**The Pool Girl**

by Leto Armitage

**Chapter 25**

I shut the door behind Linda and then walked ahead. The glimpse at Linda Milton’s face was brief but enough to make it clear she wasn’t angry, she was afraid. I walked upstairs and heard her following so I went to the bedroom. The door was open with Lavi and Melissa both sitting cross-legged on the bed.

Linda froze in the doorway, “You two look ... so normal.”

Lavi, “what did you expect?”

“No, I mean, just, I’ve come into Mellie’s room so many times and you two would be sitting there just like that.”

She was still holding the photo album, now in front of her almost like a shield. She looked around.

“Very minimal. Which side table is yours?” She was looking at Melissa.

“This one.” Melissa pointed at the one on the left as facing the bed, definitely the more crowded of the two.

A very forced smile barely touched the corners of Linda’s mouth. “Figures, it’s the one loaded with books.” Lavi’s on the other side was tidier but also featured several books, drinking glasses, and other odds and ends.

Melissa, “Some of those are Robert’s. He kind of floats around depending on where he ends up sleeping.”

“No ... set pattern then?”

Melissa stared at her mother. I could tell she was forcing normalcy into her voice. “No, just however it falls out that night but Lavi and I kind of ended up with our sides unless one of us is in the middle.”

“Ah.” Linda fidgeted.

To my surprise, it was Lavi who patted the bed inviting Linda to sit. I hovered near the doorway. Linda sat and Lavi seemed to be playing nice.

“I ... I came to say I’m sorry about how I’ve been acting. And I’m sorry about a lot of things.”

“Have ... have you changed your mind?” Melissa was looking down at her hands. So was her mother, or at least the photo album.

“No,” was the reply. “But I am sorry, I was ... you did not deserve what I said. I was nasty.”

Lavi looked at her. “You’ve been that for a long time.”

“I’ve never”

Lavi cut her off, “You can be nasty and use silence to do it.”

“I...” Linda breathed in and out and looked at Melissa. “You know I thought I was so much better than my mother. She probably would have thrown you and Tommy out. I guess I’m not.”

Melissa, “You’re not like grandma.”

“No, I am. Robert, has Melissa ever told you about my mother?”

“A little,” I said honestly.

“What did she tell you?”

“She said that she was hateful. Melissa said that she didn’t want anything to do with her grandmother.” Melissa nodded in agreement.

Linda barked a single, “Ha!” I looked at her. She continued, “David, Mellie, and Tommy’s dad once called my mother, ‘the kind of person you immigrate to avoid.’ And he did, we did. We moved across the country. We were poor but he made it happen to get away from her and get a fresh start.” With that, she opened the front cover of the photo album. “Do you recognize this?” Linda was looking at Melissa.

“Yeah,” she said wistfully, “our old photo album. I know you keep it in your closet.”

“Do you know why I keep it there?”

“So Rian doesn’t have to see my dad’s pictures.”

Linda shook her head. “Rian would understand. No, I put them up because I didn’t want to look at them. I’m afraid I’ve always lied to you and Tommy.” Melissa sat up very straight at that moment and Lavi looked like she went to high alert very quickly. “I’ve always told you and Tommy about how much I loved your father but the truth is ... when he died we were talking about a divorce.”

A long moment passed when a penny dropping would have sounded like an earthquake.

Finally, Melissa asked, “What?”

“That’s David.” Linda was pointing to a photo now.

I walked over to look. He had straight hair like Melissa but it was dark brown. I couldn’t see him in Melissa’s face but she definitely had his eyes and I could tell he was accustomed to smiling. I recognized that in Melissa too. He was a young man in this photo, wearing a letterman’s jacket. There was a school in the background. His arm around a pretty blonde girl that looked a lot like Melissa.

“I was only sixteen. My best friend Candy took this photo. I found out I was pregnant just a few weeks later.” Linda ran her hand over the plastic-covered photo. “I was the head cheerleader, he was the quarterback, we were homecoming king and queen, my mom said I was perfect. Then I got pregnant. It was towards the end of the school year and I hid it.” She flipped pages and I saw her in various states as her belly grew around the house and in the yard. “When the new year started my mom told the school I was in Europe and couldn’t come home right away. I didn’t come back until I lost some of the belly fat but people found out anyway. Mom was so angry.”

“David was a year ahead of me, so he had already started college. He worked like crazy, got a job, and kept up with school so that when I graduated he could move us. He started at a new school with a light class load and worked and kept us going. We lived in a run-down little apartment. In movies, that’s the best time, when things are simple, but I was stressed all the time. We never had enough money. We ate mac and cheese and hot dogs for dinner more often than not. We even had to use food stamps. But he’d come home exhausted and still just laugh like some kind of idiot. It was like he didn’t understand how hard it was. He’d make up stupid songs, sing them, and dance with you. And no matter how tired he was he would read to you every night.”

“I remember some of it. I liked the voices he gave the characters.” Melissa had tears in her eyes. So did her mother.

Linda: “I spent a lot of time thinking I hated him.”

Melissa was crying now and Lavi reached over to put her arms around her. Between sobs Melissa said, “I don’t understand.”

Linda looked at her daughter, “I never loved David. I was infatuated with him. I was a kid. And if I’d kept my legs together we could have graduated and he’d have gotten a good job, I could have done college right away...”

“But if you didn’t love him...”

“Baby, I would have been happy. I had to learn this the hard way. You love your children but between men and women ... it’s about building a family and somewhere in there, you can find comfort if you do it right. We did it wrong. Maybe if we’d done it right David and I would have found it but it was too much, we were too young. Everything is just infatuation and that gives way eventually. And three people, three people can’t work that out, hell it’s hard enough for two.”

Linda let that thought settle in. Melissa was just watching her mother so Linda continued, “That kind of love like in the movies isn’t real, Mellie, when the passion cools off you realize you’re just with this person who ... who isn’t what you thought. You have to build from there. Real love is what you find in a family. Do you know what David was going to school for? I thought he would do something useful but do you know what he was doing?”

Melissa shook his head.

“Sociology. He wanted to become a social worker. Social worker? How would we raise a family with him as a social worker? Oh, he loved you and Tommy but we argued endlessly. I remember once we fought about something I had decided for you and Tommy and he said I didn’t have the right to do it without talking to him. I’m the mother!”

At this point, I was staring. I stared at Linda, I stared at Melissa and I stole frequent glances at Lavi. Well, this was ... a thing. Melissa looked like she was in shock. Lavi didn’t have access to a knife, did she? I didn’t think so, so that was good. Was I in shock? Fuck, this wasn’t good.

Melissa was wringing her hands, “Why ... are you telling me this?”

“I just wanted you to understand that none of this is real and if you got some idea of romance from me I wanted you to let it go.”

“What about Rian?”

“Oh, Rian is a good husband. I’m glad to have him. He’s reliable, works hard, has a few bad habits but not too many. He’s one of the good ones.”

Melissa and her mother looked back and forth. Their eyes met. Silence reigned. Until Lavi said something, her voice ringing out as surely as if she had hit a gong.

“Well, fuck me.”

An icy Linda Milton turned to her daughter’s lover, “Excuse me?”

Lavi took this as an invitation to elaboration. “Fuck me, you’re a nutter.”

Melissa, “LAVI!”

Depending on how the next five minutes went I reminded myself there was a drilling project in South America I would be useful on site for, something I’d always refused to travel for before. I could take the girls. Did they have an extradition treaty with the US? I should look that up. Should I do it now? Fuck.

To my surprise, it was Linda who raised her hand and said, “No, Lavi has a right to say that. I had a realization when I was at home. I...”. Linda stood up and walked in a small circle clenching her hands and before picking up the album back up from where she had put it down and sitting down again. “I don’t want to admit this but it’s part of what I came here to say. I was hoping for this to fail, I was hoping for you to be miserable. When Tommy came out I didn’t say it but I hoped it was just some strange teenage phase and he would realize it was a mistake. I had hoped that people making fun of him would get through to him. I was happy he was harassed off the football team! See, I was right!” The look in Linda’s eyes was a bit manic. If she did something crazy could I move fast enough? Then she seemed to let go of some tension and her voice calmed. “What kind of mother am I? And here I was wanting you to be miserable and I thought I took it well with Tommy and Lavi said I was a bitch to him and ... I ... I “. Suddenly Linda broke down into sobbing tears.

Again, fuck.

I started to comment that Lavi didn’t actually say Linda acted like a bitch to Tommy but that might be too literal for this moment. I indicated I’d be right back, got a carafe of cold water from the fridge, and a bottle of vodka from the freezer, and headed back upstairs with four glasses. The edge of the bed was occupied with a pile of crying emotional women so I just stood nearby. I drank a glass of water and then three quick fingers of vodka. Soon glasses were being passed out. Lavi and Melissa chose water while Linda asked for something stronger to steady her nerves. I gave her a single finger of the vodka and she made a face when swallowing it.

Linda, “So, you know what I did then?”

It was clearly rhetorical but Melissa answered anyway, “No.”

“I called your grandmother. And do you know what that cold bitch said to me?”

Melissa just shook her head.

“I expected her to tear into me, to tell me I fucked everything up again. Instead, she said I was right and that I did the right thing. If you’d slapped me back Melissa it wouldn’t have rocked me like that dried up husk giving me her blessing. I’d come to depend on her disapproval. God damn, I can’t even disappoint that bitch right!”

I looked at the glass in my hand. I decided it was too empty and put a few more fingers worth of vodka in it. I refilled Linda’s too but only half what I drank. Lavi was now holding out her and Melissa’s glasses. I picked up the water carafe but Lavi from the other side of Linda just shook her head. I obliged with just a bit of the vodka for each.

Three of us sipped our drinks. Melissa slammed hers back and I refilled it so that she could sip that one. Meanwhile, Linda continued to flip through the photo book and ran her fingers over pictures.

“I have a lot of fond memories though. David and I had good times, we just weren’t right for each other. David married me but still, a senior with twins, and once they caught me and my mom trying to hide it? I wanted to die.” Linda turned to Lavi, “Was I really so bad with Tommy?”

“You were a pretty horrible bitch to him, Linda.”

“Oh. I thought ... well, I guess it’s done.”

She kept looking at the photobook and Melissa and Lavi quietly followed her gaze. They got to the last page and Linda gave it to Melissa.

“Here, it’s yours now. I have copies of the pictures I want from it, they’re in the album in the living room back home. I didn’t really hate David, I figured that out later but I still feel like that at times. He was actually a pretty great dad and I’m grateful for that but my life was ruined.”

“Mom?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Did dad rape you?”

“No.” She looked at Melissa like she didn’t understand the question.

“Then you just as much a part of it.”

“I know. I just don’t want you to make my mistake.”

Melissa, “I’m not. I don’t even want to talk about how it’s not the same anymore.”

“But I think it is.” Linda stood and looked at her daughter. “But I can be civil and ... I want for your happiness. I’ve not just been thinking you’re wrong but I’ve wanted you to fail, wanted you to be miserable so that I could be right. But no more, I love you. I do want you to be happy. And Tommy. I guess I need to talk to him too.”

“So, where does this put us?” I finally asked.

Linda turned to me. “I think she’s making a mistake Robert but I’m going to hope for her happiness and for me to be wrong. And I will act accordingly.”

It was a good moment but clearly no one felt like hugging Linda. We were all still tense. But it was Melissa who got up and threw her arms around her mother and hugged her anyway. “I love you, mom.” Linda just stood there. “I love you too baby.”

They separated. “I do admit I don’t like how quiet it is without you at home,” Linda said.

I found my voice “You know, I once told Melissa I’d offer to cook Sunday dinner for all of us if you ever acknowledged my existence. I guess this qualifies.”

“I’d need to think about that, but thank you Robert for the offer.”

“Actually, I’d like to take that back,” said Melissa. She looked at Lavi and that bloody telepathy thing went on again. I swear they had some language that involved the tiniest muscle twitches that said some ridiculous amount.

“Saturday is family dinner. You and Rian and Tommy when he is here are all super welcome but that is our weekly family dinner.”

“With ... the Hellers?” She must have told her mom about that.

“Yeah.”

“Robert cooks? I never did eat my food that night.”

“I know,” I said, “I made a catfish sandwich with your entree the next day. It was good.”

Linda just said, “Let me talk to Rian.”

After that, I saw her out. She walked away, apparently having walked instead of driven. When I returned upstairs the girls were pouring fresh glasses of water.

“So...” I said because I’m eloquent.

“So,” Melissa added.

“So, that was fucking bizarre,” Lavi said.

Melissa threw her hands up, “I don’t want to talk about it!”

Lavi, “I don’t know what to say about it!”

I picked up my phone and found the number. Both of the girls were looking at me.

