**The Pool Girl**

by Leto Armitage

**Chapter 28**

Sunday came and went in a rush. I made breakfast while Melissa and Lavi played together which was becoming a tradition. Then they came downstairs beaming just in long tee-shirts. I paused the TV as they came in.

“You have good timing,” I pointed to an oven timer, which was now counting down in seconds.

Lavi came up on my right and Melissa on left and I received a double hug, a sensation I will never tire of. Melissa, half sleepily asked, “What’s for breakfast?”

“Beef sausages, fresh croissants, eggs, and honey butter.”

“And coffee?” Melissa batted eyelids at me.

I smiled. “And coffee, but you can fix that yourself, the pot is ready.”

Lavi however was already getting coffee cups out for her and Melissa. Syliva had bought them cups they now used regularly here for coffee that said “The Wife’s Coffee” and “The Other Wife’s Coffee.” Which girl had which changed randomly. One that said, “The Husband” was already filled with coffee and waiting for me to return to it. Of everyone, Sylvia was probably my biggest supporter. Sometimes I still got a side-eye from Peter like he was suppressing a father’s protective instinct but then when I talked to him he was completely at ease. I was coming to realize that his currents ran deep below the surface as they did for his daughter.

I was watching Shin Godzilla on the TV which earned me both an eye-roll and a grin from Melissa. I turned down the volume after I got the croissants out and we listened to the destruction of Tokyo lightly in the background as we ate. It was going to be a busy day so Melissa canceled her original plans which involved checking out some kind of church. Still, she made herself scarce though Lavi and I both said she didn’t need to. She said it was fine, she was going to go chat with Rian about something.

With our private time, Lavi decided to spend it rubbing my shoulders while I read poetry to her. It quickly became clear she hated William Carlos Williams, who I discovered I liked less than I had last time I had read him. I steered away from Syliva Plath not wanting connections to her mom during our private time. I took a gamble and read her Adam’s Curse by W.B. Yeats which she loved. Lavi often asked me to re-read sections or talk about a part but she never offered any commentary of her own, where Melissa wanted a dialogue Lavi just wanted to absorb it.

That’s what we were doing, me shirtless and Lavi’s hands on my back as Melissa walked through the back gate and found us under the big tree. She slid her key back in her pocket and said, “Am I interrupting something?”

“Only a drought of Melissa kisses,” I said. So, she joined us, kissing Lavi first who held out her arms, and then me. Then Melissa leaned back against us and that’s where we were when Sylvia showed up, announced by her phone making fake camera noises as she took pictures.

“This is too sweet. It’s going on Facebook.”

“Just walking in now are we?” I really didn’t mind but felt like giving Sylvia some grief.

“Back gate was open,” Sylvia replied. She was looking at her phone and without looking up said, “It’s an extension of the boinking rule.”

Melissa, “Boinking rule?”

“Don’t ask,” I said. Melissa got up and went to shut and lock the gate.

“Anyway,” Sylvia said, “Peter will be here soon with Jacob so we need to get ready.”

Dutifully we all got up and prepared to meet some new people.

Monday morning Lavi drove us to the school. There was a woman, about my age, a bottled blonde in a nice dark blue skirt suit waiting for us with several folders in her hands.

She shook Melissa’s hand first, “Melissa.”

“Mary,” Melissa responded. Lavi and I shook her hand as well.

“Good to see you all again. Now, do you remember what we discussed yesterday?”

Lavi nodded. “Yep, they’re going to play down everything and try to make it seem like I overreacted.”

“Right. Now I’m going to be representing you, Melissa. So, don’t exaggerate but represent the threat your assailant represented. And if I’m not mistaken...”

A bright red Porsche pulled in next to us. I didn’t know the make or model. I’m not a car guy but that was a beautiful car. The man that stepped out was in his 60s, a bit overweight but his suit had been tailored for it. He had thin wire-rim glasses. His hair was thinning but if it bothered him he didn’t bother to try to hide it with any combing tricks. He carried something that looked like a leather backpack instead of a briefcase.

I was closest so I reached out for his hand. “Mr. Kozinski.”

He replied, “Jacob, please.” He took my hand with his and had a firm grip.

Lavi lowered her head and addressed him, “Mar Cohen.”

He laughed, “Come here silly girl, give me a hug!” Lavi did and then the man held her at arm’s length. “Your dad told you to be polite didn’t he?”

Lavi turned a little red, “Yes sir.”

“Hah! Don’t call me that until I’m dying and you’re in my will.”

Lavi grinned. “I’m in your will?”

He grinned back, “You might be, pretty girl like you would make a dying man want to stay alive. It’s a shame you’re forty years too young.”

Lavi stepped away. “And you’re married.”

He shrugged. “Is true. I told my wife I was ready for my mid-life crisis and I could get a pretty girl or a car so she told me I could have a car. I tricked her though,” he wagged his finger as if making a point, “the last pretty girls worth it are both here and taken!” Lavi laughed.

“Take a hug from a shiksa too?” Melissa asked. He grinned and Melissa stepped up to give him a hug too. I really needed to learn some Hebrew apparently.

Meanwhile, Mary Heyman was tapping her foot. I had a feeling she didn’t like this level of familiarity between clients and lawyers. Kozinski held out his hand, “Ms. Heyman, a pleasure to finally meet you.” The girls and I had met with everyone yesterday but at different times. This was the first time the lawyers met each other though they had exchanged emails.

She smiled. “Mary, please. I’d heard you were representing Lavi. I was a bit surprised. Your firm handles criminal law mostly.”

He shrugged again. It seemed like a very natural gesture on him. “I could have sent a junior counsel but Lavi is family.”

“Really?” I asked. I hadn’t known that.

“Well, kind of,” Lavi said, “my dad’s sister’s partner is a cousin of Mr. Jacob’s wife.”

He nodded in agreement. “As I said, family. So, where is our last party member?”

“Oh,” I hadn’t thought to check my messages. There wasn’t an update from him but as we talked a generic white car, maybe a Ford, pulled into a spot and I saw Clarence Marshall get out. He was younger than I with dark curly hair, dark-skinned with very anglo features. I was guessing he had a variety of racial types in his family tree and he looked like he wasn’t long out of college. His suit looked off the rack but he was smiling and greeted us warmly.

“Good morning everyone! Mary!” He shook her hand with familiarity and then turned to Kozinski, “Mr. Kozinksi, a pleasure to be working with you.”

“Please, call me Jacob.” Jacob Kozinski looked at his watch. “It is ten until Lavi’s appointment, let’s go on in.”

We headed to the front entrance, Jacob in the lead. He seemed like he was used to people following him and he probably was. I hadn’t been inside an actual high school since I’d been a senior at one. The place was massive and nothing like I remembered. The front doors were huge and once we went in there was a woman behind security glass asking our names and giving us a clipboard to sign in while she passed out visitor badges. We were buzzed through a side door and found ourselves in something that seemed a lot more familiar. A large counter dominated the room and mailboxes occupied the wall behind it with an older woman and a young boy who looked high school age himself there.

Melissa waved, “Mrs. Blackman, Terry.”

The older woman looked at us and smiled, “What can I do for you, dears?”

“We are here for a meeting with Mr. Escobar,” Jacob said.

Terry eyed all of us, “I’ll let Mr. Escobar know...”

Mrs. Blackman interrupted, “Oh, don’t worry about that dear, just let them through, they have an appointment, after all. Right over there.” Her attitude was dismissive as if she couldn’t even think why it would matter but she reached out and put her hand on the phone before Terry could reach for it. “Terry, why don’t you go start sorting the mail, I’m sure that will have taken you this whole period, right dear?”

He nodded, said “Yes, ma’am” and almost scurried out.

She pointed at a door that said “Mr. Escobar ‘‘ on a nameplate. I tried to smile at Mrs. Blackman. I don’t know why she was doing it but sending us through uninvited was perfect. She smiled back and I got the feeling she was having fun. I’m glad someone was.

We went in. The office was large, ridiculously large. You’d have thought it was for a CEO of a major corporation. It had windows that wrapped around the corner giving an impressive view of the school grounds. Jacob strode in, looked at the small meeting table, immediately walked over to it, opened his backpack, and started taking out paperwork.

