amazing. He was the first man who made me feel ... not dykey. I don’t know the words.”

“But he’s gay.”

“Right and not like 80%, he’s 100% fag, to use his words, not mine. He was sweet, he once told me if he ever had to play straight he’d want me for his wife. I almost melted.”

“So, how does...”

“You? I’m getting to that.” She patted me on the chest. Good, I thought because she wasn’t a big girl per se but she’d been sitting on my lap for what felt like a while now. “I guess I’m rambling. So, I met you and it changed. No, you didn’t get my panties wet right away, yeah, I was interested because Melissa was finally opening to me and I wasn’t going to let it get screwed up, but the more I was around you I saw things. I never even questioned that a knight would be a prince but I saw you and how you were and I realized I didn’t care what you looked like. But no, you’re not ugly so that does help.”

“I’m not a knight though. They go out and do stuff. I hide here from the world.”

“No, you don’t. You keep saying that but you don’t. You built a castle and told the world to go fuck itself without raising your voice.”

I scoffed, “I’ve raised my voice.”

“Yeah, to my mom, when she was rude. When she insulted Mellie And even then you pulled yourself back.”

“Princes are rich, I’m not.”

She leaned in and put her forehead against mine. “I was a kid, don’t be so literal. I wouldn’t have cared if the knight was ugly as sin and poor as a beggar. If he had read me poetry and stood up for me and behaved ... nobly I’d have been all over him.”

“I’m not young either.”

“It’s true I always visualized my knight as someone ... well, like Tommy. And actually now that I think about it Tommy has a certain Heath Ledger vibe to him. But it turns out that didn’t really matter, just the other stuff.”

“You think I’m those things?”

“I know you are. I also know you’re a geek and have a temper, and no patience for people and ... no fashion sense. But those things don’t matter to me. Melissa isn’t perfect, she has plenty of flaws. They don’t matter either. And Melissa was my princess and you’re my knight and I’m so happy I have you both.”

“You know, when you were describing what you wanted in a knight, I was thinking that was you in a lot of ways.”

“Huh?” She pulled her head back.

I smiled. “Don’t act so surprised, you like being fierce.”

She pouted. “I know. It doesn’t mean I don’t want to be a princess sometimes though.”

“You are to me.” I put my arms around her again.

“Most boys are intimidated by me.”

“You can be a warrior princess.”

“You’re not scared of me.” She kissed my nose. “Even though I’m not the blonde sweetheart. When I first met you I put myself out there. It usually sends boys running and grown men stepping back. You were just like, ‘hi, I’m Robert’.”

“I don’t remember you doing anything like that.” I was searching my memory and found I really couldn’t remember any such thing.

She laughed, “You wouldn’t.”

“There’s room in my kingdom for more than one kind of princess.” I stood up and she wrapped her legs around me. With my hands underneath her, I held her up and realized I needed to do some strength training if I was going to do this often.

Lavi started giggling. “Let me down.” I did. “Don’t feel bad,” she said, “I think the girls in porn that do that are tiny things. There’s a reason Grace is at the top of the pyramid, not me.”

That did soothe my ego a little. “How about ... we settle outside? It’s not really hot yet.”

“Awesome. I can grab a blanket.”

“You do that and I’ll grab something else?”

“Ooh sounds naughty.”

“Not really.” I grinned.

A few minutes later, still in her panties and t-shirt, she had spread the blanket under the big tree near the pool, her phone and a pitcher of lemonade nearby. I felt overdressed so I removed the shirt to lie down with her in just my pants. While I leaned against the tree she lay in my lap and I read to Lavi.

I started,

“Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets, The muttering retreats Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells: Streets that follow like a tedious argument Of insidious intent To lead you to an overwhelming question...

Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”

Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go Talking of Michelangelo...”

She laughed when I said “I am not Prince Hamlet” and said “I will!” when I read “Do I dare to eat a peach?”

When I finished I asked, “So, did you like ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’?”

She was smiling. “I loved it. There was a lot there. It was a love song but a complicated one and not ... not one kind of love and the world was mixed in.”

“You want to talk about it,” I said.

“Mellie would. I just want to absorb it. Read it again another time?”