“I’m not dealing with this much family emotion without chocolate fudge cake and gelato.” I hit the dial for the bakery.

Lavi and Melissa were already getting up and Lavi had her keys in her hand. We headed to the car. Thirty minutes later we were pulling back into the driveway just ahead of Sylvia. Syliva got out eying us as she got books out of the car.

“So, if you three weren’t huddling up why exactly did I need to bring these over?”

“Unplanned war council trip,” I said as I unlocked the door from the garage into the house.

Lavi, “We have raspberry gelato and chocolate cake.” Her mom hurried to our side of the garage door before we closed it.

“What’s this about a war council?”

Melissa, “Well, there’s no surrender but we might have an armistice.”

“I think I missed something.”

“Food first,” I said. “Would Peter want to come over? I got plenty.” I started laying out sandwiches from a huge deli bag.

“Peter is having a game night with some friends. Some new expansion is out and they’re having a blast trying to crush each other into the dirt. You bought extra sandwiches?”

“Not exactly but I have two reubuens, an Italian beef, corned beef, and a chicken with onion and mozzarella. We’re going to cut them up and share.” I got a knife and a big serving plate. “They reheat the next day well too.”

“Sounds good to me. What’s this war council then?”

“I think it might be more group therapy,” I said, “but let’s eat.”

So, we did. We ate and filled Sylvia in. Melissa was cutting the cake and Lavi doling out gelato into bowls before long.

Lavi, “Robert, your mom isn’t going to be psycho right?”

“My mom is special but she’s excited to meet you, girls.”

Melissa, “She knows Lavi is Jewish?”

“She doesn’t care.”

“Doesn’t hate blondes and won’t be triggered by cheerleaders?” Lavi asked.

“No landmines I’m aware of, I swear. I’ve sent her pictures, I’ve told her all about you both, we should be cool.”

Sylvia, “I can’t believe I may have to eat meals with Linda. I’m going to bring wine and Peter can drive.”

“On the plus side,” Melissa said, “Robert passed an important milestone.”

“Huh?” I asked.

“Three emotional women and you didn’t go into a catatonic state.”

I shrugged. “No, no, I got a shot for that when I went in for my tetanus.”

Syliva punched my arm playfully when I said that. It was much softer than her daughter’s, thank goodness. I took a bite of the cake. It was only so-so but right now the chocolate was really satisfying. The gelato was manna from heaven, though.

Lavi let out a deep breath. “So, where does all this put us? I mean, this was dramatic as shit, and no offense Mellie but I meant what I said, your mom is a Grade A nutcase. She needs, like, some serious therapy but is anything different for us?”

“Seems like some kind of progress, isn’t it,” I said, “I mean I’d rather she be ‘yay’ for us but clearly that isn’t happening but she used words like thank you and ... Robert. I mean, I have a name now. I’ve graduated into actual personhood instead of ‘that man’. If I get a sock I’ll be a free elf.”

That got a small smile from Sylvia. I thought it was funny.

Melissa, “Well, for me it means something.” She picked at her cake and ate the frosting seeming to prefer it to the cake itself.

“And that is?” asked Sylvia.

“I wasn’t trying to get her approval anyway but yeah, I was still trying to not make her unhappy at least. And I still don’t want to make her unhappy but after that stuff earlier ... I don’t know what to say about any of it. I mean that stuff about my dad, fuck. I’m fucking done with it. I always thought she and Rian had some kind of fucked up relationship and ... I feel sorry for Rian, do I talk to him, ignore this? I don’t know.”

Sylvia, “Your mom and Rian’s relationship isn’t your business dear.”

“I know but ... that was so fucked up and Rian is a decent guy. He doesn’t deserve that.”

Lavi, “Baby, it may be what he wants. Does he seem unhappy?”

Melissa kind of half shrugged. “No, he’s timid but ... he seems like he is happy.”

“I think you have your answer there,” said Lavi.

Melissa rolled her head like she was loosening her neck. “Well, I do have to find a new church.”

Lavi, a little eagerly said, “You could convert.” Her mom nodded in agreement.

Melissa smiled, “Thanks, but I think I need a better reason for conversion than my mom and I had a fight in the church’s parking lot.”

“Marriage and family is a decent reason,” Sylvia said as she took a spoon of gelato.

“Thanks, I don’t know. I don’t necessarily believe in miracles and all that but I’ve always thought of myself as Christian, not necessarily angels are listening to our prayers kind of stuff but ... my dad, I remember him reading to us from the bible before bed sometimes. The stuff he chose, it meant something.’”

Sylvia smiled gently at Melissa, “Well, I’m not trying to convert you. I’m a pretty bad Jew, to be honest, but to me, it’s less about God and more about family.”

“And tradition,” offered Lavi.

Sylvia shrugged. She converted for family, but I knew that heritage was important for Lavi.

Melissa, “Well, I have some thinking to do. What about you Robert, any religious advice?”

I blinked. “Not really. I grew up southern baptists but my parents were never big churchgoers.”

With a grin Sylvia said, “Lucky you.”

I smiled. “I guess I never understood religion personally. I figure people want the universe to make sense and be part of something bigger. I’ve never felt the need for either. Things just are what they are and the biggest thing I care about being a part of is my family.”

Lavi, “So, we’ve never talked about this but do you believe in God?”

I chuckled. “Yeah, I usually try to avoid this discussion. I remember answering this question back in high school once and a rumor went around I was a satanist afterward. Uh, no, I don’t believe or not believe, I’m not an atheist and not, I guess, a deist. Someone who believes.”

“Theist,” offered Sylvia.

I pointed my spoon at her. “That’s it.”

Melissa, “So you’re an agnostic?”

“Technically, except when you talk about agnostics there’s usually this implication that they must want to know if there is a God even when they say they can’t know. Honestly, I don’t think about it much. I just do my best to live my life.” I shrugged and scrapped the last of my gelato out of the bowl.

I looked up to find Melissa positively beaming at me. “You are a frustratingly simple person at times, my love.” So, that was a good thing? I smiled back but forget understanding women as a whole, I don’t think I’ll ever understand one of them.

Lavi meanwhile was trying not to giggle, “Well, the kids will have plenty of viewpoints.”

“Well, thank you all for having me for this impromptu dinner but I’m out,” added Sylvia, “that will keep me from having to fix dinner for just myself, so thank you.” She stood and gave each of the girls a hug. I stood by the side and then she held out her arms to me. “Come on Rob, you’re family now.” It felt weird but nice as I stepped and gave her a hug. Sylvia saw herself out and I looked at the clock. It was barely 5 PM. Holy shit it had been a crazy day. Slyvia left. Once the front door was closed Lavi had an announcement.

“Naked hot tub!” That’s all she said as she started pulling her shirt off.

“EEEE” Melissa made a sound like brakes being hit hard that made Lavi pause.

Lavi paused, shirt at her breasts. “Seriously? Hot tub, naked, come on.”

“We have to study. You have a test and I have to finish an essay.”

Lavi lowered her shirt. “Fuck. I need happy brain chemicals.”

Melissa, “After school work.”

Lavi replied by sticking her tongue out but headed towards her books.

“Uh, how do you know her test schedule?” I asked.

“I have Amber update me on her English and History and a girl named Amy is in her math and physics class and updates me on those.”

“So ... you track her classes to make sure she gets her work done?”

Lavi nodded, “For four years now, ever since I failed that one test in our freshman year.”

“And ... you don’t trust to get the information from Lavi?”

Melissa folded her arms. “I trust but verify.”

“The Spanish II incident,” Lavi offered. “I didn’t tell her about the vocabulary quizzes and I got a D.”

“And it’s not happening again,” said Melissa as she pointed to the books Sylvia had left on the kitchen table. Lavi sat down and started in while Melissa went with me to get the spare laptop which I’d wiped a few days ago. Once in the office, I got it out of the cabinet and handed it to her. She smiled, put it aside, and wrapped her arms around me.

Feeling her firm breasts pressed against me I reflexively grabbed her bottom and pulled her to me. “I thought you told Lavi you had to get an essay done.”

She looked into my eyes. “I do, and I will but I ... Thank you for putting up with all this. I swear, I’m going to make you a happy man.”

“Of course you will, every single day even when things are hard you will make me happy. You made me happy being in my life today even when I wanted to pull my hair out. And ... honestly your mom’s, by the roots.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be, just be here.”

We kissed and I got hard. She pressed against me, her thigh rubbing my erection through my pants.

“I kind of miss lying against this sometimes and pretending I don’t feel it. It’s ridiculous how much I wanted you to grab me and how turned on I was that you didn’t at the same time.”

“You know, if I’m frustratingly simple I think you might be frustratingly complex.”

“But you love me?”

“Utterly.”

“Well, we will definitely make both of us happy later.” She put her hands on my chest and pushed away gently, giving me a sultry look that I swear made the room hotter. “And Lavi. But, the essay first.” She picked up the laptop and headed back to the kitchen.

“What is the essay on?”

Over her shoulder, she said, “I had a pick a theme from Their Eyes Were Watching God. I choose awakening female sexuality.”

I watched her leave, her hips swaying just a tiny bit more than necessary but, dear Lord, if there was an argument for the existence of God it was a woman’s hips as she walked. Earlier I had thought I could see a shadow of her mother in how she managed Lavi’s academics and right now I couldn’t imagine them even being related.

Two hours later I was reading on the patio when Lavi walked out shedding her shirt, “I’m free!”

She threw the shirt towards me. “Not yet,” I said, watching her white bra swing a little while holding up her massive breasts. She grinned, unhooked the white bra and it joined the shirt in my lap as she slid out of her pants.

“What the slut means,” added Melissa, walking out behind her, “is that we’re done with school work.”

“Wheeeee!” Went Lavi as she plopped down on a chair and slid her light green panties down her legs ... which were straight in the air; Lavi lying on her back and yelling, “Lavi is a free elf. Robert and Lavi free elves, evil schoolmistress free elves!” as she kicked her legs in the air.

Melissa knelt next to me and gave me a kiss. Melissa asked, “Who is going to tell her that free elves get clothes, not take them off?”

“Maybe slutty elves have different rules?” I offered.

Melissa stood, shed her own shirt and bra and cocked her hands on her hips. “I thought that was nymphs.”

The serious look was interrupted by Lavi sneaking up behind her and goosing her. I don’t know exactly how far that finger went but Melissa went “OH!” And went on the tips of her toes. Lavi and I were laughing and once she composed herself so did Melissa.

“I went ahead and heated the hot tub up,” I said, once I was able to breathe again.

“Yay!” With that Lavi skipped over to it and sunk down in the water. I loved watching her and her silliness was a balm after the stress of the day.

Melissa lay down on me, topless but otherwise much like we used to. “Mmmm this is nice.”

“We should join Lavi,” I said.

“Just a sec. I asked her if I could have you for a moment.”

“How is she?”

“Dealing with it. She’s angry but kept squeezing my hand while we worked. It helped.”

“I got the impression your mom didn’t know the part of Lavi she saw in the car.”

“How was it? Lavi said she got real with mom.”

“That is one way to put it,” I acknowledged. “Let’s just say if I had any doubts that Lavi could find employment as an interrogator those are gone now.”

Melissa sighed against me, “She thinks Lavi is just another cheerleader. She doesn’t get her. But, mom doesn’t get a lot of people, I’m figuring out.”

“You know, Lavi worships the ground you walk on.”

“I know.”

“She doesn’t think you really understand.”

Melissa snorted, “That’s because she doesn’t get that I worship her. She’s so smart about people, but has one huge blind spot.”

“Herself,” I replied. Melissa nodded in agreement. “Have you tried to tell her?”

“Yeah, but she will never see herself the way I see her. I know she can be a bitch but she is the bitch who would burn the world if it meant saving the ones she loves. She doesn’t see the amazingness in that.”

“Then let’s make sure we love her for it.” I kissed the top of Melissa’s head. She looked up and kissed me.

“Let’s,” she replied. She got up and was completely nude in a second. I just stared.

“Like?” She asked, posing, with outstretched and slowly turning, her perfect body on display.

“I want to see you in those heels again.”

“Which ones?”

“The ones you wore to the dinner at the steakhouse”

“Why?” She asked, a wicked smile on her face.

I smiled, “I want to lick my way from your toes up and I want it to take a long time.”

She stood, legs spread, and said in mock outrage, “My dear sir, that sounds like something a pervert would say!”

“Yep.” I stood and undressed. Laughing she ran as if being chased into the tub and joined Lavi who was watching us. By the time I got there, they were kissing, the ends of their hair soaked by the water.