Vincente Escobar was a Latino somewhere around my age with a crew cut and a mustache that would have made a 70s porn star proud. He stood as we entered, “Excuse me...”

Jacob waved and smiled, “We are here for the ten o’clock meeting regarding Ms. Heller and...” he trailed off and gestured to Heyman who finished by saying, “Ms. Milton.” She took up a position next to Jacob and began laying out her paperwork and a digital recorder. She continued, “We are a one-party consent state but just to let you know I will be recording this meeting.”

Escobar glanced down at his phone as if he was trying to figure out why it hadn’t rung. As agreed in advance Marshall and I walked over to the chairs that sat in front of Escobar’s desk and pulled them to the side away from the table and took seats where Escobar would have to sit awkwardly to look at us while still facing everyone else. He glanced at us and did a double-take when looking at Marshall.

Marshall gave a warm smile, “So good to see you again Mr. Escobar.” Peter had done some research and found that Escobar had gotten divorced less than a year ago. Clarence Marshall had handled the divorce for the then Mrs. Escobar and although this was outside his usual work he knew more about Escobar than Escobar would be comfortable with. He had been critical in giving us advice as to Escobar’s personality when under stress. He had initially not wanted to take this kind of case but the chance to rub elbows with Jacob Kozinski had changed his mind. The fact that Kozinski’s staff had couriered over a research packet that gave Marshall a one-day crash course helped too.

Escobar began to figure something was up and changed his stance. He went from annoyed to wary and looked to Jacob and Heyman. “Mr. and Mrs. Heller?”

“No, Lavi is a legal adult and doesn’t need her parents present. I’m Jacob Kozinski of Kozinski and Phillips, I’m representing Ms. Heller. My associate is...” he passed it again to Heyman who continued, “I’m Mary Heyman, counsel with Bearing, Greyson, and Smith. I will be representing Ms. Milton.”

Without giving Escobar time to respond Marshall chimed in, “And of course we know each other Mr. Escobar, I will be representing Mr. Carlo here in his consideration of a defamation lawsuit against the school.”

“What!?”

Now the phone on his desk rang. His right arm visibly twitched. He picked it up, listened, and said “send her in.” So, Mrs. Blackman had called this time. Interesting.

Richardson walked in. She was wearing a track outfit and it was my first time meeting her up close. Her hair was close-cropped and silver. She was solidly built and had a completely neutral expression though she paused in the doorway longer than necessary. She nodded and said, “Melissa, Lavi,” and then turned to Escobar, a question in her voice, “Vincente?”

Marshall intercepted the query by walking up and offering his hand. “Mrs. Richardson, a pleasure, my name is Clarence Marshall. Here,” he handed her a well-populated folder, “oh, yes, Mr. Escobar, here I have one for you as well.”

Richardson, “What are these?”

“These are signed statements from Ms. Heller, Ms. Melissa Milton, Mrs. Linda Milton, a Ms. Combes, a Ms. Adjani, Mr. Turner, Mr. MacMahon, and Mr. Peebles as to statements made by Mrs. Richardson in public during a school event while acting as a school employee. We have just cause to believe these could cause harm to Mr. Carlo. There is also a copy of the preliminary complaint though it has not been filed yet.”

Jacob, “Clarence, let’s let these folks get seated, they’re still on their feet.” He spoke with the tone of scolding Clarence gently like the elder there to oversee everything. “Now we have neglected some introductions. Mr. Escobar, if I may call you Vincente, Vincente, this is Robert Carlo.”

I reached out and shook his hand, “Vincente, I wish we could have met under more pleasant circumstances but hopefully we can work this out.” I also put out my hand to Mrs. Richardson. She took it and I shook her hand without comment. Then she and Escobar took seats at the table with Lavi, Melissa, Kozinski, and Heyman. Marshall and I sat to the side.

As he sat Escobar puffed his chest out and adjusted his tie, “I agreed to this meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Heller so I’m not sure what this is about.”

Lavi, “Oh, mom was just forwarding a message. I have retained Mr. Kozinski to handle this.”

Escobar, “Now, Lavi, don’t you think bringing in an attorney is going to make this unnecessarily confrontational? This isn’t a courtroom.”

Lavi smiled gently, a look that I knew was artificial, “Mr. Escobar, thank you so much for your kindness, but given how things happened Friday night I think I need to be careful how I respond to the school’s actions.”

“Or, lack thereof,” added Jacob.

Escobar seemed to take this as a cue to be stricter, “This isn’t a court proceeding,” he looked at Jacob, “I don’t have to allow this meeting.”

Jacob looked at Escobar and put his pen down that he had started making notes with, “Mr. Escobar, the Supreme Court ruled in 1975 that students are granted the right to due process in disciplinary matters and given the ad hoc way that things have been done I have a concern about an abridgment of Lavi’s rights. If you require us to leave we will proceed directly to filing our complaints. I have a junior associate at the courthouse doing other work. He has copies.” He looked Escobar directly in the eyes. “They will be filed before we turn our visitor badges back in. Do you want to talk first or not?”

“Is that a threat?” There was heat in Escobar’s voice.

“No, a threat has hostile and damaging intent. My only concern is the rights of Ms. Heller.”

Escobar straightened his tie, again. “Very well.”

Kozinski, “So, let us review what happened. Lavi, we have your statement but can you refresh us...”

Lavi sat up a little extra straight, “Sure, Melissa and I were sitting on the bus about midway to the back. We were talking and doing stuff on our phones. She was playing a game, one of those word games she likes,” Jacob made a move on gesture, “okay, so we were there when the team was making rude comments about Jerry. Jerry is Melissa’s ex-boyfriend.”

“This was before her relationship with Mr. Carlo?” Jacob asked for clarification. Richardson and Escobar both glanced at me.

“Right, and mine since I guess that’s relevant. So, she broke up with Jerry and...”

Jacob, “Hold on, can you clarify that last statement? About your relationship?”

“Oh, uh, I’m in a relationship with Melissa and Melissa is in one with Robert and I’m in one with Robert. Does that help?”

“And this relationship is well known?”

“I think so. I mean we had other girls from the squad over during the summer and told everyone so that no one was like, you know, had a problem with it.” Lavi was clearly a little nervous.

“And did anyone?”

“Yeah, two girls at first, and then one continued to not want to come over.”

“And this was to Mr. Carlo’s house?”

“Yeah, we were practicing there.”

Escobar, “Excuse me, this is the first I’m hearing of this. There was a squad practice at this person’s house?”

Richardson chimed in, “No, absolutely not. The girls got together and practiced but I didn’t know anything about it. It wasn’t a school thing, just them getting together.”

Jacob nodded. “Agreed, let us be clear it was not a school event so it wasn’t a squad practice per se.”

Escobar nodded agreement. Lavi continued, “So, we’ve kept this out of school. Melissa and I don’t hold hands or anything but it’s gotten around of course. And the guys on the bus were giving Jerry all this ‘you turned your girlfriend dyke’ crap.”

Heyman intruded, “Lavi, in your opinion was this taunting meant to invoke a response from anyone.”

“Oh definitely, they were winding Jerry up.”

“What about you and Melissa?”

“I don’t know if it was aimed at us but clearly we were part of it and it wasn’t nice.”

Jacob, “How did you respond?”

“We ignored it at first, then Owen and Grace were telling them to knock it off and they just kept at it. So, Melissa stood up for Jerry, and then Chris came up and grabbed her arm. She tried pulling away and I felt her bump against me but he held onto her arm and then said something about her partying with him later since she still liked guys and was pulling her arm towards his, uh, groin and so I grabbed his arm and, well, you know the rest.”

“What she means,” Richardson said, “is that she punctured his arm and cut him up.”

The older lawyer didn’t look up from his notes. “Is that correct, Lavi?”

“Yep. Not half of what I could have though. He let go of Melissa then so I let go of him too.” She didn’t look ashamed, not one iota, and I wanted to hug her. Richardson however seemed taken aback.

Some invisible signals passed between Jacob and Heyman because then she took up the baton. “Now Melissa, can you describe what happened?”

Melissa had her hands in her lap and answered quietly, her hair in straight sheets. “It’s just what Lavi said. I had been trying to get Chris to back off Jerry, then T’wana made that comment...”