“Sure.”

“And to Mellie. I wouldn’t mind listening to you two talk about it.”

“Really?”

“I like your voices.”

I kissed her lips.

Lavi, “Can I ask you a question?”

“You just did.”

She slapped my leg, a little harder than I think she was aware she did.

“You know what I mean.”

“Yes, of course, you can.”

“If you were to read a poem to some girl to try to seduce her, what would you read?”

“Hmmm ... Maybe ‘Love’s Philosophy’ by Shelley.”

“How does it go?”

“Uh, from memory I think I remember the first part ... The fountains mingle with the river, and the rivers with the ocean, the winds of heaven mix forever with a sweet emotion; nothing in the world is single; all things by a law divine in one spirit meet and mingle. Why not I with thine?”

Lavi looked at me. “Woah, pretty bold. Why not fuck? Really, it ends like that?”

“There’s a bit more but it ends with the question of what is it worth if thou kiss not me?”

“What is what worth?”

“The natural world, the sunlight on the earth, and moonbeams on the sea.”

“All the things touching in creation mean nothing if I won’t fuck you?”

“Pretty much.”

“Well, I don’t want to fight nature.” She sat up and took her shirt off.

“I thought knights were supposed to practice courtly, chaste love.”

She smiled and slid out of her panties. “Not my knights.” I ran my palms over her nipples as she watched. “You like my tits don’t you?”

“I love them.”

She giggled. “I like them too. Mellie’s are perkier though. And she’s got a better body.”

“Not better, different. I like your curves too.”

“She’s prettier.”

“Phooey.”

She raised an eyebrow. “You said phooey?”

“Fiddlesticks. I like...” I stopped myself before I made an analogy that could really be taken the wrong way. “I like different bodies and the truth is if the woman inside is amazing I’ll probably end up attracted to her even if I wasn’t drawn to her physically to start with. And trust me, I thought you were sexy as fuck the first time I saw you.”

She hefted the tits in her hands. “Can you imagine how big they’ll get when I’m pregnant. I’m thinking “H” cups easily. I’ll be a cow.”

“I am more than fine with that.”

“Good.” She was licking her fingertips and rubbing her nipples with the saliva. “They’re actually a pain you know, like literally. Big boobs cause back pain but I still like them. I saw a video once with this Japanese girl with ... they had to be like J cups or something and natural. She was really hot. She had one of those hucow cosplays on and a bell around her neck.”

“We could pierce you here,” I pushed one of her hands away, grabbed a nipple and squeezed hard, “and attach a little bell. Keep you topless around the house and keep track of you by the bell ringing.”

“Ooooo ... I’m not really sure about the cowbell part but I’ve thought about piercing one or both.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I think I’d do one at first, see how I like it.”

“I’ll make you a deal. You get an “A” on your next history exam and I’ll pay to get your nipple pierced.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Deal.” She shook my hand.

“You know ... that was Thursday I was studying. I took it Friday morning.”

“I know ... I said next.”

“Gah! All right, I’ll get your blonde nymph to tutor me again. I think I did well.”

“You’re in good company, nymphs have tutored gods.”

She moved and laid back and held out her arms. “Come to this goddess.”

On my knees I leaned down and sucked her breasts, I did that for ages as she ran her hands through my hair. Then I moved down and gently kissed her lower lips. I tongued her hole and licked at her nub, taking my time. My feet were off the blanket and toes in the grass, the day was getting hotter and I was warm as I ate her.

“You really take your time.”

“I enjoy it. I like your taste.”

She had her feet on my back. “You can fuck me, I’m plenty wet.”

I didn’t answer. I just continued to eat her while she played with her tits. She came eventually, shaking against me and I continued to eat her. Eventually, she began gently prodding me with her feet, the invitation clear. Amused that I’d finally gotten her to ask for it, even if non-verbally I got up and then sank into her.

We both sighed as I sank in.

Lavi moaned, “I love it when we fuck outside.”

She had her legs bent and I ran my hands on her thighs.

“I do love you.”

“I know. And I love you. And Melissa. It’s not the same kind but just as real. And you’re not jealous of us are you?”