I didn’t want to interrupt so I just soaked and watched. When they broke apart they were red, only partially from the water. Lavi looked like she was about to speak but Melissa grabbed her again and kissed her passionately, her hands caressing Lavi’s breasts and Lavi gave into the kiss, her hand coming up to cup Melissa’s face while they kissed. Something was happening under the water and Lavi made a squealing sound and began panting hard. She panted into Melissa’s mouth who pulled back, and now I could see her hand playing with Lavi’s folds. Lavi leaned forward, seemingly held in place by Melissa’s hands but not wanting to give up her lips and they kissed again while Melisssa masturbated her best friend and lover.

Lavi let out the occasional “oh, fuck” in-between little squeals and tried reaching out to play with Melissa’s breasts but ended up hands bracing her to the seat in the hot with her head rolling back.

Melissa grinned, “That’s it slut, cum on my fingers.” I saw Lavi start to buck against Melissa’s hand gently as if Melissa wasn’t getting quite as far as she’d like. Melissa giggled, “That’s it, fuck my hand, cum for me.” After another moment Lavi tensed and let out a final, louder squeal and shuddered. Melissa drew her hand back with a very self-satisfied look on her face. Lavi didn’t give her friend any time to gloat though because she jumped up and grabbed Melissa kissing her again, her hands trying to be everywhere at once, running her hands over her breasts, grabbing her butt, stroking Melissa’s back.

Melissa giggled happily, “So, you said something about cock blocking earlier, what was it that got interrupted?”

Lavi, “Well, Papi there said his little girl was bad and I needed to be punished.” I hadn’t actually but decided to let this play out.

“Really?” Melissa feigned shock. “And how would Papi do that?”

Lavi had wide eyes like she was an innocent youth. “He said he’d put the rod to my poo-poo.”

I tried not to laugh, I really did but I couldn’t hold it in and started snickering as did Melissa. Once she gathered herself Melissa said, “Your poo-poo huh?”

Melissa, “Can I watch?”

The question seemed to catch Lavi by surprise and she broke character, “Of course, why wouldn’t you?”

“Well, first, it’s polite,” that got a raspberry blown at her by Lavi in response, “and second, it was supposed to be your alone time and now I’m here and to be fair...”

“Oh fuck that,” said Lavi, “if we start tracking what’s fair what are we going to do when we’re both knocked up and already have one rug rat apiece running around? Don’t worry about being fair babe, just love me.”

Melissa smiled at her wife, “I do.”

Lavi turned around and stuck her butt in the air, “But I do have a price.”

“What?” Melissa was obviously excited.

Lavi got on her knees on the seat and wiggled her butt at Melissa, Lavi’s legs in the water and butt in the air, her head resting on her arms on the patio. “First, get it nice and wet for Robert, and second, you can’t touch yourself until I say so.”

Melissa was already getting into position behind Lavi but paused and went “What?”

“No touchee.”

“Uh, how long?”

“Until I say so.”

“And how long will that be?” She sounded just a bit concerned.

“Not that long.”

“All right.” She didn’t sound completely sure but went with it.

Melissa spread Lavi’s cheeks with her hands and applied her tongue. I was very tempted to stand behind Melissa and start my fun now but I decided to let Lavi play her little game. They had an interesting relationship, Melissa dominant in academics, submissive sexually but neither to any extreme degree, it was definitely a constant give and take between them. It was a dynamic I was still coming to understand.

I stroked myself and watched Melissa eat Lavi’s ass. Melissa did it with relish, making happy noises and wet slurping sounds as her tongue invaded. Lavi giggled like a little girl and said, “That feels so weird and so good at the same time.”

Melissa stepped back and slapped Lavi gently on the ass. “I think you’re ready.” She ran her hands up Lavi’s back and then stepped aside and motioned like presenting a present for me.

I stepped up and wiggled my dick at Melissa, “I could use some additional lube.”

Melissa smiled and got on her knees. Her lips wrapped around my cock and I felt her gather up as much saliva as she could. She didn’t so much suck me as just focus on making me as wet as possible. After just a few seconds she pulled back. “All ready now.” She smiled and gave me a quick peck on the lips, then sat down next to Lavi and took the extra step of sitting on her hands after she almost grabbed her nipple to play with it.

With one hand I pulled one of Lavi’s cheeks to the side and slid in. Lavi still wasn’t as used to this as Melissa but the head slid in gently. Lavi moaned, “Oh, that’s a lot, still. Take it slow.”

“Does it hurt?” I asked.

“No, just slow, please. Feels good.”

Melissa had positioned herself to watch closely. “LIke to watch me penetrating Lavi?”

Melissa actually blushed just a little. “Yeah, I know it’s silly but it’s so hot.”

Lavi, “So if you could watch Robert fuck anyone on the squad who would that be?”

“Oh god, I don’t know! I mean, all honestly.” I pushed forward, a fraction of an inch. Melissa continued, “I mean if Xinyi had asked who knows, that tiny little ass split in half by Robert’s dick, that would be amazing!”

Lavi, “Well, that little cunt isn’t getting anywhere near him. Fuck yeah, keep pushing in.” I felt her relaxing her muscles.

“No, no, totally,” agreed Melissa, “I was just saying if.”

“Well,” I said, “I’m not fucking any of your teammates. It’s just not a good idea.”

“I know,” Melissa said a little petulantly. “But Lavi asked.”

Lavi grunted, “Oh, keep going, that feels good. Be gentle but keep going.”

Suddenly Melissa said, “Hey, what about after graduation?”

“After what?” I asked, pausing.

Lavi with a tone of annoyance, “Mellie, can you not distract him when he’s fucking my ass?”

“Oh.” Melissa looked embarrassed.

I went back to focusing. “Lavi, your ass is a work of art, god, it feels good.”

“That’s it big boy, fuck it.”

“I don’t think I can get the last little bit. You’re already so tight.”

“Just fuck me then.” She wiggled and it felt amazing as her hips shimmied. I obliged and began the delicious work of fucking her.

“Oh yes,” Lavi said, “it hurts just a little but it’s so nice too. Please don’t stop.”

I kept going, I couldn’t go fast but slowly pulled halfway in and out and sped up a bit as she relaxed more and loosened. After a moment I started to speed up.

“Oh god, oh god, oh god, Mellie, come here!” Lavi’s head was up her elbows on the patio and face towards the sky with ecstasy.

Mellie lunged and got her hand beneath Lavi and began playing with Lavi’s clit while reaching for herself at the same time. I came hard in Lavi and stood there, softening but buried while Melissa continued playing with both of them. Melissa came almost immediately after I did and Lavi not long after had another small orgasm. She giggled and laid her head down on her arms. “Sleepy now.”

I pulled out of Lavi and Melissa reached out, looked at my dick as if inspecting it for anything too nasty, and then put it down her throat. She gladly sucked the cum off and then did the same for the cum from Lavi’s ass.

Once she was done Lavi sat back down. “Did I see that right, you cleaned Robert’s dick out of my ass?”

Defensively, “The hot tub filters are very sensitive, we shouldn’t put too much stuff into the water.”

Lavi laughed, “Slut. Ass to mouth slut!” She sounded impressed.

“It’s not like you had shit on it. I checked.”

“Maybe there were tiny pieces you couldn’t see!”

“Then it wouldn’t count.” She tried to act offended by I could see a smirk of pride in Melissa’s face. She liked out-slutting Lavi.

“Well,” I said, “I think I need a break from the hot tub. Who wants some water and then maybe continue upstairs?”

“Me!” “And me!” Came the replies.

“Oh,” and Lavi said as we got out and toweled off, “there’s this new show on Netflix I want to watch the first episode.”

“Of course my love,” I said and we went inside to be together.

**Chapter 26**

Friday night came around and I found myself at a high school football field. It felt weird. I hadn’t been around so many teenagers since I’d been a teacher’s assistant in grad school. I knew intellectually that Lavi and Melissa were teenagers but I didn’t think of them like that, just young women who happened to still be in high school. My phone pinged and I saw a message from Yussef that said ‘over here’. I looked up to see him waving at me from some stands so I walked over. I had expected a packed high school with teeming crowds of excited people. There was a crowd but it was relatively sedate and not as many as I expected but Melissa told me to expect that from an exhibition game. Yussef had a short trimmed beard and was dressed in khakis and a polo shirt. He offered his hand as I sat. I shook it.

He greeted me, “Welcome, your first game?”

“Since my high school days, yeah and really I didn’t go much even then.”

“I have to admit I didn’t understand the appeal but it has slowly grown on me.”

I looked around and caught sight of Linda sitting a good ways away with a group of other women. I waved politely and she waved back, with an expression that was an almost perfunctory smile. Around her were a small gaggle of other women. I recognized June immediately and in front of her, a woman that I suspected was Ji and Xinyi’s mother based on her features. Most gave me discrete looks as Linda waved briefly as if obeying protocol. The exceptions were June who waved enthusiastically and Mrs. Gou who gave a tiny wave and whose gaze lingered on me. The only one who pointedly did not look at me was one of two African American women there. I wondered if she might be the mother of this T’wana whose name kept coming up.

Yussef gave me a questioning look. “You have created a miracle. I still haven’t gotten Mrs. Milton to say more than hello to me and she still acts like she has bitten into bitter fruit when she does.”

I chuckled, “It’s a long story.”

“Truly?”

“No, not really. Its a short one but I don’t know how to tell it.”

“Ah, the madness of women.” He grinned conspiratorially.

I grinned back. “Maybe we’re all mad here.”

He chuckled. “Or else why would we have come here?”

“Exactly.”

We sat and chatted as people milled about the field and things were setup. A small fanfare was played by the band for football players from each team as they came out. Yussef told me many of the player’s names and gave me a breakdown of what was expected of certain ones. I recognized a few names. Grace’s boyfriend Owen had been described by the girls as whipped though I think that was in jest. He was a mountain of a young man, a fullback who apparently had already had several offers from good college programs. Jerry was there, he played several roles, usually a wide receiver and kicker. He was also apparently very religious and came from an Irish Catholic family. Yussef provided the last with an air of ‘you take the bad with the good.’ The other name that stood out was Chris Newton, another star player along with Owen. I didn’t know much about him except when we had considered letting boyfriends come to the pool party the girls hadn’t wanted him there. He was wearing bandages on his arm which Yussef pointed out as he stopped to get them checked by the coach before joining the others.

During all this, the cheerleaders were doing some kind of warm-up and trying to hype up the crowd doing jumps, cheers, and clapping. I couldn’t help but stare at Melissa and Lavi. It was the first time I’d seen them in their uniforms in person. They were black and silver outfits that left their midriffs bare and had short skirts. There were shorts under the skirts but they provided a wonderful illusion. Lavi’s sports bra must have been working overtime as both girls jumped and clapped. Despite Lavi’s lack of enthusiasm when talking about cheering here you couldn’t tell it. She jumped and screamed and seemed to be just as into it as anyone else. It was the new girls, Coraline, Emma, and two I didn’t recognize that seemed to be nervous but Melissa and Grace were near them and regularly patting them on the arm or saying something. Xinyi sat nearby with another girl on a bench. The girls didn’t wave but frequently looked at me. I glanced over at Yussef. He only had eyes for Zahra. Her outfit was slightly different, covering her stomach and she wore a long-sleeved shirt and leggings that covered all but her face but she was jumping and cheering with everyone. As they cheered Yussef shared more details about the cheer routines with occasional comments about Zahra’s hard work. Pride for his daughter dripped from his voice.

I decided to rib him a little. “I think you’re a cheer mom in disguise.”

He smiled broadly, “I suppose I have taken a ... feminine role at times since we lost her mother but...” He shrugged. His shrug said a lot. I suspected taking a feminine role in raising children was not approved of by his culture but he didn’t care. I began to suspect that Zahra got her independent thinking from more than her mother’s side.

On the field the game started, a whistle blew, I saw the ball snap and I was mostly watching Lavi and Melissa but found myself starting to get caught up in the game a little. But when I looked back I couldn’t find Lavi among the cheerleaders.

I turned to Yussef, “Did you see where Lavi went?”

“She was talking with Mrs. Richardson, the cheer coach.”

“Oh.” I watched and at first, everything seemed normal. Then Melissa’s movement seemed to become less fluid. I couldn’t see well but she seemed to be looking off to the side. Suddenly she stopped and was walking towards the bleachers to my left. I looked and Lavi was wearing a summer dress made from a print of Van Gogh’s Starry Night and carrying a bag while walking towards me in the bleachers. She waved a little sheepishly and gave me a quick kiss on the cheek as she sat.

“Lav...”

She cut me off as she looked across me and greeted Yussef, “Dr. Tahan.”

He nodded politely, “Yussef please.”

By now Melissa was jogging up the steps, already up to us, and got the question out I was trying to ask.

Melissa, “What’s going on?” Now everyone was looking at us. One cheerleader sitting down and another jogging off the sidelines.