Heyman interrupted, “Excuse me, Melissa, what comment was this?”

“Uh, it was kind of crude.”

“Please.”

“All right, well, I was trying to stand up for Jerry because they were making comments about his, well, masculinity, and throwing out comments about Lavi and I being gay which we were blowing off and then T’wana made a comment about us still liking dick, uh, her words, sorry, because we were getting screwed by some, as she put it, old guy.”

Heyman put on a soft expression clearly meant to put Melissa at ease, “I hate to ask this but were the comments accurate? Not the tone, that was clearly meant to be injurious but is there anything factual we need to address?”

“No, no, I mean I do have a,” she paused while shrugging, “physical relationship with Robert so clearly I’m not gay, and I have one with Lavi so I’m not straight. I mean they were being jerks and trying to get a rise out of us but I’m used to them acting like children.” Melissa spread her hands as if to say this is all obvious.

“So,” Heyman looked very interested, “when you say you are used to it, would you say there is a persistent culture of harassment on the school trips that you and other cheerleaders have been exposed to?”

Escobar held his hand up in objection, “Hold on, the definition of harassment has not been met here...”

Heyman cooly turned her attention to him, “As you said, Mr. Escobar we are not in a court but we can return to that if necessary. Now, Melissa, has it ever gone past verbal provocation?”

Melissa perked up, “Oh yeah. I mean it’s not like fights haven’t happened before. It hasn’t been anything major but punches have been thrown.”

Jacob held up a hand to get Heyman’s attention, “May I?” Heyman nodded assent. “To your knowledge has anyone ever been suspended from these fights?”

“No.”

Jacob pressed, “Was anyone ever injured?”

“Tommy, he got a black eye my sophomore, his junior, year. He ended up quitting the team not long after.”

“Was this on the bus?”

“No, it was actually in the locker room at a home game.”

“What about the person who hit him?” Jacob continued to write.

“That was Jason. He was chewed out and the coach made him do towels and clean showers for a few weeks.”

“So, to your knowledge, he was not suspended.”

Escobar held up his hand, “This is hardly pertinent. She doesn’t even know if this Jason was suspended or what happened in their disciplinary action as that is confidential.”

Melissa looked daggers at Escobar, “I would have known if he was suspended during a review and that didn’t happen.”

Escobar, “I hardly think”

Melissa didn’t back down one tiny bit. “Tommy is my brother. I would have known if he hadn’t gone to school after that and I kept very close track of what happened to the bigot who hit him.”

Heyman acted surprised though we’d been over all this yesterday, “Bigot? What do you mean by that?”

“They were giving Tommy a hard time because he had come out as gay recently and they were pushing him around saying they didn’t want a fag on the team.”

Richardson, “You weren’t there, you don’t know that.”

“Well, I may not have been on the bus since we were JV but I know what happened. Tommy went to track not long after. He’s running for State now.”

“So,” Heyman asked, “would you say there is a history of discriminatory action against sexual orientation on the football team?”

“Absolutely.”

Escobar looked like he wanted to say something but held it in.

“All right,” Heyman continued making notes, “can you tell us now what happened with Chris?”

“Just what Lavi said, he grabbed my arm and pulled me forward implying we were going to have sex later and wouldn’t let go when I pulled away. Lavi saved me.”

“So, he used force to pull you to him as you resisted and he indicated while applying force to you that you were going to have sex with him later?”

“Yes.”

“And the result was?”

“Lavi protected me and was suspended.”

“Chris?”

“He played that game.”

“And you?” Heyman’s voice was neutral but she had a smile that indicated she was a cat and a canary was already being digested. When her eyes glanced up at Escobar I think he saw himself with downy yellow feathers.

“Once I found out Lavi was suspended I left the game, I didn’t feel safe.”

“Did you talk to anyone about this?”

“Yes, Mrs. Richardson.”

“What was her response?”

“She told me it wasn’t my business what happened with Lavi and the school had a zero-tolerance policy towards fighting.”

“But Chris Barrington was playing, so clearly not suspended?”

“Yes.”

Richardson finally let loose, “It is not her business. Melissa walked off the field and I am seriously thinking about suspending you from the team, miss. And I still don’t understand what he is doing here.” She pointed at me.

Jacob, “Well, Ms. Milton is here in two capacities. The one I can speak to involves section 9.33 of the Penal Code regarding acts in defense of a third party but I believe there are additional concerns.”

Heyman put her hands on top of her notepad and gave a neutral look that radiated confidence. “Melissa is looking at legal action given how the school’s lack of action put her at substantial risk for sexual assault. Melissa informed Mrs. Richardson of this Friday night that she didn’t feel safe and would investigate her options.”

“What?” Escobar turned to look at Richardson.

Heyman looked down at a paper from her folder and continued, “She said, and I quote before leaving the field Friday evening, ‘I will consider what to do about the school ignoring my report of an attempted sexual assault.’ This is also attested to by the same parties who have signed statements for Mr. Marshall.” She then handed Escobar and Richardson more file folders. “I have highlighted the relevant statements to Melissa’s concerns for your convenience though they are largely duplicates of what you have from Mr. Marshall.”

Richardson looked pale and said, “I didn’t know she meant...”

Heyman, “Clearly, she made a report of an attempted sexual assault and there was neither an attempt to safeguard her or follow up...”

Escobar, “Melissa was not suspended and I will be investigating her claim.”

“As will the police,” added Mary Heyman.

“Excuse me?” That was Richardson.

“We have a school resource officer who would...” said Escobar.

Heyman looked at them both. “I fully understand you have a school resource officer, I even understand they were available at the game that night though not on the bus. Your school resource officer could have done something but did not. I do have questions if they were even informed about the event. Were they?”

“Well no, I needed to talk to Vincente first,” admitted Richardson.

“What for?”

“Well, to make a decision about how to handle this.” Richardson looked appalled at answering the question.

Heyman gave Richardson a dead stare. “Mrs. Richardson you have already indicated that Melissa may face disciplinary action for safeguarding herself,” she tapped the recorder to emphasize that it was recorded, “and your position is that a follow up to a sexual assault report is that it could wait during which interim time the alleged assailant would have repeated access to Ms. Milton?”

“I did not say that.”

Heyman pressed, “When did you speak to Mr. Escobar about the incident?”

“We spoke briefly during the game.”

“When during the game? As it started?”

Escobar straightened his tie for the, what, fifth time? “Excuse me, I’ve yet to get a report. The report I had on Friday night was that there was a verbal exchange between students and some cheerleaders left the game.”

“If it included that cheerleaders had left, that means at least after the start of half time. You spoke to Mrs. Combes during half time as well, did you not?”

“Uh, I had a parent ask about some policies but it was not a report of incidents.”

“Surely you were curious?”

“I can not comment on that but Mrs. Richardson said I would receive a full report today and I trusted her judgment.” From the look on Mrs. Richardson’s face, she knew what being thrown under the bus sounded like and she didn’t like it.

Jacob took back over, “Speaking of the process, my concern here is Lavi, and she was removed from the game and told to not come to school Monday correct?”

Escobar, “That is correct. We have a zero-tolerance policy towards fighting and violence.”

“And yet, Mr. Christopher Barrington was allowed to play in the game. Was he suspended from classes today?”

“No. We are investigating as we said and he was the only one to sustain any signs of assault.”

“So, you’re claiming you have a zero-tolerance policy and are enforcing it on selected parties when there are multiple participants which preclude the ability to exert self-defense and not be put in a position of being punished. Surely you can see the problem here.”

“We will investigate Mr. Barrington’s role as well.”

“I would hope so,” Jacob said.

“We have a right to remove parties for the safety of the school.”

“Absolutely, but your policy says that all parties will be suspended while a prompt investigation is made.”

“All parties involved in violence, Chris was not,” Escobar replied. “As it was reported to me,” he added hastily.

“Really? And we will find that interpretation has been consistently implemented during your tenure at this school and that has been well communicated to faculty and staff?”

Escobar remained firm, “I think so.”

“Well, courts have ruled that zero-tolerance policies can not negate an individuals’ rights to defense...”

Escobar interrupted Kozinski, “She attacked Chris Barrington over something he said to Melissa Milton as I understand it.”