“No.” I shook my head. “When I see you two kiss, when I know you’re been together, it makes me happy that you’re enjoying each other.”

Lavi, “I know she feels the same way.”

“How?”

“She didn’t even ask me to record you and me today.”

I laughed while Lavi grinned.

“Our budding filmmaker.”

Lavi, “You know, when I met you I thought you were nice but there was no way a guy would accept Mellie and me.”

“It seems like forever ago, she hadn’t accepted that about herself yet though, right?”

“No, but when I teased her she stopped saying she wasn’t like that. Something was going on in that overthinking head of hers. I started to ... it sounds cheesy but hope. I told her I’d love to still be a part of her life in any way she wanted and I’d stand by you and her.”

“I’ll bet that was scary.”

“Terrifying but I knew I’d always regret it if I chickened out.”

“That was sweet of you.”

“No, it was selfish. I told you that.”

“Maybe it can be both sweet and selfish.”

“Maybe,” Lavi replied.

I was enjoying talking but the whole time Lavi was gently rocking back and forth on my dick and I was beginning to feel kind of fuzzy. “Fuck this feels good. You feel good.”

She giggled. “Tired of talking?”

“No. But it is hard to concentrate a bit.”

“I know but it’s wonderful, just being with you.”

“I kind of did this with Mellisa yesterday.”

“She told me.”

I snorted. “Figures.”

“I hadn’t planned on it today, but it feels right. Sometimes we’re so horny but it’s nice to have alone time and just relax and fuck.”

“It does.” I played with her left nipple. “I should name these ladies.”

“Thelma and Louise?”

“The wrong feel to it. Fuji and Everest?”

“Too impersonal,” she said.

“I’ll figure something out.”

She made a face indicating she understood how important this was. “You do that.”

“And I will of course have to award myself house points for it.”

“Oi vey!” She threw her head back in mock outrage. After that, we just smiled and fucked. It was nice and I felt close to her. The sun had risen more since we’d been out here but we were still in the shade. She reached up and played with my nipples which sent a shiver through me and pushed back a bit harder.

It wasn’t long and I was getting close and leaned over her, laid myself nearly flat on top of her and shut up. I took the nipple I’d been playing with and bit it, my teeth leaving small marks when I pulled back and I fucked her harder. I kissed the abused nipple and then bit it again, this time pulling up slowly on it with my teeth as wet tightness made my cumming inevitable.

To my surprise, Lavi beat me to it and screamed something that sounded like “oh yes” but somewhere early in it hit a pitch that I’m not sure I could actually hear. I think I lost vision for one split second as I emptied into her as her body stopped shaking.

She smiled lazily at me and I at her. I laid down and spooned behind her as she wiggled her butt at me. I grabbed it and started rubbing.

“I need a few minutes,” I said.

She reached behind her and grasped my wet dick. “You’ll get hard again.”

I chuckled “I need to catch my breath.”

“I like teasing you.”

“Slut.”

“Butt slut.” She wiggled again.

“You want...” I was cut off by her phone ringing. We stopped suddenly. It wasn’t a notification beep, it was a ring. No one called ... any of us really. She grabbed it and held it so I could see it. The called id said “Mellie’s Mom.” She answered it on speaker.

“Linda?”

The voice on the other end was flat and sounded tired. “Lavi, I’m sorry to call. Rian is out of town and I didn’t know who else to call. I called your mom but she didn’t pick up.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Could you pick me up? I’m at the police station.”

**Chapter 24**

Lavi and I were both already standing up. Lavi was talking to Linda while I gathered up the things. We walked as Lavi talked and I deposited everything on a patio table to be taken care of later.

“Linda, what’s going on?”

There was a pause, “It’s complicated, it happened really fast. I don’t know.” Her voice was robotic.

“Is Mellie with you, is she okay?”

That got some animation in her voice. “No, she’s not okay. That’s how all this started.”

We were jogging upstairs. Lavi clearly wasn’t getting anything straight out of Linda Milton so she got the address and we jumped in the shower, did the fastest rinse off I had done since my college days of rushing for class and were out the door. Lavi drove.

“Try to call Mellie,” Lavi said.

“I’m trying but she’s not picking up.”