Lavi made a grimace and said, “I’m suspended from the game. Maybe from school.”

I managed to get out a, “What?”

Melissa, “Because of Chris?”

“Yep.”

“He’s playing.”

“Richardson says there’s no evidence he did anything wrong.”

Suddenly Linda was behind me and I heard her voice over my head, “What is going on here!?”

I now was the literal center of three women talking over me.

Lavi held up her hands to quiet everyone. Yussef was watching intently. “So, we were on the bus here and the guys were being dicks. They were making a bunch of crude comments but we were ignoring it. Grace and Owen tried to get them to stop but that seemed to egg them on like Chris wanted to prove no one could tell him what to do.”

Melissa took over the story, “But it wasn’t like focused on us, yeah, they made comments like, ‘Hey babes, want to give us a victory show after the game’ but we can ignore that shit. Then they started giving Jerry a hard time. One of them said Jerry must have a tiny dick if it didn’t make a difference if I got any or not.” Melissa was now getting red and took a deep breath and Lavi picked back up.

“So, Melissa stood up for Jerry and said girls talked and she knew he was a ... uh, bigger man than any of them” She grimaced and said, “that’s not exactly what she said but you get the idea. So, then Jerry is embarrassed and says to leave Melissa alone and that they were cool. Then that bitch T’wana said, ‘it’s not like she’s not getting dick, there’s some old guy they’re both screwing.’ Then Chris comes up and grabs Melissa’s arm and says something like ‘Maybe you can still be some fun after all’ and acts like he’s going to put her hand on his junk.”

“So,” Melissa took up, “that’s when Lavi grabbed his arm and squeezed. Hard. Like, bleeding from where she clawed her fingernails cutting into his arm hard.”

Lavi continued, “We were almost here by then and when we got off the bus Richardson talked to us. I figured it was done but then Richardson pulled me out of the cheer line and said they had evidence of me assaulting Chris so I had to go and not come to school on Monday while they reviewed it.”

“This is ridiculous, he was harassing us and assaulting me,” Melissa said.

“Well, this is just splendid,” Linda said as she glared at me. How was this my fault? Suddenly I heard a voice yelling, “Melissa Milton!” It was a middle-aged woman making a “come here” gesture at the bottom of the stands. The cheerleaders had stopped cheering and were gathered up around Grace.

Linda, “I will fix this.” Suddenly Linda was pushing past people in the stands and descending the stairs towards who I presumed was Mrs. Richardson. Melissa gave chase.

Yussef leaned over me and extended his hand to Lavi. “Well, I applaud you defending your family.”

“Thank you,” she replied. She shook it.

“Was it necessary to cut his arm up?” I asked.

“If I’d had a better angle I would have punched him and broken his nose.”

“Better angle?”

“You need a straight line where you can extend your arm but I was sitting behind Mellie. I was able to put my weight behind my nails and really pull though.”

I looked at her, impressed she had thought it through even in the moment. “You’re kind of sexy when you’re scary.”

“Awww, you’re sweet,” and she laid her head on my shoulder.

Yussef, “Escalation can be a good deterrent though, he puts one of yours in the hospital, you put one of his in the morgue.”

I blinked.

“The Untouchables, great movie,” he said. I think I stared a second. “Very old testament,” he said as if in response to an unspoken question and suddenly looked a lot younger with a sly smile. Meanwhile, for the first time, Yussef was not watching Zahra. There was no point, all the cheerleaders had stopped and were watching as Coach Richardson and Linda Milton had a quiet but tense dialogue.

“Oooo,” Lavi said.

“What?” I asked.

“I don’t know what she said but I know body language and that was ‘bitch you better not’ if I ever saw it followed by an ‘I ain’t playin’.”

Yussef chuckled as did some random teenager sitting behind me. I glanced at him but then he glanced away, obviously embarrassed at being caught listening in. I couldn’t really blame him though. Suddenly Melissa was between them. She turned and looked at first her mother and then the coach and had words for both of them. Then she walked off the field and towards what I guessed were the locker rooms. Linda watched her daughter go, pointed her finger at Richardson, said something, and walked towards the exit.

I glanced up and saw June headed towards us with the other gaggle of moms watching. Soon she was leaning over me, brushing her blonde hair out of her eyes. “What is going on!?”

“At this point, I have no idea.”

Lavi, “Chris grabbed Melissa on the bus and I grabbed his arm and hurt him, now he’s being a whiny bitch and the school suspended me and Melissa and Linda got mad and that’s all I know.”

I have to admit that was a very succinct summary.

June, “Wait, isn’t he playing?”

“She said there was no evidence he was fighting.”

“Other than your words?” I asked.

“Most of the team didn’t see anything. The bus seats and Chris’s body blocked everyone’s view so its just Mellie’s and my word against his. And I got the feeling Richardson didn’t consider Mellie’s and my viewpoints reliable.”

“You said she’d given you weird looks,” I said

“Yeah, I don’t think she likes two of us being together, makes drama for the team in her mind.”

“So, it’s not because...”

“No, I think she just takes this really seriously. We’ve been keeping it on the down-low but she’s not stupid, she’d have heard.”

June sat down behind me and started talking with Yussef. Clearly this was exciting. She made a ‘hold on’ gesture to the crowd of women waiting for her.

“By the way, Robert, I think Meilin wants to meet you.”

“Right now?”

“Well, probably not a good time but eventually. She’s asking a ton of questions. Like, what your job is, are you a nice guy, things like that.”

I groaned internally. “Do I want to know what Linda said?”

“Actually, and this is like the holy shit thing for me tonight, Linda was kinda-sorta nice. She said you were respectable.”

“Wow.”

“I know, right? Well, I told Meilin you were very nice and the girls adored you and you take great care of them.” She was doing the talking thing with her hands again. Turning my neck to talk to her I was half afraid she was going to hit me with one of her motions. Soon Melissa was back, like Lavi she was carrying a bag and had changed into civvies, in her case jeans and a t-shirt.

“Where’s my mom,” she asked as she sat down on the other side of Lavi.

“Bailed,” Lavi replied.

“Good.”

June, “What happened?”

“Well,” Melissa started, “Richardson said it was none of my business and it had to do with Lavi and mom got mad saying a guy had put his hands on me and it got uglier from there. Mom read her the riot act saying she was enabling a would-be rapist.”

June’s eyes got big, “Go Linda.” Bloody hell, I was cheering Linda Milton. What was the world coming to?

Melissa continued, “I got tired of it and told my mom that I was eighteen and she couldn’t legally speak for me anymore and I told Richardson since I was a part of this I was out and assuming I was suspended and I would consider what to do legally about the fact that the school chose to ignore a report of sexual assault. Then I left.”

June held up her hand for a high five, “You go girl!” Melissa sheepishly high fived her. “I gotta get back,” June said, “but I know this woman, used to work with me, now does workplace harassment suits, I’ll bet she could tear this school a new hole.”

Melissa, “Thanks!”

June said, “I’ll text it to you,” as she hurried back to her seat. She returned to the gaggle who looked hungry for the gossip June might have.

“So,” I looked at Melissa and Lavi, “you want to go?”

Lavi shrugged as if to say sure. Melissa however said, “Can we stay a bit? I want to see how the girls do at half time.”

It was a given that Lavi would agree with Melissa and I saw no reason to object. As we sat Melissa settled between Yussef and me and they had a running commentary about both the game and the cheerleaders. I could tell that Melissa and Lavi were tense but they distracted themselves. I kept looking at Richardson walking around and considered going down there to give her a piece of my mind but I knew it wouldn’t accomplish anything. I did get some satisfaction at her looking up and giving annoyed looks at Melissa and Lavi still being here.

They, however, ignored her. Melissa pointed out where Zahra could do a little better and Yussef immediately knew what exercises would help her. I wondered if I should have brought a copy of The Naked Ape to read but figured no one would get the joke here. Lavi meanwhile gave me a running commentary on the sex lives of cheerleaders and football players and a surprising number of the marching band.

“So,” I had to ask after hearing about one football player’s preference for what Lavi called robust women, “if you know all this, how much of our sex life do they know?”

She shrugged. “Not much, we told them you make us pass out from amazing sex, read us poetry, and make gourmet meals. That got four out of five of the girls in the school ready to climb in bed with you. The others were ready to jump in after I told them about the dresses you bought us.”

Melissa was apparently still keeping an ear on our conversation though, as she now leaned over and said, “Those skanky hoes can get lost.” She looked like she had more to say but decided not to. She didn’t have to, I knew Melissa was sensitive about money in relationships.

I however had my own need for clarification from Lavi. “What? Wait, back up. Seriously?”

Lavi: “Robert, I adore you and Mellie, but if you think I’m not going to brag and make those thots jealous, really, modesty is not one of my virtues, you know that.”

I rubbed my forehead. Why was I having this conversation in the stands at a high school football game? Fortunately, Lavi got distracted by Instagram soon, and was soon posting pictures of the girls with comments like “OMG! Emma is so cute, she’s going to be amazing!”

As the girls cheered they did a few routines but there were also times they took breaks and did a more informal hyping of the crowd. Grace would move them around some and Melissa explained she was giving some of the girls’ experience in different roles. Melissa and Lavi stepping out required some adjustments on the fly, but only for the multi-part routines.

Soon it was half time. The players exited the field while the cheerleaders took a break. Though I was a bit on edge I had settled down into a relaxed pattern of chatting with Lavi and Melissa. Both were a little tense but distracting themselves. Meanwhile, I looked up to occasionally see eyes on us from the gaggle of cheer moms. I considered sticking my tongue out at them just to see what they’d do. I’m mature like that.

Melissa, “So, there will be a break for a few minutes and then the big routine will start. Looks like Emma is taking Lavi’s role which is good, she’s a strong thing. Amber is taking mine, makes sense she has the height and she knows the drill. That means they are probably going to toss Coraline, I swear that girl needs a few burgers.”

Lavi leaned into me and whispered in my ear, “She could eat me.”

I whispered back, “I don’t think that would give her the calories.”

“Well, it’d just be for practice.” We both started giggling and she bumped my shoulder with hers. I delighted in the fact that even among all these things happening we could still lean on each other. I didn’t have much time for contemplation though, because that’s when Ji started yelling at Grace and walked off the field. I sat stupefied for a minute. What the ever-living fuck was going on? Lavi’s eyes were wide and Melissa’s mouth was hanging open. Suddenly both were on their feet, bags left with me, and headed to the locker room in Ji’s wake. Grace was standing there with her head down. A few minutes later Melissa and Lavi were back with Ji, now wearing a button-up dress in rainbow colors. Melissa and Lavi sat down again while Ji headed to her mom.

Melissa leaned over, “Can we give Ji a ride home? Things are getting tense and she doesn’t want her sister or her friends to ride back on the bus but her mom doesn’t have room for five, so if we can take Ji that would be great.”

“Uh, sure,” I said. “What’s going on? She can’t get a ride with someone else?”

Lavi, “She wants to leave right now. Apparently, T’wana has been over the fucking moon about this drama and it’s gotten on Ji’s nerves until she broke. Owen talked to Grace and apparently Chris and Jerry almost got into a fight in the locker room. All the girls are finding other rides, fortunately, there is plenty of the mom squad here.”

‘So, abort plan ‘watch half time’?”

“If you don’t mind.”

“No problem.”

Yussef leaned forward, “I can give a ride if anyone needs it as well.”

“Thank you, Dr. Tahan.”

“T’wana is pissing off Ji now?” I asked.

Melissa, “She said, and I quote, ‘I’m tired of that bitch riding my dick.’”

I looked over at Yussef to see if this offended him. It didn’t seem to so I ignored it. As soon as Ji was back we were heading out. Melissa peeled off to talk to Grace but soon rejoined us and I eased Lavi’s car out of the parking lot. I drove, Melissa in the front seat while Lavi and Ji took the back.

“So ... how was Grace?” I asked.

Melissa, “Seriously upset. I think three of us walking off is fucking with her but she’s mad as hell at Richardson too.”

Lavi sighed, “God, I’m worked up. All that stuff has my blood going.”

A moment passed and she added, “And I mean, worked up, you know?” Another moment passed and she added, “You know, like horny.”

Ji started laughing. Melissa scolded Lavi, “Lavi, really?!?”

“What?”

“Ji is here.”

Ji, “I’ve heard this before.”

Melissa, “Yeah, but Robert is here.”

“She doesn’t say stuff like this around Robert?”

“Well, yeah, but she shouldn’t with other people around too.”

I couldn’t see her while driving but all I heard was Lavi continue as if Melissa had never said anything, “Really horny.”

That was it. Ji and I both were laughing and after a second so was Melissa who then yelled, “SLUT!”