He looked like he thought he had scored a point. Jacob’s look was withering. “Really? I think Ms. Heyman may follow up there but if I may finish, I did not say self-defense. I said defense. Surely you are aware that the penal code excuses physical action when the person reasonably believes that the intervention is immediately necessary to protect the third person, aren’t you? I doubt the court would remove that protection any more than self-defense and they have been unwilling to remove the one for self-defense on school grounds. In addition, I am confident we can make a successful argument that Lavi felt personally threatened as well given her and Melissa’s relationship and what was said by Mr. Barrington leading up to his assault. And that brings us to...”

“Now, wait for just a second,” Escobar was getting heated, “the only assault was Lavi’s.”

Heyman just raised an eyebrow at him and waited in silence for what felt like forever. When she spoke she calmly asked, “Can I consider that an official conclusion of your review of the incident?”

“No, of course not!”

“Then I’d like to discuss Mr. Barrington’s assault on Melissa. Do you deny that it was reported to Mrs. Richardson?”

Richardson, “She never said she was assaulted.”

“Melissa, for the recording can you tell us what you said to Mrs. Richardson?”

“Sure,” Melissa said, “We were separated on the bus and told to be quiet. I tried to talk to Mrs. Richardson but she told us to not say anything. After we got to the football field we were separated. I was talked to by the side of the bus. I told Mrs. Richardson that Chris grabbed my arm and was forcibly pulling my hand towards his crotch. I tried pulling away but he was stronger and just pulled me forward.”

Richardson exploded, “The boys were joking around!”

“So, zero tolerance doesn’t apply when the boys are joking around?” Heyman sounded incredulous. Escobar looked at Richardson with a clear message to shut up.

Jacob took off his glasses and started to clean them with a cloth from his breast pocket, “Vincente, I’m sure you can understand our position. I know you weren’t present for the events and the initial decision but...” Ah, here was the out Kozinski giving Escobar to let him save face. “And we haven’t filed any paperwork yet but to be blunt we would win. I don’t know what we could recover in damages, not much to be honest, but maybe legal fees and something symbolic but your school board does not want to pay my legal fees. You might get a short-term win with some local judge. But, the further up the courts we get the more I can guarantee the outcome, and the more I’ll push for my fees. I like it when my clients don’t have to pay my invoices. It’s a strange affection of mine but it makes me feel like the good guy.” He put the glasses back on.

Okay, so I could see why this guy drove a Porsche.

Suddenly Marshall cleared his throat, “And that gets to me.” Escobar’s shoulders twitched like he’d forgotten we were sitting there.

“Let me,” I said. “It’s my understanding and spoken to by the signed statements in your hands that Mrs. Richardson referred to me as a ‘predator’ among other things. Given that she said this in a public place where students heard it this has the clear ability to harm my reputation among the peer group of my girlfriends.”

Richardson found her voice again, “This is absurd, they’re just kids!”

Jacob and Heyman both started to talk which made Jacob laugh. He gestured to Heyman to take the floor, “Our consent laws are very straightforward, they are eighteen and legal adults able to establish their own relationships.”

Richardson gave a nasty grin, “There are rumors of another cheerleader...”

Heyman, “Rumors are dangerous territory, Mrs. Richardson. Would the cheerleader happen to be seventeen?”

“Uh, I believe so.”

“Well, our laws are quite straightforward compared to some states. Seventeen is not a legal adult but is of the full age of consent.”

“Excuse me,” I said, “I think I know the person they are talking about and they and I have never so much as hugged much less anything else.”

Marshall, “For the recording can you give us more detail Robert?”

“Rumors began circulating Friday during the game. Some were communicated to Melissa and Lavi by text message and relayed to me verbally.”

He turned to Melissa, “Can we get these text messages if needed?”

Melissa nodded, “Sure I still have them. I’ll be glad to share those and the group chats.”

Richardson looked nervous at that. I had no idea what was in those chats but I knew the girls weren’t shy about sharing their thoughts there and I’ll bet Richardson knew it too.

A few minutes of silence followed as Escobar looked over the papers in his folder.

“So,” he said, “I’d like to thank you all for coming. I’ve not yet received the written report from my staff,” he looked pointedly at Richardson, “and I will need to review that before proceeding. I will say that Chris Barrington is being suspended pending review immediately and I will have him informed to leave school grounds. This is on the basis of the verbal report of the assault on Melissa Milton which I have only just now gotten, from Ms. Milton as that was not included in the informal verbal report I had received from the staff.”

Jacob nodded. “Understand we have not filed any actions yet. Please share these with your counsel and we look forward to an amicable resolution.”

Heyman, “So, as I understand it from your statement earlier Melissa is not suspended based on only those documented by staff as committing an injury...”

Escobar, “Well, I think I may have spoken poorly and I apologize for any confusion, what I meant to communicate is that we don’t automatically act against bystanders in our zero-tolerance policy, to be consistent if Melissa was involved in any physical confrontation we will have to suspend her as well. We will of course have their teachers forward any necessary materials to them so that they can do their assignments and not fall behind in coursework. You will be out for the week but we will have something decided by Friday. It will not count on your record or against absences unless there is further disciplinary action as a result.”

“Well,” Heyman said, “obviously I hope for a certain outcome and Melissa will be retaining me throughout the process but we need to wait for the outcome of your review before any further action.”

“Of course, and I appreciate you coming with Melissa. We care deeply about the physical and emotional well being of all of our students,” said Escobar with a game show host’s smile.

“Well,” said Jacob, “I don’t think I have anything to add. I also await the results of your review. Thank you for your time.”

Escobar was smiling and standing to shake hands.

Marshall was still sitting so I did too. “That just leaves the matter of Mr. Carlo’s concerns. This isn’t a matter that is addressed by the review but is potential litigation against Mrs. Richardson and the school as she was acting in its employ at the time.”

Escobar tried turning on the charm. Fortunately, the lawyers were all immune. “Surely we don’t need to escalate something over a personal opinion said in the heat of the moment.”

Marshall smiled, “Well, the state does not like frivolous slander cases so there is a legal mechanism you can use to negate this whole issue.”

“That sounds good,” Escobar said.

“The law says that if she does a retraction in the same manner that the original statements were made to the same audience that we have no cause for complaint.”

Richardson looked like someone slapped her. Escobar was trying to digest it. “So...”

I said, “I think at a gathering of the football team and cheerleaders at the next game will be adequate.”

Richardson was clearly ready to say something when Escobar talked over her. “I will have to take that under advisement and speak to our attorney. I hope you understand.”

“Of course,” I said graciously.

“Thank you, Mr...”

“Carlo,” I supplied.

After that, we got up to leave and Lavi suddenly stopped and turned around to face Escobar and Richardson. “Excuse me?”

“Yes?” Escobar asked.

“Since Ji’s name was brought up anyway I wanted to say something. Jiang Guo left the game too just like Melissa did because she didn’t feel safe. She wasn’t part of this quite like Melissa was but she walked off the field for the same reason.” That was a bit of a fib I thought but no reason to point it out.

“Your point?” Escobar.

“I know she came to classes today and I know Mrs. Richardson told her Sunday they’d talk about it at practice today. I’d hate to hear she got in trouble for protecting herself.”

“Really?” That was Heyman. “I understood that Ms. Guo wasn’t present for the main verbal exchanges but it sounds like she might be worth getting a statement from as well.”

“I’m sure no student would ever face repercussions from ensuring their own safety,” Escobar said.

“I would certainly hope not,” was the reply. Ice wouldn’t have melted in Heyman’s mouth at that moment. That was the last thing said as we left.

We chatted as we walked to the cars and then headed to a coffee shop and sat six around another large table. Melissa and I got everyone’s drinks.

“How are you doing babe?” I asked as we stood at the counter.

“Oh my god, I’m ready to die. That was intense.”

“You did great.”

“I barely said anything.”

“None of us did. That was the plan though, let the lawyers fight it.”

“What did Peter call it? Someone challenges you to a duel you send in the biggest scariest guy you can find as your champion.” She took the carrier from the barista while I grabbed the remaining two.

“I wouldn’t call Heyman a guy, she might not like that.”

Melissa giggled. “I got that vibe too. Did you get the bad vibes from her at the start?”

“Yeah, she seemed to not like Jacob.”

“They seem cooler now though.”