“Find friends.” I was already headed to the app before she had said it.

“No go, no current location.”

“Fuck, her phone must be off.”

Lavi was comfortably above the speed limit but driving safely as we headed to the police station. It wasn’t far. We looked around, figured out where to park, and were inside. I’d never been to a police station so I thought it would be like in a movie with a desk sergeant greeting people. Instead, the glass double doors just opened to a long hallway with unmarked doors and near the end what looked like a bank teller’s window. The sign said ‘Parking Tickets.’

I walked up to it to see a bored-looking middle-aged woman. She smiled neutrally at me. “Can I help you, sir?”

“Uh, I’m sorry but can you help me? We got a call that an officer Letterman has our friend here and we should pick her up.”

“Let me see...” She turned to her computer, looked something up, and then picked up her phone. “Officer Letterman, there are some folks in the lobby, said they are here to pick someone up.” ‘Lobby’ was a generous description I thought. The epitome of government blandness. It should be in a Kafka novel. “All right, thank you.” She turned to us. “He will be out in a minute.”

“Thanks.”

Lavi and I turned away looking around, not sure where he would come out or what he looked like. In just a few seconds a door close to us opened and a sturdy young man with a blonde crew cut came out carrying a clipboard. “Are you here for Linda Milton?”

“Yes!” Lavi almost jumped at him. “Is her daughter, Melissa here too?”

“Uh,” he looked uncomfortable, “no. Can you come with me just a minute?”

“Sure,” I said and took Lavi’s hand. We followed into the door he came out of. On the other side, a large room of cubicles stretched with uniformed officers doing various kinds of paperwork. Letterman motioned for us to a small meeting room, really nothing more than a 20 x 20-foot cube with a glass wall, a small table and a few chairs. We sat. He shut the door behind us.

Lavi, “Are they all right?”

“Everyone is fine,” Officer Letterman said. Lavi visibly calmed. “Can I get your names, do you have ID with you?” Lavi and I both produced our driver’s licenses and he made notes. “So ... you’re Lavi Heller, the one she called, correct?”

“Yes.”

“And your relationship to Linda Milton?”

“Uh...” she looked at me. Officer Letterman looked at her looking at me. “It’s complicated. I’m friends with her daughter.”

He let that slide and looked at me. I said, “It’s complicated too. I’m also friends with her daughter. And Lavi.” I motioned to Lavi.

“Ah. So, is there any chance you are,” he looked at his notes, “and I quote Mrs. Milton from earlier, ‘that man she is ruining her life with’?”

I took a deep breath. “I imagine I am if she said that, yes.”

“Gotcha.” He made a note.

Lavi, “Look, we can’t get ahold of Mellie, what’s going on?”

The officer put the clipboard down. “Mellissa was fine when I saw her. I can tell you what’s going into the report. I responded to a call at a local church. Melissa Milton and Linda Milton were having an altercation in the parking lot. Linda was being verbally abusive and one person reported Linda Milton striking her daughter. When I arrived the crowd had them separated and Linda Milton was being verbally confrontational with several members of the congregation as well. Melissa declined to confirm the strike so it’s not likely it will go any further. There was some indication of an impact on Melissa’s cheek but it was already fading from red when I got there. Domestic issues are hard to prosecute when the other party isn’t cooperative. Melissa left in the car and no one else wanted to give Mrs. Milton a ride home so I brought her here to finish her statement.” He gave us a thin smile. “Now, if Melissa changes her mind in the next couple of days...” He let that hang in the air. She could cause her mom major problems.

Me, “How was Melissa? She turned off her phone and ... no offense but I’m way more concerned about her than Linda.”

“She seemed fine, all things considered, but clearly needed to clear her head. I imagine that’s why her phone is off. No one indicated that Melissa struck her mother so I didn’t see a reason to hold her for any possible charges.”

At that moment Lavi’s and my phones both dinged. The text messenger id said ‘Melissa.’ Lavi was calling instantly. I only heard one side of it. “Mellie, oh my god, where are you?” “Oh, well, we came to pick up your mom from the police station.” “No, we’ll take her home.” “Fuck that are you all right?” “Yeah, he’s with me.” “No, I totally get it, it’s fine. We will be home soon.” “I love you too.”