Lavi, “I broke her!”

Melissa was still laughing, “I’ll break you later!”

“You promise?”

“I promise.” Melissa was smiling now. They blew kisses to each other.

That seemed to remove a lot of tension from the car.

“So,” Ji asked, “how does this work, do you all just fuck each other?”

“Uh,” Melissa seemed to think, “yeah, pretty much. I mean it’s not like a constant orgy or anything.”

“No one is going without, though,” said Lavi.

Ji, “It’s so weird.”

“So, I have to ask,” said Melissa, “why ask us for a ride? Someone else could have given you a lift.”

“Well, to be honest, partially to piss off T’wana. I’m tired of her riding me. But mostly because I just wanted out right now, not after the game was over.”

“About what?” I asked.

“Huh?”

“What is she giving you grief about?”

“You three really. She knows something happened at the party with Xinyi but no one is saying what so she’s been like a bitch with a bone.”

“So,” I had to ask, “What did you tell Xinyi and Grace, at the party?”

“I lied. I told them you had a hidden security camera over the door in the kitchen and once I said that Xinyi admitted everything. She fessed up and said it was exactly like you said.”

“Uh, good to know,” offered Melissa.

“Well, I had to say something and I didn’t want to share your ... uh, details.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“I did have to tell, the Xinyi part, to my mom. She wanted to know why Xinyi wasn’t on the team right away.”

“She gave me some funny looks at the game,” I said.

“Oh, she thinks you’re... “ she sighed, “dangerous.”

Dangerous? “Like, violent? She doesn’t think I’d attack you does she?”

“Oh, no, no! She thinks you’re going to seduce me.”

Melissa and Lavi both started a new round of chuckles. I didn’t join that one. I mean, I wasn’t going to but it wasn’t that funny...

Ji continued, “She said there was a dragon behind me and a tiger in front of me.”

“Huh?”

“I think you’re the tiger. Oh, the saying? It means surrounded by danger.”

“What’s the dragon?” Melissa asked.

“No idea. I was ready to be done with that conversation.”

“Totally unfair,” said Lavi.

Ji, “What?”

“Robert should be the dragon, he likes behinds and I could be the tiger, I like fronts.” She smiled at Ji. Lavi might prefer blondes but that didn’t mean she had exclusive tastes.

Ji, “Are ... you seriously thirsting on me?”

“No, well, not really, just joking around. Um ... why?”

“I don’t know. Just kind of freaked me out. I mean everyone knows you like girls but you’ve always been gaga over the built blonde girls like Mellissa.”

“Well, I have Mellie now. I want a harem.”

“Hey,” I said, “I thought the guy got the harem.”

Lavi, “It’s the 21st century Robert. I can have a harem.”

Mellisa while looking at her phone, “It’s the 21st century. You two can share a harem.”

“You’re all right with this?” Ji asked Melissa.

“Well, if we’re just talking am I all right with them having sex with others, yeah, at least the idea. I know it’d be hot. I suppose how else I felt would depend on all the other stuff like who and how. Like there was this girl in Miami, if that had happened it would have been awesome because there was no baggage but someone we know, yeah, it’s hot but...” She trailed off.

Lavi shrugged, “And like Mellie said, we’re not fucking all the time. Robert and Mellie read a lot. We watch movies, do chores, talk, swim. Tomorrow we’re planting a herb garden.”

Ji sounded surprised, “Wow, domestic and shit.”

Lavi sounded pleased, “Yep.”

Me again, “So, Ji, isn’t there going to be some blowback from you just walking off?”

“Ha. Yeah, I’ll get crap, but what are they going to do?”

“Kick you off,” said Melissa.

“Same for you.”

“I can argue I wasn’t safe. Not saying Richardson won’t give me hell about it but she won’t kick me for it at an exhibition game. And I was serious about the assault. That kind of thing can escalate.” I felt my knuckled tighten on the steering wheel which Melissa must have noticed. “It’s fine babe, I’m not defenseless.”

“Damn right, I’d have ripped his balls off!” Offered Lavi.

“But I’m not letting this slide. He pulls that with me, who knows what else he would do. I was just going to wait until after the game to deal with it but if Richardson wants to throw down ... ggrrrr ... did she really have to be such a bitch about this?”

“Sorry, didn’t mean for you to get sucked up into this,” said Lavi.

“I was in this from the beginning,” said Melissa.

“Well, I’m sorry you got sucked up Ji.”

I heard Ji yawn, “It doesn’t matter. I was tired of T’wana anyway. If we were going to have it out better tonight than later.”

“What set that off?” asked Melissa.

“She was going on about how I shouldn’t have gone to practice at your place, about how bad it was to hang out ‘with those dykes’, and asked me again what the deal with Robert was. I told her to stop bringing him up. So then she said he must be fucking me too and I said I’d rather have him up my ass than her head. Then... “ Ji took a breath, “T’wana said ‘what, he has a nine-inch dick?’ and I don’t know why I did but I wanted to wipe that smug ass look off her face so I said ‘about that and thicker than my wrist.’ Then I said I wouldn’t stand next to her in the line anymore, Grace said she couldn’t move anyone anymore and I just fucking walked.”

The car was silent except for road noise for a dozen heartbeats before Lavi replied. “You really fucking said that?”

Ji sounded tired, “Yeah.”

“You told them you were fucking Robert?”

“Oh, it was clearly sarcasm.” My eye caught Ji waving it away as I glanced in the rearview mirror.

“Uh...” Melissa was looking at her phone. “According to Amber T’wana is saying you’ve confirmed that the drama at the party was Xinyi discovering you with Robert and the whole sidelining thing was to put her on notice so she didn’t say anything.”

Ji, “You’re kidding me, right?”

Melissa fiddled with her phone and suddenly Ji’s pinged. A light sprang up from the backseat. There was a pause as she read it and then all I heard was something that sounded like “go pee,” but I suspect it wasn’t given the tone of voice and inflection in ... Mandarin? Cantonese? I couldn’t tell the difference.

Ji sounded incredulous, “Seriously? I mean, they could ask Grace.”

Lavi, “Grace is probably frazzled as hell right now, and if I know T’wana she is keeping Grace out of the loop while at the game.”

“Uh, Grace is texting me,” Melissa said. “I’d say that’s a safe bet that she’s out of that loop. June apparently found the principle and asked to see a copy of the school’s policy on sexual assault on school property and he is talking to Richardson now. Grace is having kittens.”

Ji, “And Xinyi won’t say shit, she’s probably thrilled. If I’m gone she can get on the team that much sooner.”

“Will your mom freak?” Melissa asked.

“I’ll tell her I’m studying harder for an ivy league school, that’ll be good enough for her. I can’t believe how shitty this has been and we are what, a few weeks in? I thought my senior year would be awesome! No, I’m haunted by two fucking hags, one of whom I share a bathroom with! I’m cursed, this is like I killed babies in a past life stuff. Shit!”

I heard a sound that I think was Ji slapping the car seat repeatedly in frustration. A few more miles of quiet passed. She stopped and let out a huge breath.

Melissa, “I’m sorry.”

“It’s none of your faults. I’ll deal.”

“So, your mom said she thought Robert, uh, I guess I’m asking she’s okay with your escape route?” asked Lavi. “I don’t want this to be more for you to deal with.”

“Whatever. I didn’t really ask. I’ve had it. I told her it was a safety thing and I needed to bail or I’d rip into T’wana and then something was going to come out about Xinyi so if she wanted to keep that quiet she’d give them lifts home and I was leaving.”

“You said all that ... there?” I asked.

Ji replied almost with a laugh, “An advantage of being Chinese around here, if anyone speaks a second language it’s not mandarin.”

“Wow.” Lavi offered Ji a high five. Ji didn’t take it.

“Look, don’t take this wrong Lavi, but I know you’re happy about me, and T’wana engaged in military action. I gotta look out for my little sister even if she is my karmic punishment and that means I’m going to avoid stirring the pot about all of you. But it’s not like you and I are BFFs. You’ve given me an unending line of crap for three years. Shit, I had to stop using my American name because you refused to use it.”

“Hey, I didn’t call you Ji to give you shit, I like the name Jiang, I think it’s really pretty.”

“Not to give me hell?” Ji didn’t sound convinced.

“No, I didn’t start giving you hell until after I got to know you.”

“God, you are...”

“Insufferable?” Offered Melissa.

“Yes!”

“Immodest, self-satisfied, smug, vainglorious, unbearable...” continued Melissa.

“Yes, all of those,” agreed Ji. “How do you put up with her?”

“Same way she puts up with me,” Melissa said, “because she’s perfect despite her flaws.”

“Ji, look,” Lavi’s voice seemed strained, “I’m sorry.”

“What?”

“I’m sorry, okay? I know it’s for your sister but you are looking out for us too and I appreciate it. I’ve taken plenty of shots at you when I didn’t have to over the years. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be a bitch. It started with that comment you made back in our freshman year. I shouldn’t have kept on for that but I felt like I had to make sure you didn’t come after Melissa again.”

“What comment?” Ji sounded confused. “Melissa?”

Melissa sighed. “Lavi, you don’t have to go there.”

“No,” Ji’s voice rose, “what are you talking about?”

“Melissa was talking to Minh, remember him, graduated last year?”

“The geek, in all the honors classes?”

Melissa, “He wasn’t a geek, he was sweet!”

Lavi, “Uh, he kind of was a geek love, but I’m not saying that’s bad!” I could see Melissa getting annoyed and Lavi was hoping to ward off Melissa’s ire. “We were on the JV squad and T’wana asked what Mellie was doing with a geek from the chess club. It was in the lunchroom, Mellie and Minh were a table down.” Lavi was clearly trying to prompt a memory.

“I don’t even remember this. I mean I know Melissa always liked the smart boys but I don’t remember this.”

Lavi, “I do. You called her a chinkaroo.”

“I ... I did?”

“Yeah, T’wana thought it was super funny and when someone asked what that was T’wana said it was like a fag hag but for little yellow dicks. Minh and Melissa both overheard it. He almost ran out of there.”

Melissa’s voice sounded a little tight. “It’s fine; it’s ancient history.”

“I ... don’t remember that. I’m sorry. Wow, that was...”

Lavi, “Well, I wasn’t nice and from then on I kept on you.”

“So, you were kinda protecting Mellie all those times?” Ji sounded contemplative.

“I never let it go and I should have.”

“You know, all through high school I don’t think T’wana ever stood up for me unless she could put someone else down at the same time.”

Melissa: “Well, if you haven’t noticed T’wana is a nasty person. I’ve always thought you were nicer when you weren’t around her.”

Ji looked at Lavi, “I don’t know about BFFs but we got one year left, maybe we can at least be friendly.”

“I’d like that.” I could hear warmth in Lavi’s voice.

“Wow,” Melissa said, “Two peace treaties in a week.”

“What?” Ji asked.

“Don’t ask,” I said, “long story.” Then I remembered what I’d said to Yussef. “Well, short but confusing. Never mind, where can I take you?” I asked Ji.

“Well, according to Mom, she’s staying at the game. They are letting Xinyi cheer in the second half. And I completely forgot I didn’t bring my key since Xinyi took her’s so I can’t get into the house.”

“Your dad’s not home?”

“Nah, he’ll be back super late on the red-eye. He’s gone Monday through Friday for work and back on the weekends.”

“We can take you back to our place,” said Lavi, “but your mom may not be happy about that.”

“Oh, she’s fine with it. I think she figures it’s just a matter of time. When I left she said something about my being a woman now and men seeing me. I think she was proud.”

“So, you leaving with us...”

“Oh yeah, I’m sure she assumes I’m already plowed in every hole. Great, and I basically said it to the squad too! Ug, I’m an idiot!”

Melissa let out a tiny squeak almost inaudible but it still rang through the car.

Lavi started laughing hysterically, “Don’t do that to Mellie, it’s cruel.”

“You like that idea? Me getting plowed.” Ji was leaning forward to try to see Mellisa’s face which was beet red and she said nothing. “Holy shit, you really...”

“I said I did!” Melissa said defensively.

“Okay, okay...” Ji backed off.

“I can stop somewhere and get us some food,” I offered.

“Let’s just go home,” said Lavi, “and order something.”

“Uh, that might not look right, Ji coming home with us.”

“Won’t matter,” said Ji, “maybe they’ll believe us, maybe not; really depends on what the rumor mill wants to believe.”

“But to be clear, I’m not going to,” I said. “We don’t need that drama.”

“We already have the drama,” Lavi said laughing, “you might as well.”

Melissa, “You just want an orgy.”

“Only if it’s a bunch of girls and Robert. Yeah, I’m good with that.” I could hear the smile in her voice.

“No sex with other members of the squad,” Melissa reminded her.