“Yeah, I get the impression neither of them like bullies.”

“June and Peter know good folks, not surprising. What about the Clarence guy though, I never got how he got into this. I mean I heard the divorce thing.”

“Peter’s idea,” I admitted.

“But you’re paying him?”

“Yeah, it’ll just be a few hours and totally worth it.”

“If you make Richardson eat crow in front of everyone I’m going to need your debit card again.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I’m buying a Go-Pro and the day after I graduate that shit is going on Youtube.”

I almost tripped. I started laughing so hard and barely made it back to the table with the coffees. I held mine up.

“To an uncertain future!”

Jacob added, “To putting the establishment in its place!” Heyman had a look of incredulity at that but cheered with him.

“So,” Heyman looked at Lavi, “you’re going to fight this how far if you have to? It won’t be cheap. Heck, the retainer can’t be less than four figures.”

Jacob giggled, “Well, Lavi’s mother and I are working out a certain ... arrangement.”

Heyman raised an eyebrow so Lavi supplied, “Mirka, Jacob’s granddaughter is a mega-fan of mom’s superhero books. Turns out there will be a Mirka in the next book, a minor character, and Mirka, well the real Mirka, will even get to design her powers.”

Jacob shrugged, “It will take a while but eventually Sylvia will price the service and I suspect it will be very close to my firm’s invoice.”

Heyman looked shocked. “And if you had to take this to the state supreme court?”

Jacob looked at her levelly. “Do you have any children, Ms. Heyman?”

“No.”

“Sylvia said Mirka could write her own fiction with the characters and put it online so long as it was free. If she ran it by Sylvia it could be, what did she call it, canon. She is the happiest I have ever ever seen her. It will be worth it.” I didn’t know much about this arrangement but I knew from Lavi that Mirka was a sickly child.

The talk continued for a while but the people working today had to move along. The consensus was that things went largely as Jacob had expected. Jacob figured Escobar would do whatever the school’s attorney told him to do. Richardson was a bit of an unknown, she liked to be in control but wanted to go to nationals even more than the girls. Getting rid of Melissa and Lavi would accomplish the first goal but go against the second. Before long we broke up and as Lavi was driving us home I said, “I gotta ask, have either of you made plans for if everything goes completely south?”

Lavi kept her eyes on the road and threw out, “Transfer to West High?”

Melissa shook her head. “I’ll just take the G.E.D. I’ve looked at it. I could pass it with zero prep. It would suck to lose out on the college credits from the advanced placement courses but maybe it would give me time to figure out what I want to do post-high school.”

Lavi followed up, “What would you do between now and college?”

In a monotone, Melisa replied, “Buy a housedress, string of pearls, and greet Robert with a gin and tonic every day after work?”

“Make it a white Russian and this sounds like a good plan,” I said. I said it jokingly. All right, it was half-jokingly.

“Seriously,” Lavi said.

“Seriously,” Melissa said, “I’ve started to get a few ideas but it’s not all figured out yet and I don’t know how any of it makes a career yet. You?”

“I hadn’t thought about a G.E.D. Mom and dad were willing to send me back to Israel if I wanted to do my national service.”

“National service?” I asked.

“Yeah, I have to do two years.”

“You’re an Israeli citizen?”

“Yep, dual citizenship. So long as I’m living here I have an exemption but if I moved back I’d have to serve.”

“Do you want to?”

“Honestly, mixed feelings. I do kind of want to but my life is here and there’s no way I could leave you and Mellie.”

“We could move there,” Melissa said.

Lavi, “I guess but that’s a lot to talk about. So, Robert, if Mellie and I did G.E.D.s and spent a good chunk of a year hanging out at your place and getting ready for college what would you think? Maybe we’d take a class or two next semester.”

“Honestly?”

“Of course.”

“Having you two there all the time would be heaven.”

Lavi reached over and ran her hand up my thigh. “That was definitely the right answer.”

I had a sudden thought. “So you’re both out all week huh?”

“Looks like it,” Melissa said.

“So, want to head to see my Mom early on Friday?”

Silence hung for a second as if they had clearly forgotten that plan for Labor Day weekend.

Then Lavi barked, “Fuck, yeah!”

Melissa snorted from the back seat, “It’s a long drive to Panama City so that’s good I guess.”

“What if we even made it Thursday? That would give us time to stop in the Big Easy,” I said.

Lavi’s voice rose two octaves. “Woah, New Orleans, are you joking?”

“If we leave Thursday we could do a whole day there. It’s a detour but not a major one.”

Melissa was grabbing the back of my seat, “Can we do the French Quarter? Visit the graveyards?”

I grinned. “Absolutely. I figure I have just enough left on the ex-honeymoon fund for a one-day blowout.”

“Too bad it’s not Mardi Gras,” said Lavi grinning.

Melissa, “Slut.”

“Hey, these puppies deserve to be worshipped.”

“I won’t argue with that,” I said grinning.

“So,” Melissa said from the backseat, “what do you say we get home, have some stress relief and make plans?”

I felt the car pick up just a bit of speed as Lavi grinned.

**Chapter 29**

We got home and as soon as we were in the door Melissa and Lavi held hands and walked upstairs. I took the opportunity to mind their safety and make sure they didn’t fall. The fact I could watch their asses as they walked up the stairs was completely incidental. Once upstairs both girls immediately began shedding clothing. They folded and put theirs to the side while mine ended up in a small pile. As a result, it took me less time, and soon I was horizontal on the bed with Lavi and Melisssa on each side of me. Melissa’s blonde hair was spread around her as she reached out and lazily stroked my dick. I didn’t need much help, two beautiful women on either side had already gotten me excited. Melissa had painted her nails red and she slowly stroked me while rubbing her face against my shoulder. Lavi meanwhile was kissing one of my nipples while her hand was massaging my testicles.

“I’m not objecting but why am I the center of attention?”

Lavi lifted her face up, “It’s your vacation. You lie back and enjoy it.” I took her curls in my hand and pulled her to me for a kiss. Her fat tits pressed against me and her tongue attacked me. As she pulled away she said, “Besides, we need to get it in, you know what next week is right?”

“That time, eh?”

“Yep, the great desert when Mellie becomes chaste again for a week.”

“Hey!” Melissa lifted her head up. “That’s not fair, it’s gross!”

“I’m just saying no one has to go without. I’m horny as hell on my period.”

Melissa scrunched up her face. “God, I’m not, I just want to eat ice cream and be in a ball.”

How did I end up with two naked girls talking about their periods while I was sandwiched between them and getting a handjob?

“No reason for Robert to go without,” Lavi retorted.

“Well, no, but I’ve got other ways to take care of him.”

Lavi, “I need to be taken care of too. So, Robert how do you feel about fucking,” she began to gently pull on my sack, “your little baby makers into me during my period.”

I played with her tits. “Well, spotting is one thing but...”

Melissa made a harrumphing sound. “You two better do it in the shower, I”m not cleaning the sheets for that.”

“Like I wouldn’t use a towel, but there is always my ass,” Lavi offered.

I sighed dramatically. “Well, if I must...”

“You must.” She patted me like I was a good pet. Then to Melissa, “Oh, you should let him do you too. We could buy some cute panties where the butthole is showing. And he goes back and forth between us.” Melissa looked dubious. “It would make a hot video for your collection.”

Melissa’s face immediately became contemplative. Lavi knew what buttons to push but Melissa didn’t give an answer. Instead, she brought her hand up to her face and slowly licked her palm leaving a large deposit of saliva behind, and returned to stroking me using the lubrication. I now had each nipple being kissed and one hand on my dick while another massaged my testicles. When Melissa’s hand came down her hand sometimes touched Lavi’s. I felt like my nerves were on fire.

“If you keep doing that, I’m going to make a mess on your hand,” I said.

Melissa lifted her head. “Go ahead. It won’t be the last one for you today and I want you to take the edge off.”

Lavi, also took her mouth off a nipple, “You better cream her hand, I’m waiting you know. I haven’t had our wife’s tongue in me today. Will you make that happen for me, baby? Will you make her eat your lioness out after you cum for us? Pretty please?”