My phone dinged again, ‘I love you.’ I replied back the same.

“She’s fine?” I asked Lavi.

“Relatively. She sounds rough,” was Lavi’s reply.

“Maybe I should grab a taxi,” I said, “I’m probably not who her mom wants to see right now.”

“I don’t really give a fuck what she wants.” There was a fire in Lavi’s eyes.

That looked bad. “Maybe we should just get her a taxi or something,” I said.

Lavi held up her hands as if surrendering. “I’ll be nice.” Something seemed off about how she said it but a stray thought distracted me.

I turned to Officer Letterman, “Why didn’t Linda just call a taxi?”

Officer Letterman shrugged, “I don’t know.”

Soon we were following the officer to a cubicle where Linda Milton was waiting. Her eyes hardened when she saw me.

“You.”

I shrugged. “Me.” I tried to interrupt an explosion in case it was coming. “Look, you don’t like me I know, but let’s just get you home.”

“Why are you here?”

“I was with Lavi when you called.”

“Of course you were.” She stood up and grabbed her purse. “Thank you, officer.” She turned and walked towards the door. I shook the officer’s hand, thanked him, and followed.

We got to Lavi’s car, Lavi driving, me in the front seat, and Linda in the back.

Our passenger sat in the back like it was a taxi. “Thank you for picking me up Lavi, that was so humiliating. I can’t believe Melissa did that to me.”

We were a few minutes out from the station and Lavi suddenly made a turn away from the neighborhood.

Linda, “Where are we going?” She didn’t sound scared, just confused. If she could have seen Lavi’s eyes she might have been.

Lavi, “We’re going for a drive.” She pulled onto the highway that circled the city. “We can drive in a fucking circles all goddamn day if we have to but you’re going to answer some fucking questions. And you’re going to answer them without bullshit.” Linda got out a nasty sounding sound that was probably the beginning of something but Lavi cut her off. “I talked to Mellie and she sounded like she was fighting off tears. That’s your fucking daughter you cunt, now if you give me shit I’ll just leave you on the side of the fucking road and you can hitchhike back until your pride wears down enough to call a fucking taxi assuming someone doesn’t pick you up to rape and murder you first which I don’t give a fucking damn about since you struck Mellie, do you FUCKING UNDERSTAND?”

That was a lot of ‘fuckings’ in one monologue I thought but looking back it did seem to have the desired effect. In my limited interaction with Linda Milton, I hadn’t seen her pale like that. I’m guessing it was a side of Lavi she’d never seen much less had directed at her before.

Quietly she asked, “Can we get something to drink?” Lavi didn’t respond so she followed up. “I’m thirsty.”

Lavi, “Sure.” Quiet followed as Lavi drove until she found an exit. We went through a drive-through and got some sodas. I texted Melissa to let her know we had to talk to her mom for a bit. Melissa didn’t respond to that but said she was going to take half a Xanax and lay down. Linda sat meekly in the back and we went back to the highway. Lavi got in the right hand lane at the speed limit and put on cruise control.

We had put about fifteen miles behind us, Linda sipping her soda when Linda finally said, sounding more like her pompous self again, “You had questions?”

“You didn’t order diet,” Lavi said.

Linda barked a bitter laugh, “That’s your question?”

“It is right now.” Lavi’s hands were calm but her eyes still looked ready to murder. “Get used to answering them.”

“All right, I figured today it really wouldn’t matter if I let it go. I’d already fucked everything else up why not some high fructose corn syrup too just to make the day a complete debacle.”

Lavi didn’t delay the followup, “Did you strike Mellie?”

Linda made no action to respond and Lavi just drove. Eventually, we neared the exit for our neighborhood again. Lavi just drove past it. More silence.

The voice came out meekly. “I did. I apologized already, I told her I’m sorry when we were still in the parking lot. I... “ More silence. Lavi just drove. “Well, I guess I’m not going back to that church.”

“Why?” This time it was me asking.

She was looking out the window. “I might have said things to the preacher.”

“Might have?”

“Fine, I did.”

“What?” Lavi asked.

“I’d rather not say.”