Lavi sounded indignant, “That’s Robert’s rule, I didn’t say I wouldn’t.”

Ji, “Are you saying you want to fuck me?”

“Not exactly, there’s just a principle here I’m defending.”

Melissa put her hand on my arm, “Our wife is a hopeless slut.”

I would have rolled my eyes if I hadn’t been driving. “I just want to know if I’m going to a restaurant or going home.”

Ji, “So long as someone feeds me I don’t care.”

Lavi, “Oh, Robert can feed you!”

That hung in the air a second, followed by Lavi, Melissa, and I laughing while it was Ji’s turn to become as red as she could. Fuck it, I headed home.

As soon as we were in the door Lavi pronounced, “It’s been a night; let’s chill.”

Melissa had spent weeks in her spare time hunting furniture stores to find a huge couch that some of my old honeymoon money could be spent on. It was brown, soft and so deep it was heavenly. She also got an amazing deal on it. So, it was decided dinner would be on the couch and we would put on music and relax. I ordered Thai and Melissa fixed drinks. I questioned Melissa pouring wine for Ji but what the hell, it wasn’t like Ji hadn’t had sangria and vodka here before, though not my vodka. I doubted the law cared about that distinction.

Soon the two Pad Thai arrived along with the curries that Ji and Lavi opted for. Melissa and I were gone in the kitchen cooking up some eggs while Lavi arranged the coffee table to be a makeshift sideboard for the food. We came back in and whatever had been in mid-conversation stopped suddenly and Ji looked away.

“Uh, did we interrupt something?”

Lavi shrugged, “Ji was just asking about what being a lesbian was like, like how did I know and stuff.”

Melissa clearly did not consider this worthy of being embarrassed about. “How would you know, you’re bi? Maybe eighty percent gay, tops.” She settled on the couch.

Lavi, “Oh higher than that babe, I’ve really only ever been into two guys and one was gay. That’s gotta put me high up in the percentages.”

Melissa started in on her food and I sat next to her. She continued, “But Tommy being gay doesn’t count, he’s like gorgeous. I’m his sister and I’d simp for him if he wasn’t my brother.”

“That’s fair,” I added, “I’m completely straight and yeah, he’s a very attractive man, like Chris Evans levels except without video editing to enhance him.”

Lavi, “So, are you saying if you were bi you’d fuck Tommy?”

“Not necessarily, but I think I’d find him sexy. But I’m not bi.” I started in on my own food.

Lavi suddenly made a happy sound as she ate some curry.

“Hit the spot?” I asked.

“No, just imagining Tommy and Mellie double-teaming me.”

Melisssa finished chewing her bite of shrimp and then started waving her chopsticks at Lavi. “Not happening slut.”

“I know, I know, just something that popped in my head.” She returned to eating.

Ji still hadn’t touched her curry. “This is so bizarre.”

“What?” Melissa asked.

“You’re all just chill about this?”

“About what?” I asked.

“This stuff? I mean, ‘if you were bi’, people don’t talk like that. Well, maybe Lavi but not other people.”

I thought of several pompous responses but instead said, “Why not? It would be pretty hypocritical for me to be super sensitive about it given my wives.”

Melissa, “Oh, you didn’t give a crap before we met you.”

“Fair enough.”

Melissa continued, “And I’m learning how to not care what people think.”

“I can tell that, Miss Melissa, the Perfect Prefect.”

Melissa’s eyes narrowed. “Does someone call me that?”

Lavi, “Uh, several.” She looked at her food very carefully.

There was silence for a minute as Melissa stabbed at her food. Abruptly she said, “We don’t even have prefects, we’re a public school, what the hell!?”

Ji, “Uh ... someone might have come up with it at a sleepover while we were watching Harry Potter.”

Three heartbeats passed before Melissa said, “No one is getting house points for that shit, it’s not even factually accurate.”

“Oh my god, you are so Ravenclaw at times, my love,” Lavi said.

I started laughing and soon Lavi and Melissa joined me.

Ji was smiling. “You guys seem to laugh a lot.”

Melissa responded, “Why not? I could be pissy about it and I am kind of ... unthrilled, but it is what it is. Besides, I can kind of see where they’re coming from. My being pissy isn’t going to do anything. No point in fighting a fight where there isn’t anything to win.”

Ji, “Done enough of disturbing the universe this year?”

“Huh?” Melissa paused mid-chew again.

“I mean, you’ve turned the school upside down in a few weeks. Miss Melissa Milton, the Anglo Saxon princess, and Lavi Heller, the Alpha Bitch turn out to be a couple-couple and both with an older man and you two seem to have given zero fucks. The whole school is Twilight Zoned.”

“Really?” Melissa looked shocked.

Lavi nodded as if she was well aware of these facts even if Melissa wasn’t.

“Do you know how many people have pulled aside every single cheer squad member to ask questions, especially after T’wana told them we practiced over here?”

“Uh...” Melissa’s food was momentarily forgotten, “I guess everyone is curious?”

“Oh yeah, and like EVERYONE, I’m not just talking students, four of my six teachers have asked me, parents of other students, two of the vice principals, several past teachers...”

I looked at Melissa, she looked at me, Lavi ate a spring roll.

Melissa to Lavi, “Did you know about this?”

“Of course, I expected it.” She took a sip of her wine. “Mellie, I love you but you have never quite grasped that we are the top of the food chain.”

“What? I’m so confused.”

Ji, “Oh yeah. I think that is part of why T’wana is so on edge. She’s always had her place in the hierarchy. She’s never challenged Lavi for the title but she’s been like the beta bitch who could do what she wanted so long as she stayed out of Lavi’s way. Now no one knows the rules.”

Melissa, “We’re gone in what, seven months? Who cares?”

Ji and Lavi together, “A lot of people.”

“It’s stupid. But, how about you, Ji?” Asked Melissa.

“What about me?” She was finally eating and had to swallow some potato to answer.

“You’re disturbing the universe tonight aren’t you?”

She shrugged as she put some rice into the curry. “Maybe a little but I’m so past caring what T’wana or Richardson think. I don’t need to cheer anymore. It used to really matter. But somewhere along the way ... all right, I’ll tell you the breaking point for me but you have to promise to not laugh.”

We chimed in, “I swear,” “Pinky promise,” “Cross my heart.”

“Fine. I was reading Reddit’s relationship forums. It’s like a constant train wreck of emotions, it kinda makes me feel good like ‘I’d never let a guy treat me like that.’ But there I was reading this stuff and I started to see T’wana in it, like telling me who I could talk to, she’d tell me she didn’t say things I know she fucking said, and I was like holy shit, she’s gaslighting me. Like, I’d always made excuses for it and she said she knew I was an Asian blonde but she liked me anyway and all these things and I was like, I’d never put up with this shit from a boy why the fuck was I from her?”

Melissa, “You’re not saying that you ... you know ... and her...”

“No, no, no! I mean, I’ve wondered, you have to wonder right? No, this was purely platonic evil mind fucking stuff.”

“Gotcha.”

“Well, good riddance to bad rubbish, that includes toxic relationships,” I said.

Everyone held up their glasses in salute to the idea.

“But,” Melissa said, “when I asked about disturbing the universe I meant more your tiger mom.”

“Oh, she’s not so bad. She’d rather I play the violin, get straight As, and be a cheerleader but she’s fine if I do two of the three so she gets violin and cheerleading. If I quit cheer I’ll buckle down on school and she’ll still be happy. Seriously, if you think she’s a tiger mom you need to meet some of my aunts and cousins. My mom is the laid back one.”

Lavi now raised her glass, “To laid back moms.” We all cheered that one eagerly.

After that, we ate and the conversation drifted to music. Melissa’s phone got passed around as everyone hunted for music to share and slowly one glass of wine became two. Eventually, Ji got a ping on her phone.

“Mom says the game is over. The team did the halftime routine. Apparently it went ... not horribly. She’s going to take Coraline and Emma home and grab me after.”

Melissa, “Grace texted to say Owen is going home with her mom and her, he doesn’t even want to be on the bus with the rest of the team right now. Jerry’s parents are there and giving him a ride too.”

Lavi, “Must be bad if the team doesn’t even want to ride together.”

Melissa shrugged. What was there to say?

At this point everyone was feeling the wine I think, especially Melissa because she had switched to snuggling up in my lap and was mindful of Ji being there but clearly ready for her to leave too. I looked down to give her a quick kiss when she leaned up and slipped her tongue into my mouth. My hand found its way to run across her stomach under her shirt before I reminded myself we had a guest.

“That was hot,” Ji said.

Lavi meanwhile had skirted over to Ji and suddenly was tracing a single fingertip on her knee.

Lavi, “So, uh, I don’t want to freak you out and I’m, you know, not going to pressure but if you ever want to know what it’s like to...”

Ji, “You would?”

“Just kissing. If that’s all right, I totally shouldn’t offer without talking about it.” She looked at Melissa and me.

“Just kissing?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

“Just as friends, right?” Asked Melissa.

“Of course,” Lavi responded.

This was a slippery as fuck slope but it was it really my place to tell them no? Was I being influenced by the thought of how hot it would be? Fuck I’m not a saint. I nodded yes and so did Melissa. I felt her ass suddenly press against me and I wrapped my arms around her to hold her there.

Ji leaned in and she and Lavi kissed. Lavi had her hand on Ji’s knee and Ji’s hands were firmly on the couch cushions. Their lips just touched but Lavi’s tongue slid out and Ji’s danced with her’s. They didn’t lean in for deep kisses, they kept it light. If it hadn’t been for their deep breathing and closed eyes and utter concentration you could almost take it for the kind of kiss two girls do as a joke but it continued, Lavi grabbing at Ji’s lips with her own, Ji retreating and then putting herself back there.

When Ji’s phone finally pinged again I saw headlights outside in the driveway. Ji was panting, red and flustered.

“I gotta go, I ... thank you.” She did a curt bow and headed out grabbing her bag by the front door.

The door shut behind her and we sat in silence until the car was gone. All Lavi said was “Someone better fuck the shit out of me right now.”

Melissa grabbed their bags and tossed one to Lavi. “Outfits, go,” and they ran up the stairs. I turned off the lights and followed as fast as I could.

**Chapter 27**

I was less than a minute behind the girls but as I reached the top of the stairs Lavi had Melissa pressed against the wall. Both were still holding their bags. I mostly just saw Lavi’s back but she was licking Melissa’s neck while Melissa had her eyes closed and was breathing deeply. Lavi was saying something near Melissa’s ear but she must have heard me behind her. I leaned against the wall and watched as Lavi raised her voice.

She placed slow sensual kisses across Melissa’s neck and face between words. “You really expect me to say no to that Asian pear?” Lavi’s voice was husky, teasing. I walked around a little and saw that Lavi had her free hand under Melissa’s shirt.

Melissa was just smiling, obviously in a very happy place. Her voice came out like honey, sweet and smooth, “No fucking the team, Robert said so.”

“Robert said that for him, not us.”

“It’s still, ooh yeah, um, we shouldn’t. And I know you won’t unless I say okay.”

Lavi growled a little. Melissa knew her lover. “I’ll just have to convince you.” Melissa yelped as Lavi did something under the shirt.

Melissa squeaked, “Cheater!”

“All is fair.”

“Oh God,” Melissa said. I saw Melissa’s knees buckle just a little and Lavi giggled. “It’s Robert you really need to convince.”

Lavi giggled again, “Oh I know Robert, if I break you he will fall too. He’s a guy, besides he can’t say no to you when you really want it.”

I walked up behind Lavi, I ran my hand up her neck and tangled my fingers in her head and gently but firmly pulled back. “Got it all worked out,” I asked?

“You know it,” Lavi replied. “You think you can put me in line?”

I chuckled, “No, but I could have fun trying.”

I had come to learn a few of Lavi’s favorite spots and one of them was accessible with her hair pulled up. I went to work on the back of Lavi’s neck, kissing it. I heard a bag hit the floor and based and the arching of her back Melissa was doing something wonderful with Lavi’s front.

Lavi, “Fuck, you two don’t play fair!”

“All is fair,” I echoed.

I felt Lavi’s ass rubbing against my crotch. “Are you saying you’d turn down Ji’s ass rubbing against you?”

I could see Melissa now attacking the front of Lavi’s neck while I kissed the back.

“I don’t think I’m even a part of this,” I replied, “it wasn’t me she was making out with. Besides you have a way nicer ass.” I decided I had a free hand so I made use of it to squeeze said ass.

Lavi went up onto her toes for a second, “God, can you two just fuck me and we can talk about this later!?”

Melissa giggled, “You’re the one who wanted to talk about it while molesting me.”

“ARRGH!”

I stepped back and grabbed Lavi’s hand. “Come on.”