I started to feel it start and my breathing quickened. Melissa whispered in my ear, “That’s it love, cum for me. I’m going to lick it up.” I didn’t try to hold back and spurted several strands in the air, the rest streaming onto Melissa’s hand. She giggled and held her hand up, true to her word licking it clean.

“Slut,” Lavi said. She said it with pride.

“Now,” Melissa said, “I’ve had my cream, I think it’s time for pie.”

Lavi snorted, “That was corny.”

Melissa raised an eyebrow, “Does that mean you’re turning it down?”

“Nope!”

We rearranged and Lavi got on her back while Melissa arranged herself between Lavi’s thighs. I thought Lavi’s face looked inviting so I straddled her chest and massaged her breasts, pulling on the nipples and pushing them together. I got up on my knees and said “get it wet.” Lavi obligingly took my head in her mouth and made sloppy slurping sounds.

Then I shifted back and held her tits together while I rocked back and forth using her cleavage to fuck her tits. I rocked back and forth enjoying the sensation, it was wonderful but didn’t feel nearly as stimulating as other options, especially after recently cumming. Still, Lavi laid back and let me work it while she enjoyed Melissa’s tongue. I watched Lavi’s face and waited until I saw her breath quicken until she got tenser and I scooted up so that my legs were pressing her tits up towards her face.

She understood immediately and took my cock in her mouth. She jerked me as she sucked on my head and occasionally lost focus obviously having trouble dealing with the sensations Melissa was giving her while sucking me. When she lost track I helped out by grabbing her head and fucking her mouth roughly. Eventually, after I lost track of time she screamed around my cock and laid back.

I felt Melissa from the bed moving more than I saw her and then she was at my side. She jerked me off onto Lavi’s face. “Come on, cover her.” Given I had cum not that long before it wasn’t an impressive show but with their encouragement, I felt completely drained. Then Melissa leaned down and licked the cream off her wife’s face but didn’t swallow it, instead, she let it drop into Lavi’s mouth who did swallow it.

“Good girl. Remember the rule, it always goes in a hole one way or another.” I smiled as I lay down. They began kissing and I needed a little time to recover but I didn’t mind watching for a while.

An hour later, Lavi was in the bathroom while I started to get dressed and Melissa tossed me some sweat pants and a t-shirt.

“I was just going to put the pants and shirt back on I wore earlier,” I said.

She grinned at me as she headed into the walk-in closet. “Dress down. It’s your vacation.”

“What if I need to go somewhere?”

From the closet, she responded, “What if I want easy access?”

I had no argument that I wanted to make against that so I dressed in sweats. Soon I was downstairs walking among the planting beds thinking about winter. I had seen these sort of greenhouse covers you could build over a raised bed for the winter and wondering if I’d want something like that. But I’d have fresh mint soon and I was downright giddy. I was still standing there when Melissa and Lavi came down wearing something that I can only call shirt dresses. They looked like long t-shirts but each had a loose belt that pulled them in and accented their waists. Additionally, they were cut down to expose generous cleavage. I suddenly realized they were or had been large men’s t-shirts. Melissa spun around, her long legs making the black t-shirt spin around and I saw on the back a list of AC/DC tour dates. Lavi’s was a dark red and had an advertisement for South Padre Island. Lavi instead of spinning just jumped up and kicked up her feet like, well, a cheerleader and showed the distinct lack of panties.

Lavi landed on her feet and leaned into Melissa. “You like?” She asked me.

I grinned. “Not really, the drooling is just a random automatic response.”

“I think he’s fibbing,” Melissa said in her little girl voice. “Mommy told me to not trust boys. They’d tell you they don’t like you and then try to put their nasty in you.”

Lavi nodded sagely. I rolled my eyes and said “I need to make some bread, you two teases. Seriously though, where did you buy those?”

“Goodwill,” Melissa said.

“And then I spent a few hours with them and a sewing machine. By the way, mom says I can’t loot the sewing room and bring it here. She says it’s her insurance I still come by regularly.”

I walked inside and started pulling out the gruyère cheese, bicarbonate, and olives along with flour and other stuff. Melissa and Lavi took up seats at the table.

“Making soda bread?” She asked.

“You’re learning.”

“Just paying attention.” Lavi was flipping through movies on the wall TV. She ended up playing a variety of videos from Youtube that varied from pop music to sewing videos to a few about history, especially 19th-century European history I noticed. I eyed her as a video discussed the emigration of Jewish settlers away from central Europe in the late 19th century.

She saw me looking at her and said, “I’m getting an A on my next test. A+.” She said the last while running her tongue over her lips. Uh, I was making bread, right? I went back over the list in my head.

Melissa meanwhile looked at Lavi and then me and then Lavi again. “I feel like I’m missing something.” When no answer came within a second she followed up, “Am I?”

Lavi turned to her and said, “Did I forget to tell you? Robert said he’ll pay for me to get my nipple pierced if I ace the next history test.”

Melissa’s eyes went wide. “Pierced!?”

“That’s what I said.”

“Oh my God. Like one or both?”

“Just one, for now, I want to see what it’s going to be like.”

“I can’t believe you agreed to that.” Melissa was obviously amused as hell. “We are definitely doing before and after comparisons. And we’ll have to be careful.”

“Duh, I don’t want the girls getting infected or anything. But you know me, I’ll agree to anything to make the girls happier.”

I interjected, “Done. You have to get a B+ or better for the whole semester to get the other one done.”

Lavi, “Hey, when did I agree to that?”

“Right now,” I said. “You said you’d agree to anything so if you decide that would be what you want that’s what you’ll have to do.”

“I think something is being misrepresented.”

“Close enough,” Melissa replied.

“It’s the lack of panties, I think,” I said.

Melissa was snickering, “Lavi’s brains are leaking out.”

“Hey!”

“Too late, you agreed, no taking it back,” I said.

Lavi, “What if I decide a year from now I want to get it done?”

I started sifting the flour. “Then I recommend you get a B+ or better. I didn’t put a time constraint on it.”

“I’m not going to get my way on this, am I?” Lavi asked.

“When do any of us get our way when the other two have decided and it’s really for our own good?” I asked.

“Exactly,” Melissa said. She was rooting around the fridge. “What’s this?”

She pointed to a bowl covered in plastic film with black stuff in it. “That’s beef marinating in a bulgogi sauce for dinner.”

“Korean BBQ?”

“Yep.”

“Now I’m hungry.”

“Well, I’m still making the bread and have to make spring rolls.”

“Don’t you usually have rice with Korean BBQ?”

I shrugged. “I felt like making a cheese bread and I think this will go well with it. I’m going to add olives in too and I think it’ll pair really well. If it doesn’t, we order Thai.”

“Sounds good.” She got out the pickles she sometimes snacked on and took the jar to the table. Lavi was back to watching the video and rewinding it. A few times I looked over and Melissa was reading but would slowly lick up and down a pickle if I was looking. As a result, I puttered around the kitchen with a constant hard-on.

A few hours later I was sitting in a lounge chair that I had moved around the corner of the house and was reading to the bees. I had read somewhere that bees would learn a person’s voice over time and I think it’s true though I didn’t have any hard evidence. What I do know is that I could sit right next to the hive and they never warned me off. Today I was working through Lagonston Hughes. I know, you wouldn’t think bees were Langston Hughes fans but it turns out they have excellent taste.

Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder and Melissa leaned over to steal a kiss from me. “Hey, babe.”

“Hey,” she said.

I looked behind me and Lavi was there too but probably about fifteen feet further back. She was not as comfortable around the bees as Melissa was. Melissa spent as much time with them as I did now. Where it had taken me weeks to get them used to me and was something I needed to keep up as new generations of bees were born, once she was past her apprehension Melissa just seemed to move among them like she was one of them.

“What’s up,” I asked.

Lavi, “Ji just texted me asking if she could come over.”

“And?”

“And I was hoping you’d be cool with it.”

“It’s your house too, you don’t need my permission to have a friend over.”

Lavi, “And what if it’s more than that?” She was twirling her hair in her fingertips. Damn it was cute.

“That’s between you two,” I said.

Melissa had a hand on my shoulder standing behind me. “That’s not true. We’re a package deal.” I shifted around so I could see her. She continued, “I’m not saying she has to get in bed with either of us but she can’t be involved with one of us without ... I don’t know how to say this, but even if she only makes out with Lavi she’s still getting into something with us by extension and she needs to get that.”