Lavi’s voice was completely devoid of warmth, “I don’t recall asking for your opinion about what questions you wanted to answer.”

Linda clearly had some internal conflict and then seemed to deflate a bit. “All right. I told him he was a fucking wimp and clearly didn’t have any control over his congregation and ... was probably a pedophile since he was encouraging it.”

“Why did you say that?” I asked.

“I was thinking of you and Mellisa and I thought it would hurt him.”

Lavi, “Melissa is a grown woman.”

“She’s a kid.”

“You wouldn’t give a fuck if a footballer was banging her so long as he didn’t knock her up.”

That looked like it slapped Linda. “That’s different,” she responded.

“Yeah, because Robert makes sure Melissa enjoys it and he treats her with respect.”

Linda’s face got red but this was going too far. “Lavi, stop. I understand, I really do. I want to rip her apart too...”

From the backseat, I heard “How dare...”

“Shut it,” I said, “you are a very unpleasant person and frankly I’d like to punch you in the mouth and knock your teeth out but someone here needs to act like an adult because neither of you is.”

Lavi twitched a bit. “Sorry. You’re right.” I rubbed her knee in response. “I should be thinking of Melissa.”

Linda’s voice dripped bitterness, “She doesn’t care.”

Me, “The hell she doesn’t. Do you remember the dinner party?”

“I recall your little table parade.”

“Melissa spent all night afterward telling me about the wonderful loving things you’ve done. I actually trust her judgment so despite everything I’ve seen I have to wonder if there isn’t someone there worth caring about. If I didn’t I’d just let Lavi have at you.”

“Lavi’s not like this. This is your influence making her cruel.”

Lavi, “Oh you don’t have a fucking clue, woman. I’m the queen bitch of a squad of bitches. Mellie is the angel. If it hadn’t been for her you’d have seen this side of me years ago, especially with the nasty shit you pulled on Tommy. You’ve had this coming.”

Ah. Now I got it. I thought this was a little Jekyll and Hyde but this had been simmering for years. I flashed back to earlier that morning and Lavi telling me about how she’d kind of fallen in love with him.

“Well, I do agree with you on one thing,” Lavi said.

“What’s that?” Linda was looking out the window again.

“That church probably won’t be that welcoming anymore.”

I couldn’t help it. I laughed. Neither of them did but I did.

Linda, “Do you find this funny?”

I sobered up. “In a sad way, yeah, I do. But right now I want to know what happened. All of it.”

“Well, Melissa made a mistake and elected to take a vocational course that she isn’t really interested in and I told her that this experimentation thing with other girls...”

Lavi tapped the breaks and pulled over. “Strike one bitch.”

“Excuse me?”

“Melissa isn’t experimenting. She knows what she’s doing. You can’t accept that you walk from here.”

“You said...”

“I said I’d ask questions. You have to answer honestly. That means starting with describing my relationship with Melissa correctly. You can say it’s wrong if that’s your opinion but it is not an experiment.”

I tried to provide a calmer voice, “Lavi is correct and it’s insulting to Melissa. She doesn’t love trivially like that.”

Linda Milton breathed in and steeled herself. With a clenched jaw, she started again, “All right. I told her that her relationship with Lavi was understandable but she would get over it in time but she needed to clear her head and get away from this man because he was obviously clouding her judgment.” Lavi pulled back on the road.

Lavi, “Was there more?”

“Maybe. Those were the major points.”

“I want all of it.”

“Fine, you want me to drag it back out? I ... called her a whore, fucking men for jewelry. Then I said she was so desperate for a daddy figure that maybe I should have just married someone right after David died so she wouldn’t be looking for one now. There, happy now?”

Lavi’s knuckled turned distinctly pale on the steering wheel as she gripped it. “Did she tell you that she and I bought the rings?”

Linda shifted uncomfortably, “No.”

“Do you think I’m looking for a father figure?”

“I...”

“I’m not. Neither is she, except for her kids.”

“Her kids? That’s absurd. If it hadn’t been that Miami thing and the ridiculous fake marriage thing it would be over. This is a charade, it’s not like you can really marry. You just keep feeding this absurd melodrama.”