Melissa grabbed both their bags and headed to the bathroom. “Take care of the feral pussycat, I’ll just be a few.”

Lavi had already pulled away from me and leaped onto the bed, scurried up to lay her head on the pillows, and lifted her legs to pull her panties off just pulling them off around her sneakers. She was a gorgeous sight, her wide hips lying back, the Van Gogh print dress pulled up to her waist. She was stroking herself and motioning for me to hurry up. I got on the bed, still fully dressed, and began slowly undoing the laces on her sneakers to take them off one at a time. I started to pull her socks off and put little kisses on her toes when she began slapping the bed.

Lavi, “Pussy, now!”

I grinned. “Ever heard of delayed gratification?”

“I think that means I get gratified less, so I say we don’t.”

I laughed at that. “Fair point.” So, who says I would deny a lady? I finished taking her shoes and socks off and then laid down and buried my nose in her quim and began to lick.

“Fuck yes, that’s it, eat ME!!!!” She was breathing quickly and I angled up to stab at her clit with my tongue and was rewarded with an immediate convulsion that marked Lavi’s small and first orgasm of the night.

“Like that?” I said, muffled by, well, muff.

“No talking with your mouth full!” Lavi pushed my head back down. Trying to eat pussy while laughing is not easy but I did my best. Her legs relaxed and she purred now having gotten some of the sexual stress out of her system.

Over the last few months, I’d learned a lot about Lavi, especially about how she loves to have her clit played with. Especially that she liked it in short periods that build her up. Then I alternate by running my tongue through her folds. I was glad she liked that because I loved filling my nose with the scent of her. She was different from Melissa whose taste was almost sweet while Lavi was rich. Maybe I was projecting my sense of them but they really did taste different to me.

I ran my hands up and down those muscular but soft thighs and licked enthusiastically. Lavi got quieter as she focused on my attention and ran her hands through my hair. She pulled her legs up to give me as much access as possible. As I licked her folds while letting my thumb rest against her clit her left leg started to twitch. I felt her hands slide off me as she moaned, she used her fingers to spread herself, urging me to push my tongue deeper and the other one disappeared, I suspected to play with her breasts.

In a moment Lavi was lifting her hips and screaming, “FUCK YES!” and then fell down.

“So, a good start?” I asked.

Lavi, “A good start, now come up here.”

“Let me get comfortable first,” I said. I stood and undressed, noticing that Melissa was now in the doorway and watching us, unusually her hair was up in a sort of bun. She was dressed in her cheerleader uniform but instead of athletic shoes had heels that showed off her legs. She walked by me and set up her phone on the little tripod she had made a permanent feature of the bedside. I joined Lavi on the bed; she had finally taken her dress and bra off. She reached for my dick while I reached around her and ran a palm over her heavy breast, cupping it. They were heavy and sagged as real gorgeous breasts do. I pulled the nipple and she squirmed. Melissa picked up my phone and fiddled with it. Soon from the room’s speakers Camillo Cabello’s ‘Havana’ started playing.

Melissa stood at the end of the bed and twirled. I noticed she wasn’t wearing shorts underneath but a very sexy pair of crotchless black lace panties.

Lavi giggled, “Well, I like the uniform change.” She gently stroked me. “And I think little Robert here does too.” Melissa grinned. She turned and bent over as the beat picked up and straightened, arching her back, taking a pin out of her hair and shaking it out behind her as one hand lifted the skirt and the other slapped her ass.

“Wooh baby!” Lavi yelled. I wolf-whistled. Melissa turned partway and smiled. She leaned forward into the door frame and kicked her legs up behind her, which did wonderful things. Lavi licked her palm and reached down to rub my balls while I played with her nipples. Melissa danced in place, shook her hips, turned around, placing her back against the wall, and slid down spreading her legs. One hand slid down the wall while the other disappeared under her skirt. She reached the floor and spun around, pulled her legs under her, and shook at us again.

She moved up sinuously, twisting like a serpent, and kept eye contact with us. She was dressed like the innocent blonde cheerleader but the look in her eyes was pure sin. She undulated and danced her fingers up her torso as she did.

Lavi, “If you don’t get up here soon, Robert is going to coat my hand.”

Melissa licked her fingers and traced the edge of her outfit that showed her stomach. “Maybe he should wait a bit longer. I haven’t even gotten the top off yet.”

“Melissa?” I realized I was breathing a little faster than I realized I was when I spoke.

“Yes, Robert?”

“I want to fuck you in it.”

She grinned, evilly. “I’m not done yet.” Her hips swayed and her hair swung back and forth. She turned away from us again. I placed my hand on Lavi’s and removed her from playing with me and motioned her for silence while I got up. I strode to Melissa quickly and stood in front of her.

“On your back.”

She danced, moving conveniently closer to the bed. I shoved and she abruptly fell backward. The speakers played ‘he got me feelin’ like ooh-ooh-ooh’ when Melissa shrieked, “You brute!” Lavi had her hands under Melissa’s arms and pulled her up while I lifted her legs by the knees. “Really?” Melissa asked Lavi, “You’re going to help him?”

“I want you in the outfit too,” Lavi said as she put a leg over Melissa’s face.

“I can’t believe this, you thugs, I’m being absolutely ravaged.” It might have been more convincing if she hadn’t said it so calmly while sliding hands up Lavi’s thighs and then making happy sounds as she started licking up the richness I had been enjoying a little bit before.

With her legs open I pushed into her. Melissa was ready. I looked down, the bulb of my head entering Melissa, the cheerleader skirt spread around her thighs, I had thought fucking in the uniform would be silly but I had to admit it was sexy as hell.

I slapped Lavi’s ass. “Turn around.”

She breathed heavily, “Why?”

“I want to kiss you.”

Lavi lifted up and I saw Melissa’s face, coated in Lavi’s juices. She blew me a sweet kiss and before Lavi could reposition I leaned down to kiss Melissa.

“I love you,” I said.

“I love you.”

Lavi returned to her place and faced me, leaning forward. I could tell by a little jerk of her body that Melissa had returned her tongue to its labors. I reached out to hold Lavi’s face and kissed her.

“I love you too.”

“And I, you.” We leaned and touched foreheads as I fucked Melissa and Lavi rode her face. Lavi reached out and started playing with my nipple. “You like fucking that cheerleader pussy?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Ever fucked a cheerleader when you were in high school?”

I shook my head no.

Lavi grinned, “Maybe we could get another in here. I have one in mind and I bet she tastes sweet. I know she’s only dated a couple of guys and they were tiny. I bet you’d find some new places to explore with your cock in her.” As Lavi said that I felt Melissa’s legs tighten around me.

Lavi was playing dirty so I decided to do the same. I reached out and found both her nipples and pinched both. “We might as well toughen up your nipples some, you know how the kids will be on them. Big tits like this, you might need to have both ready if you and Melissa get knocked up at the same time.”

The response was half feral and utterly rewarding. Lavi grabbed my head for a kiss that made me light-headed. That might have been why I lost control. I found myself moaning uncontrollably into Lavi’s mouth as I came into Melissa who bucked up at me as if making sure I didn’t come loose.

Lavi screamed again, falling forward so that had to catch her. Once I did I looked to see Melissa not only covered in Lavi’s juice but her finger in Lavi’s ass.

After a moment Lavi sat up and slowly focused on her words. “Fuck, do that to me again.”

Melissa slapped her ass from below. “Nope, your turn to suit up.”

“I think Robert has had his dose of cheerleader pussy for the night.”

Melissa’s voice turned pitiful, “Babe, I was hoping you’d dress up for me.” Lavi moved faster than I knew she could and within seconds the bathroom door was mostly closed and I heard her moving around in there.

I was still inside Melissa. She ran her hands over her stomach, “Enjoy? You know if we get kicked this might be your first and last time to fuck us as actual cheerleaders and in uniform. We’ll have to turn them in too.”

“Yeah but ... if you lose the uniform we can pay for one, right?”

She giggled.

It was late when I woke up. Melissa had indeed wanted Lavi in her cheerleader outfit and in the end, we were all sated. Now they were both sleeping deeply. I didn’t know how late it was but all I saw outside was the moon reflected in the pool. I sat on the edge of the bed a while, thinking. I had no idea what to do about the drama they were embroiled in. I felt like I was a part of this but it was another world to me. I thought about it and thought about it and decided the only reasonable thing was to ask someone. I did know one person, just one. I grabbed my cell phone and looked up the number, a recent addition to my contacts, and went downstairs to make the call. I thought I would get voice mail but instead, he answered on the second call.

“Hi, you probably don’t remember me but I’m Robert Carlo. I’m wondering if I can ask for some advice.”

Morning came. We drank coffee and lounged in bed. I told them about the call and the referral I got. We agreed to take care of it after Lavi was done at the temple and before we headed to our next appointment. It was going to be a busy day. Lavi headed out to meet up with her parents while Melissa and I headed to the back yard where a small pile of lumber, rolls of weed-killing tarp, and many bags of planting soil awaited.

“So,” Melissa put her hands on her hips, “what are you doing with all this?”

I looked at her, “Me? I assumed you were building them.”

She didn’t look amused. Was she learning the look from Lavi? “Seriously, you have a plan right?” She asked.

“Yep. I looked up how to make no nails planting beds. We need to cut out the tarp, it’ll biodegrade over time, and doing no nails means all eco friendly.” I was pleased with myself.

“So, going to cut the boards so they slot into each other?”

“Yep.”

“Building templates for the cutting?”

“That’s the plan.”

“So, for the pieces where you need something out of the middle how are you cutting out the perpendicular cut between the two other cuts.”

“Um ... well, I have a miter saw...” She looked at me. I saw judgment in that look. “I was thinking I could cut it a bit with that and then break the rest off.”

“Do you have wood chisels?”

“Uh, no.”

“Do you have a jigsaw?”

“No.”

She had her hands in her pockets. “Drill?”

“Yes, but why would I need a drill?”

“If you cut the two long cuts with a miter saw you can drill a hole at the end and then use a jigsaw to cut the other piece.”

“I think you should be in charge of this.”

“Nope, you’re the man.” She had her phone in her hand.

“What are you doing?”

“Texting Rian to see if we can borrow his jigsaw. And probably some drill bits.” She was busy on her phone. “He says we can. He’ll even bring them over.” I looked at her. “What?” She asked.

“I’m trying to figure out how to ask how you know this without sounding like a sexist pig.”

“A girl can’t know how to use tools?”

“Your mom and her perception of gender roles is a factor here.”

She shrugged. “I took a woodshop class for the hell of it. It was that or Office Skills, whatever that is, or Photography, and mom was way too excited about me taking photography so I told her it was full.”

“Did you like it?”

“Photography?”

“Woodworking.”

“Yeah, it was a lot more fun than I thought it would be. I got an A.” She made that smile in that way I was still addicted to.

After that, we started cutting tarp and laying stuff out. Rian showed up, was incredibly awkward, gave Melissa the tools, and disappeared saying Linda was waiting for him. Before he left I tried asking him about how Linda was doing but he said that all she had shared was something about “that wretched whore” so apparently it wasn’t oriented at me. I joked that Linda should get house points for alliteration but Rian didn’t get it. Apparently Richardson also had some unkind comments about me as an influence and Linda’s failures as a parent. The word ‘predator’ had been used to describe me. Rian reported that Linda had responded with “as if my daughter...” while sidestepping her own opinions of me.

Rian left and two hours later we were hot and exhausted. The cutting was done, two large planting beds were built and we had filled them with dirt.

Melissa, “So, until we get the plants we’re done?”

“I think so. You know, for a farmer I think I’m a good computer geek.”

“Nah,” her hip bumped mine, “for a farmer you’re a great lit geek.”

I looked at her, she was glistening with sweat, her hair up in a ponytail. “I know how we could cool down.”

“Cold water?”

“Get naked.”

She rolled her eyes at me but smiled too. “I think you’re having dirty thoughts.”

I couldn’t fit my hand down her shorts as they were too tight but stood behind her and pushed her shorts down. “I’m all sweaty,” she said.

“Smell good to me,” I replied. I licked at her skin and pushed the shorts down. Spreading her cheeks I put my tongue in. Honestly, it didn’t taste like anything but sweat but she shook as I did it.

“You dirty boy, licking my sweaty ass.”

“Mmmmm well, I need to get it relaxed to fuck it.”

“You’re going to fuck my sweaty ass, you dirty satyr?”

“What can I say, we like a bit of nature.”

Melissa stepped away from me then, out of her shorts and panties, and got on her back.

“Come on you randy goat, fuck your nymph.” She lay back in the grass with the dirt that had spilled out on its way to fill the beds. She rolled around, grass and dirt sticking to her sweaty body. “Still sexy?”