I nodded in agreement. “Yeah, but how is this different from say Picnic Girl?”

Melissa, signed softly, annoyed at my lack of memory. “Kelly. I know, I ... this is different, this is someone we know.”

Lavi, “Look, I’ll toss her ass out in a heartbeat before I willingly make either of you upset.”

I smiled at Lavi. “You are wise beyond your years my apiphobic love. But I think Melissa is saying this more than just being able to veto some fun.”

Melissa, “Yeah. So, we’re agreed?”

“On what?” I asked.

“We lay out some rules for Ji when she comes over.”

“Do we know she’s coming over for, uh, that,” I asked?

Lavi was picking at grass blades. “We don’t know. But I’ve been the first girl kiss for a few, maybe mostly straight girls. She’s going to be trying to process if nothing else.”

“Maybe mostly?” I asked.

Lavi looked up at me. “She’s not pinging my gaydar. But she could be bi or something else.”

Melissa, “Something else?”

Lavi blew Melissa a kiss, “Not everyone goes from straight to full bi-babe like you did. Let’s face it, you’re just an overachiever even when it comes to dyking out.”

Melissa was unusually quiet so I turned further to look at her and found her turning red. “Ahh, did the teasing lioness embarrass you?”

“I just didn’t think about it like that,” Melissa said softly.

Lavi lay back on the grass and spread her legs which fully exposed her in the shirt dress. She had her phone out. “I’m texting her now, but if you come over here I’ll show you how much I appreciate that perfectionism.”

I looked at Melissa, “If you don’t I will.” She squeezed my shoulder and walked over and lay down between Lavi’s thighs and went to work. If Ji was coming over we didn’t have a lot of time so I just walked over and lay down to watch but soon Melissa’s hand was snaking out to my crotch. I got the message and got on my knees behind her lifting up the shirt dress. I really liked this easy access principle.

She was still a little dry so I got on my knees and began tonguing that delicious cleft. I was soon rewarded with sweetness and musk on my tongue. I lined up and fucked her hard as she liked and she shook through several orgasms.

Lavi, “Come on Robert, think about it. You could plow Ji while she eats me.” She had her fingers in Melissa’s hair, “How about it Mellie, right here in an hour, you watching Robert enter Ji. There’s no telling what some straight girls will do to get their pussy eaten right. Oh!”

I couldn’t see what she was doing but Melissa must have been using her hands to make Lavi’s back arch up like it did because she was using her mouth to talk. “You listen to me Lavi Marie Esther Heller, if that poor confused girl wants her snatch eaten you do not coerce her into anything. You do it because it’s a nice thing to do!” She did something else and Lavi’s back arched again.

“Yes, Ma’am!” Lavi replied. I couldn’t help it but start giggling. “Does that mean Robert has to fuck her to be nice if she wants it?”

“Not today,” I said.

Lavi’s voice rose, “Oh, not today? I’m making progress.”

Melissa must have liked the idea because she got tight and squeezed me hard which in turn made me cum. I remained on my knees a second getting my breath and slapped Melissa’s ass. “All right you two, you need to get a little something more on if we’re going to have guests.”

Lavi was making purring noises and I still heard Melissa make a few languid licks through Lavi’s folds. Lavi sighed out and said, “Just a minute.”

Twenty minutes later I was making a large pitcher of honey-sweetened lemonade and the doorbell rang. I went to answer it and Ji was standing there in a dress with a sort of tartan pattern but less regular and in blues and turquoise.

“Hi Robert, I texted Lavi and she said I could come over.”

“Of course, come on in. I was just making some lemonade, want some?”

“Sure.”

She followed me back to the kitchen and as we arrived the girls came downstairs. The first thing I noticed was that they still had the shirt dresses on. I had expected them to get, well, dressed. Then, I also noticed that Lavi didn’t bounce as much and her breasts while always beautiful only formed that kind of cleavage she got when wearing a bra. The cut made to show cleavage went from provocative to stunning with the added effect of the bras.

Melissa walked over to get glasses while I was still stirring the lemonade. Meanwhile, Lavi was showing off the dress for Ji who was looking at it appreciatively. And maybe at Lavi, too.

I whispered as she passed, “I thought you two were getting dressed.”

She stopped and whispered back, “You said to put a little something on so we did, panties and bra. You’re lucky, I had to talk Lavi into the panties.”

“You two are going to kill me.”

“You’ll die happy.”

“True,” I said.

“I did kind of screw up though.”

“Uh, what do you mean?”

“I should have put a pad in.”

“Is it starting early?” I couldn’t help it but that would suck to have a vacation and her period to come early.

“Oh no, your sperm is still leaking out of me and it is going to be making my panties squishy while I talk to Ji.”

She walked away then holding the glasses and wiggled her hips at me. I followed and was nearly at the table when Lavi giggled and said, “So Robert, is that a spoon in your pocket or are you just glad to see Ji.” I froze. Fuuucck. Sweat pants might be easy access but they don’t hide much either.

“Your wife was teasing me,” I replied. I could feel my own cheeks heat up but I sat the pitcher down and sat down myself.

Lavi, “Poor boy. Want me to make it better later?”

“Yes,” I replied simply. Two could play this game I thought. “Maybe in your ass?” I was pouring the lemonade.

“That sounds good, it’s been a while.” She replied as she took the glass. Meanwhile, Melissa was turning firetruck red which amused me no end.

What actually caused the spit take from Melissa was Ji asking, “Can I watch?”

The lemonade was just a tiny spray but it caught Lavi. “Damn it! Why does it always hit me!?” She got up and got a paper towel to start cleaning her face.

“Five points for...” I looked at Ji, “What house are you?”

“Like Hogwarts?”

“Yeah.”

“Depends on the test, I’ve come out Gryffindor and Slytherin.”

“I knew it!” Yelled Lavi from the other side of the kitchen. “You look good in both red and green,” she said by way of explanation as we all looked at her.

Lavi returned and Melissa said, “Sorry.”

“It’s cool,” Ji said, “it’s not the first time I’ve seen you spray Lavi.”

For a second there was silence and then we all started laughing again.

“So... “ Melissa seemed to be looking for words but was grinning. Her phone dinged. She glanced at it and said to all of us “Ah, just to let you know Grace is headed over. But, uh, Ji, are you serious about watching?” Lavi did not seem happy at the announcement. I suspect she was having some kind of thought about being pussy blocked

Ji shrugged, “It does sound really hot but I was mostly just, you know, joining in on the teasing.”

“Hey, that’s cool,” Lavi said. “So, you’re not weirded out or anything? I know what you said by text but...” She held out her hands as if to say you could say anything by text.

She smiled and it was a nice smile. “Yeah, I really enjoyed Friday. And I’ve been thinking about it but I don’t know. I have to admit I spent a bunch of time the next day looking at pictures of women and they still didn’t really do anything for me but the kissing was really nice.”

“Would you like to do it again sometime?” I asked. She nodded yes.

“We can do that,” Lavi added.

“Really?”

“It’s not like I didn’t enjoy it too. And it doesn’t have to be anything more than that. I am starting to enjoy being around you now that we’re talking.”

Ji looked down at her hands. “That would be cool. But let me think about it.”

Lavi smiled at her squadmate. “No stress, it’s just kissing.”

Ji looked at Melissa and me. “It’s strange talking about it with you two here.”

“Well,” Melissa said, “it’s really personal, and the more personal it is to one of us the more it’s important to the others. We’re kind of a package deal, emotionally you know. That doesn’t mean any ... obligations just that, you know, if something is really personal that means we’re going to be more aware not less. Privacy isn’t really going to be a thing.”

Lavi nodded her head in agreement.

Melissa continued, “But I don’t mean you can’t use a room, we don’t want to be creepy about it but yeah, we don’t do the outside relationship thing. A relationship with one is a relationship with all of us even if you only do something with one of us.”

“But,” Lavi added, “Mellie mentioned using a room, I’m not locking any doors. If Mellie or Robert wanted to walk in, I’m not putting myself somewhere they can’t join though even if I know they wouldn’t, even if we talked about it.”

Ji looked thoughtful. “That’s kinda complicated but I think I get it. I’m not, like, in love with you or anything Lavi, but you’ve really made me feel relaxed about it.”