“US?!” I looked at her. “You, after this crap, are accusing us of feeding melodrama? Really?! To quote Lavi, ‘bitch, please.’” For the first time since this started, I saw Lavi smile. It was a small one but it was beautiful. “I’m done with this. Lavi, let’s head back.”

It took a stretched out second for Lavi to agree. “Okay.” I had the impression she could enjoy tearing into Linda for quite a while to come.

I thought for a second about what she had said though before I spoke. “Now, I want to be fair to you. You’re right on one level. We can’t do legally some of the things we talk about being. We are a bit silly about it, but if being silly is what it takes to live our own little world and be happy, that’s a small price to pay. So, I understand a little bit where you’re coming from but you need to look at not just what we say but what we mean. And,” I continued, “this is the part where I give you an ultimatum,” I said to Linda.

She scrunched up her face and snidely replied, “This is where you say Melissa will never speak to me again I suppose.”

“No, this where I threaten to never speak to you again.”

Linda sat obviously stunned and it was Lavi who said, “What?!”

I explained, “Here is something you obviously don’t understand about your daughter and you need to get it through your head. She doesn’t love without sincerity. She has told me she loves me and intends to have children with me. That would make me very happy so it’s going to happen. Do you really want a family where the father of your grandchildren won’t talk to you?”

Linda, “The family I should...”

“No,” Lavi cut in, “it’s not your family. It’s her’s and Robert’s and mine. This whole ... your family thing, get the fuck over it. I can pull this fucking car over again.”

“No need,” Linda replied stiffly. “I get the point.”

Lavi took the exit.

“You get to be a part of it,” I added, “but it’s our family and it’s on our terms.”

“Seems really nice for you.” She sounded petulant.

“What would be nice was if you and I could be friendly.”

Lavi pulled into the neighborhood. Melissa’s house was near the entrance so we were there almost instantly. She pulled into the driveway.

Linda didn’t get out right away. “What do you want from me?”

“I’d like us to be friendly, Linda.”

“Aren’t you the saint?”

“Linda, get over it. I have a relationship with your daughter. Maybe she does look up to me in some way. I also adore her and I don’t mean like a little girl. Your attitude is making it impossible to even be civil which is why I’ll just turn away and not talk to you if you can’t meet me part way, because I’m not going to be in a parking lot assaulting you the way you were your daughter.”

Linda seemed to be getting angrier and angrier until I reminded her of assaulting Melissa. She got out of the car and walked into her house. We left for ours.

Our phones dinged. Melissa’s picture popped up with the text, “See you soon? Still coming?”

I replied, ‘minutes away’.

In the few minutes it took to slowly drive a few blocks I asked Lavi, “Feel any better?”

“Not really.”

“Sorry.”

“Fuck. I really lost my shit there.”

“Well, it was a bit rough but she probably needed to hear it.”

“Thank you for being the grown-up.”

“Oh no, trust me, you didn’t say anything I wasn’t thinking. Honestly, if she was a man I might have slugged her.”

“Should it make a difference if she is?”

I shrugged. “Probably shouldn’t but it does.” I hit the remote for the garage.

“So you’re saying I’ll have to slug the women that are problems in our lives?” She actually grinned and it made me grin.

“Yep, we’ll have to share duties.”

We pulled into the garage, which I’d cleaned out enough to accommodate both vehicles. We walked in and didn’t see Melissa so we walked upstairs and she was on the bed in shorts and a t-shirt with a baking show on TV.

I looked at it and Melissa said, “Cake sounds really good right now.”

“I could make you one.”

“I want you over here, both of you.” I looked and couldn’t see where she’d been hit so it must not have been very hard. Hopefully it wasn’t one of those hits that would bruise up later.

Lavi and I crawled on the bed on either side of her and Melissa kind of melted between us.

Me, “I thought you might nap.”

“I couldn’t. Too keyed up. The pill helped though.”

Lavi popped Melissa’s arm, not very hard but I could tell it stung. “You scared us. Don’t do that turning your phone off shit again.”

“Sorry.” Melissa snuggled her head into Lavi’s chest. “I needed a little time to think. A few of the church folks were already texting me.”