“Incredibly.”

She held her hips up and, lubricated by sweat, I pushed into Melissa’s ass. “Come on big boy, fuck my dirty ass, fuck me into the dirt.”

I pushed in until my hips touched her ass. “There, you wanted it all, you got it.”

She grimaced. “Fuck yeah. You know I’m yours, right? That’s why ... God, I’m full ... just like I’m Lavi’s. This is what makes me happy, belonging to you two. I like it when you use me.”

I started fucking her. It was wonderful and painful and exquisite. “You know I worship you.” She held her own ass open as I fucked her. Her breasts had grass and dirt from where she had rolled around where we had spilled planting soil. “Even when you’re dirty the dirt is clean.”

“But you do use me, you fuck me like I’m the best toy in the world.”

“And you don’t hate that?”

“Not when it’s because you can’t control yourself anymore. Not when you try to control yourself because you love me.” She grinned at me.

I laughed. The phrase bottoming from the top came to mind but we weren’t defining things that way. So I just fucked her. When I finally came and pulled out she took glob after glob in her fingertips and licked them clean while playing with herself with the other hand. It was seconds before she began to shake and just vibrated on the ground until she went still. I cuddled up as she made cooing noises.

I lay in the grass holding my nymph. I was sweaty in the sun with a blonde nymph. We lay there and watched the bees dance around their hive. I felt just full of life and then ... it hit me. I’d spent decades reading poetry, reading about poets but this is what they were trying to capture - the ecstasy of life.

I ran my hands down Melissa’s sides and said, “You asked me once about if I believe in God. I don’t know about God but I do think there is something divine in the universe and you’re proof of it.”

She traced her fingertips on my arms. “What about Lavi?”

“She sees it in you too.”

“But is she divine?”

“Yes, no, We’re in danger of mixing metaphors but if you’re a nymph she’s a dryad, a thing of nature, the earth, flesh, she’s fire where you are the wind. She’s amazing but different.”

“And you?”

“I’m the goat.”

She turned around and poked my nose. “You’re silly.”

“You make me that way.”

“Well,” she got serious, “let’s make you, and me, clean. We have places to be.”

“Easy enough to rinse off,” I said. I headed towards the pool.

“Robert Christopher Carlo!” I froze. It was instinctive, a woman using all three of my names in that tone just makes my muscles freeze. “Do you know where that grass and dirt will end up?” The question was clearly rhetorical as she then said, “In the filters.”

“So?”

She had her hands on her hips. “So shower or hose.”

I shouldn’t have glanced at the hose the way I did but I couldn’t help it. We both sprinted for it at the same second. Soon we were wrestling for control. Then we were wet and rolling around spraying each other. Then I was kissing her again. We ended up distracted and had to rush to make our appointment but it was worth it.

“Robert, you’re out of control.” I thought Lavi’s assessment was a little harsh.

We were at the nursery and I looked in the cart. So far I had apple mint, sage, rosemary, thyme, lavender, stevia, oregano, and marjoram.

Melissa, “She has a point. You built two raised beds.” She held up two fingers to emphasize this, in my opinion, a rather obvious point.

“They’re large beds and these are small plants,” I argued. “Besides I could build a third. Maybe fourth. Four isn’t out of control.”

“Do you have the materials for two more raised beds?” Melissa asked.

“No, but I can get the stuff, I’ve already got the materials list.” I grinned. Melissa seemed unimpressed with my argument of how simple it was.

“It’s probably cheaper to buy the herbs from a grocery store,” she replied.

“It is more about freshness than cost,” I countered.

Lavi, “All I know is that I’m going to die of old age here. And my hair is curly enough without this humidity.”

“I need to look, I want to mix in herbs that are useful and the bees will like.”

Melissa perked up, “Bees? They like some of these?”

“Yeah, I already got the lavender and thyme, apparently they like those. I’m looking for chamomile now which will also be good for tea, there’s one called bee balm which I never heard of before, and one called savory, which I’ve never had fresh but it’s all the rage right now on some cooking blogs.”

“Well ... if it’s for the bees that is kind of different.” Melissa scrunched up her face and shifted around a bit. “I can help look. Bee balm, chamomile, and what?” Melissa had her phone out to look them up, later I learned so she could identify them by sight.

“Savory, it’s a small green herb.”

“Like as in a savory taste?” Lavi asked.

“Yeah, spelled the same way.”

Lavi, “So, confusing. I’d like some savory to make this savory.” She waved a hand dramatically.

Melissa looking at her phone, “Ohhh, according to this savory was considered to be an aphrodisiac by the Romans and used in love potions. Very aromatic and bees like it, so yeah.”

“That’s it,” said Lavi, “he wants to make love potions.”

“He has us,” replied Melissa.

Lavi had that look in her eyes, “No, he’s going to invite Ji and her mom over and feed them love potions, start his Chinese harem.”

I decided that actually looking for the plants was a good idea at this point so I started looking through the plugs on the tables.

“You mean you want to start a Chinese harem,” replied Melissa. “Robert, can you put a lock on the savory so that this slut doesn’t make love potions and try to enslave the entire female senior class.”

“Most of the juniors too,” added Lavi.

Melissa, “I think the bee balm is over there, I’m going to look.” I knew by now that Melissa was rolling her eyes without even seeing it and that Lavi was smirking in response.

“I’m going to institute a plant store rule like the bookstore rule,” said Lavi as Melissa and I focused on the task at hand. Lavi’s protestations about how long we were looking aside we actually were only there about an hour and headed home.

We got home and were walking the trays of plugs into the backyard when Melissa asked, “So ... uh, I know June is coming over to help but...”

“Is Grace coming?” I finished.

“Uh-huh.”

“June hasn’t mentioned it.” She sighed as she balanced a tray on one hip and unlocked the back gate. “What has Grace said?”

“Nothing.”

“You haven’t been texting?”

“She’s been radio silent since right after the game. It’s not like her.”

That’s when we heard two cars pull in. I looked behind me and saw Sylvia’s car which I recognized and one I didn’t but saw June and Grace in it. “Well, I guess you’ll get to ask her yourself,” I said to Melissa.

Lavi was directing the newcomers to grab trays and as a single file of people, we had all the trays in the backyard in less time than it took to debate about how many I was buying.

June stood there holding a tray of plugs in each arm and looking at the raised beds. “These look nice!”

“Completely nailless so they can break down naturally,” I said. I might have been a little proud of that fact.

“Really nice. Want to build me some?” She smiled at me.

“You’ll have to ask my boss, she tracks my time.” I nodded at Melissa.

“Are you sure two beds will be enough though?”

“Uh ... we were discussing that earlier. I’ll build another.”

“Maybe another two or three?” June offered, looking at me.

Five? Had I really bought that many herbs? What I said was, “Well, let’s put everything over there and we’ll figure out what to plant in a bit.”

“All right.”

“So, I have to ask, how is Grace?” Everyone was subdued with various emotions at play but Grace seemed like a blank slate and I couldn’t read her at all.

“Well, she was ready to climb the walls last night. I told her that because there were legal things going on to not talk about it with Melissa or Lavi.” Ah, that made sense. “Cheering has been her life so she’s worried sick, but she really likes Melissa and Lavi so she’s worried about them too. I was huge into cheering at her age too, so I get it. And,” she looked at me, “I have to admit it’s like watching a mini-me except she’s even better than I was, and I was good, and I’m so proud of her so I don’t want this to kill the squad but...”

“I get it.”

Peter walked up to me after putting his trays down and took my hand. “Good to see you, Robert.”

“Good to see you, Peter.” Peter didn’t look his usual mirthful self. “I’m sorry about what happened...”

Peter made a motion to cut me off. “Don’t. This isn’t about you. Melissa and Lavi might have gotten together without you and this could have happened. We will deal with it. We stopped by and chatted with Linda. She’s in our corner.”

Everyone started coming towards us and soon we gathered up in a circle in the yard.

I started, “Well, no need to bury the lead I guess. Melissa?”

She took a breath. “I filed a police report about Chris attacking me this morning with a detective who works sexual assault cases.” This wasn’t news to Lavi who heard about it at the nursery but it got the first reaction so far from Grace whose eyes went wide. “Grace,” Melissa continued, “Would Owen be willing to talk to her?”

“Almost for sure,” Grace replied, “but he didn’t see anything himself. All he saw was Chris’ back.”

“Well, he saw a lot leading up to that and heard what Chris said and where he was standing so that’s all relevant,” I said.

“All right,” she said.

June, “Good. I talked to the lawyer I told you about, her name is Mary Heyman. She recommended a police report so you’re ahead of the game.”

Peter turned to her, “Is she willing to help?”

“As time allows she’s willing to do it pro bono. Her firm likes the lawyers to do some of that, so long as it doesn’t get in the way of her paid work.”

“That’s nice,” Melissa said. “It doesn’t sound like she’s cheap.”

“She’s not. They do workforce law, a lot of discrimination, and sexual harassment cases. Something with a school will be new for her but a lot of the case law will be the same she said.”

“And that brings us to Peter’s plan,” said Sylvia. She turned to her husband. “Peter?”

Peter cleared his throat and then outlined his plan. Ten minutes of debate followed over some specifics but by the end, Syliva was making a call and I sent Tony an email saying I needed Monday morning off for an emergency. I was already taking Friday off and in a few minutes, he texted back and said I should take the whole week. He checked and I had so much accumulated I was about to lose time in January if I didn’t burn some of it now. So, I took the week off.

After that, we broke apart. June took hold of the gardening supplies I’d bought and started doing the stuff I hadn’t gotten around to like taking price tags off. Lavi and Melissa went in to fix drinks for everyone and Grace followed them. During everything, Grace had been completely silent. Melissa looked on edge too.

I walked over to Peter who was looking around at the raised beds and setup.

He looked at me, “I hope Sylvia doesn’t get ideas from this.” He made himself smile.

“Peter, I just wanted to say thank you. You know, I sat up last night trying to think of what to do and came up blank. You’re a hero.”

“You will be doing your part too.”

“I’m mostly spectating.”

“Sometimes that’s how it goes. I remember when Sylvia was trying to get her first book deal. It was a battle I had no role in but it was frustrating to watch,”

“The publishers weren’t mentioning you while taunting her.”

He shrugged. “It’s different but it’s not.”

“I don’t like being used against them.”

“Then you make them regret bringing you in.”

“You have a plan for that too?”

He grinned. “Actually, I do. I didn’t mention it earlier because I wanted to talk to you first.” He told me. He described it as flanking them. I agreed to do it, and it was right then that I decided that while Peter and Lavi might be very different people, he was definitely every bit as ruthless and scary as his daughter.

That was also when we all heard Sylvia yelp in shock. Peter abandoned our conversation to rush over to his wife. The door to the kitchen slid open and the three girls looked out. I walked over but was only halfway when I heard Peter start laughing. Lavi was already there and turned red, grabbed something, and said loudly enough for everyone, “I’ll get the lemonade!” and popped back inside with Melissa and Grace right on her heels.

June was with me when we got up to them.

“What’s wrong?” June asked.

“Nothing,” Sylvia replied, rather curtly.

Peter was smirking. “I’m going to go grab some growlers, this could be a long afternoon.” He left.

June looked like she wasn’t going to let it go and I guessed that Sylvia knew it. “Fine,” Sylvia said, “Lavi handed me her phone when she was getting the gate and I forgot I had it. We have the same phone and I went to put on some music. It ... uh, Lavi and I use the same passcode and uh...” now June was turning red... “You know, never mind.”

“So... “ June was slowly putting it together... “now you can answer T’wana’s question?”

Sylvia nodded. “Oh yeah.”

“You both heard about that!?” I asked.

They looked at me as if I was clearly mentally challenged. Of course, they had heard.

“I will never unsee any of that,” said June.

“Want to describe it to work through the trauma?” Ribbed June.

Holy fuck, had I turned invisible? “Hey, I’m right here, you know?”

“We’re not talking about you, just your tool,” replied June, “Technically it’s not even yours; it’s Melissa and Lavi’s.”

Hadn’t we all just been adults a few minutes ago?

June, “You aren’t spiking the drinks with vodka this time so ... no, not offering anything.”

“I could fix that.” June grinned.

“He has some already in the freezer.”

June, “Oooooo ... Do you know what goes with gardening? Vodka slushies.”

“I like how you think,” Sylvia replied.

They went inside. Peter had left for beer. Five women in the kitchen, three cheerleaders, one ex-cheerleader, and a novelist whose passive voice I used to correct. I was standing outside and a lone bee lazily flew by seeming to have no course in the world. I thought of my plans for the day, what I’d prepped for dinner, and shrugged. I texted Peter “Grab hard cider if they have it.” Then I joined my family inside.