I felt something a little lumpy under me and shifted find under the sheet a balled up pair of my underwear and Lavi’s panties.

Melissa, “I found them outside and put stuff up but they both smelled like you.”

Lavi sighed, “Yeah, we kind of got interrupted.”

Melissa’s voice cracked, “Shit shit shit shit, I’m sorry, I’m fucking up your day too, this should have been your time.”

“Hey,” Lavi replied, “it was in fact the worst cock blocking ever but taking care of family does come before getting laid.”

“Still...”

“Hey,” I put my arms around her, “Lavi is right, so hush.” A few minutes passed while we settled in and I said, “And she’s right, it was the worst cock blocking ever.” That got Melissa giggling and then Lavi and I joined in.

“Thank you, both of you, you’re keeping me sane.”

“Well,” I said, “if it wasn’t for us you wouldn’t be having this drama.”

Melissa, “No, I’d just be miserable still trying to be her doll and I think I’d still run into this kind of thing at some point, maybe not so soon, maybe not so dramatically but I would, or I’d become like her. And I’ve had to come to face this morning with something I haven’t wanted to admit.”

I rubbed her back. “Do you want to share?”

Melissa breathed in and out before saying, “My mom isn’t happy. It’s not exactly a revelation, she’s on edge all the time anyway but she’s down deep an unhappy person. When I was younger I remember her being sad but she smiled too. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen her smile.”

I had no idea what to say, so I just held her and Lavi did the same while planting kisses on Melissa’s head. For an hour or so we just lay there and made comments about the baking show. I’d never heard of a prinsesstårta before but it was going on my to-make list. I agreed to order out tonight instead of cooking and we decided upon take-out in bed. They each had some studying to do, but fortunately everything Melissa needed she could get remotely on a laptop and I had an older one I had been planning to reformat for her anyway, just so she had a spare here. Lavi texted her mom and gave Sylvia the short version of today’s drama and said she was staying here tonight. Sylvia agreed to drop off her school stuff here later. I stretched forward and also gave Lavi a few kisses on the lips as she stopped texting Sylvia.

Melissa tilted her head up, looking pitiful. “Some for me?”

Lavi kissed her. They were sweet and gentle kisses but seemed to get a bit more heated and that’s when I saw Melissa’s hands moving under Lavi’s shirt. And that’s when the doorbell rang.

Lavi, “Really!?”

Melissa started giggling, “It can’t be cock blocking we don’t have one.”

Lavi smirked, “I can grab the strapon.”

“I’ll get it,” I said, getting up. Then clarifying, “The door not the strapon.” They giggled and it was wonderful to listen to. I was getting off the bed when I noticed Melissa’s phone on the nightstand, it was lit up with a notification. It said, ‘Mom’ and underneath it in a smaller text a message, ‘At the door. Please.’ I considered not telling Melissa about it but that didn’t seem right.

“Girls?”

Melissa and Lavi had stopped fooling around and were just lying there holding hands. I handed Melissa the phone.

“Want me to tell her to go away?” I asked.

“I, uh, don’t know.”

Lavi, “She said please, I don’t remember her saying that much.”

Melissa, “Okay. I can do this.” She didn’t sound sure.

Now I heard knocking. “I’ll get her,” I said.

Lavi asked, “Should we go downstairs?”

Melissa just shook her head and held Lavi’s hand in a death grip.

“Feels safer here?” I asked.

She just shook her head yes. So, I took a deep breath and headed downstairs.

I opened the door and there was Linda Milton. She was an attractive woman, I could see her daughter in her but for the first time, she wasn’t in front of me with some form of anger. She had composed herself though I could see she had been crying. And then she did something she had never done to my knowledge. She used my name.

“Hello, Robert. May ... I come in?”

She was holding a large photo album.

“Lavi is here as well. We’re upstairs in the bedroom. If you want to talk to Melissa you’ll have to come up there.” She nodded slowly and I continued. “We’re dressed but it was where we were relaxing and Melissa said she didn’t feel like moving.”

Linda visibly swallowed and I could tell she was trying to not shake. “All right,” she said, “I guess I really need to talk to all of you anyway.”

With that, I held the door wide and stepped to the side to let her into the house.