“And,” I added, “it’s fine to just have fun with friends, just don’t ever, ever do anything you don’t want to do.”

“Absolutely,” added Lavi.

Melissa looked at me as if to look for permission. I nodded my consent. So, she said, “Well, I’m kind of jealous of Lavi so if you ever want to try kissing another girl let me know.”

Ji held her head a little to the side, “Are you flirting with me?”

Melissa smiled her sweetest smile and nodded yes. “A bit. You’re really sexy, it’s hard to not flirt with you.”

“Really?” Ji perked up. “Everyone says Xinyi is the pretty one.”

Melissa, “Well, she’s tall and has those runway sharp features but you’re definitely the sexier sister. And I’m glad you were able to ditch your chauffeur duties.”

“Yeah, I told mom I wanted to come over here and she volunteered to pick the sub-unit up.”

“Is she still on the whole tiger and dragon thing?” I asked.

“Oh yeah, coming out to the car like I did confirmed it for her 100%. And Xinyi was there so...”

“Everyone knows.” Melissa and Lavi said it at the same time.

Ji grimaced, “I tried fixing the record at practice today but everyone just listened respectfully.”

“Uh, that’s good though right?” I asked.

Lavi looked at me. “Robert, did you ever date a teenage girl? I mean ever?”

“A few times.” I might have said it a tad defensively.

“Are you sure?”

Melissa intervened, “Robert when a girl is trying to correct something scandalous and no one asks questions it’s because they’re sure you’re lying.”

“Oh.” That kind of made sense in a fucked up way.

“So, how do you feel about this?” I asked.

“I don’t know.” Ji sighed and shrugged and looked around. “I mean, I don’t like people getting into my business, especially business that isn’t even a real thing but I like the shield.”

“Shield?” Melissa asked.

“Yeah, T’wanna is sweating it that Lavi might come after her in some way, and even if Lavi got kicked you could come back and you could make life hell for T’wanna so it’s like I’ve got this protection. I was full-on expecting T’wana to make my life miserable over the weekend. I didn’t get a peep from her and she stood away from me at practice with her mouth shut.”

Melissa looked incredulous. “What could I do?”

“Seriously?” Ji looked like Melissa must have been jerking her around.

“Seriously.”

“You are too goddamn sweet at times, babe,” Lavi said. “Remember Kristy Hughes?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t get her kicked from the team. She was an evil bitch but her grades were own fault.”

Ji looked at the ceiling as if looking for patience from somewhere, “You let it be known. That was enough.”

“Huh?”

Ji, “So, after you had your fight with her there wasn’t a nerd in the school who would do so much as tell her what the homework assignment was. For the first time ever I saw the poindexters shut down and shut out a hot cheerleader. She couldn’t have traded head for tutoring and rumor is that she tried.”

Melissa was sitting there with her eyes wide open.

Lavi, “Babe, you are the patron saint of the chess and computer clubs. I wouldn’t be surprised if they have a portrait of you somewhere they light candles in front of.”

“That’s ridiculous,” Melissa said.

“Is it? Really?” Lavi pressed her point, “Babe, you’ve dated a number of them, for reals, treated them like you really liked them.”

“I did.”

“Exactly, and they knew it. I love you, Mellie, but as much as you know how it sucks to have to be perfect you don’t know what it’s like to be the one everyone picks on.”

Before Melissa could respond Ji picked it up, “Billy Peterson swears he saw the Academic Decathlon team pressure the chemistry teacher Lopez into pairing Hughes with a hardcore stoner for projects under the excuse that they wouldn’t drag anyone else down.”

I had to ask, “Well, that makes sense doesn’t it?”

Lavi looked at me. “Weekly easy labs with group worksheets averages out with failed exams to a C and they can push the students through and keep numbers high. Letting two fail is something a teacher would get chewed out for and hurt their review. There would have to be pressure.”

That made sense from what I’d read about schools in the news about how schools were these days.

“So, what are you going to do?” Lavi asked.

Ji, “What can I do? Mom is thrilled, the T’wana-beast is laying off me, the more I say it isn’t happening the more they’ll be sure I’m lying so...”

Lavi, “Will kind of suck for trying to have a boyfriend though.”

JI, “Don’t follow.”

“I mean if people think you’re banging Robert won’t it be hard to have a boyfriend, or girlfriend, or whatever?”

“Kind of used to not having boyfriends. Most didn’t last more than a few weeks before T’wanna started talking shit about them so it was rarely worth it.”

Melissa, “I always wondered why you dumped them so fast.”

“Made mom happy too, she said I should focus on school, not on boys.”

“But not Robert?” Lavi asked.

“Apparently men are different. Here, look at these.” she pulled out of her purse three plastic squares with a pill on each. The plastic was a lavender color with a green swishy logo.

Lavi, “She didn’t!”

Melissa, “Are you not on the pill?”

Ji, “Nope but apparently I have an appointment tomorrow to get it but these are insurance just in case she says.”

“Oh my God!” That was Lavi and Melissa in unison.

“I know, right! I swear my goal in life is never again to have a conversation with my mother about my sex life, especially one that doesn’t even exist!”

“So, what do you want us to do?” Melissa asked.

“Well, that kind of gets into one half of why I came over. I mean if it comes up please tell people the truth but I know they don’t want to hear it. So, don’t worry about it unless they ask. But I’d like it on the record just in case.”

That was when the doorbell rang. I pulled up my phone and saw through the doorbell camera that it was Grace and Zahra. I decided they had passed the threshold from guests to friends which meant I didn’t need to get up for them anymore so I used the remote speaker to say “come on in” and remotely unlocked the door for them.

Seconds later Melissa and Lavi were standing to give them hugs. Grace stood back a second and wolf-whistled at Melissa. “Damn girl. I’m straight and I kind of want to fuck you. Is that street legal?”

Melissa grinned, “Only barely but it’s just for the house.”

Zahra was wearing a pink headscarf. “Hey, think I could try it on later?” There was that hint of Valley Girl accent.

“I don’t think your dad would approve,” I said.

“It covers about as much as the swimsuit did,” Zahra replied.

“Well, not around me, just out of respect to him, all right?”

“Yeah,” she waved her hand negligently, “I just meant upstairs anyway.”

Melissa was smiling at me. “What?” I asked.

“I like it when you’re all stern.” She rubbed my arm.

Grace sighed, “Do you three not get enough lovey-dovey time? Really?”

“You’re in a mood,” Lavi said.

“Yeah, well Richardson had her passive-aggressive dial set to eleven but I guess you’ve already heard about that.”

“Uh,” Ji said, “I hadn’t gotten to that yet. We were talking about other stuff.”

“Oh, really?” Grace raised an eyebrow and looked at Lavi’s legs.

“Why are you looking at me?”

“You seem the most likely suspect to try to get in Ji’s pants,” Grace replied simply.

“So,” Ji seemed hopeful, “you get that I’m not doing it with Robert?”

“Nah, I know you were just blowing off steam. Besides, I know what went down at the party.”

“Uh, what are you talking about?” Zahra asked. Suddenly you could drop a pin on the floor and it would have echoed.

“Fuck.” Ji put her face in her hand.

“Ugh!” Grace yelled. “I totally forgot.”

Zahra was looking around with a clear expression of ‘what the fuck are all of you talking about?’

“Why are you here?” Lavi asked. Lavi’s tone was unnecessarily acerbic and Zahra backed up two steps.

“Lavi!” Melissa scolded her wife.

“Sorry!” Lavi held up her hands. “That wasn’t nice. I was just taken off balance too. Sorry, Zahra.”

“It’s fine,” she replied but stayed where she was.

“I needed a ride,” Grace said, “Mom took the car so Zahra was going to give me a ride home but agreed to a side trek.”

“Okay, storytime then,” Melissa said. It was done in short order with a lot of people interrupting each other and soon Zahra was part of the secret pact of how I had not fucked one Guo sister and got attributed to fucking the other.

“Got it,” Zahra said as it wrapped up. Both she and Grace were sitting and everyone had a glass of lemonade.

“So,” Melissa started. “What’s the status on Richardson today? It sounded like something happened.”

Ji, “I got pulled into her office to talk. She chewed me out about not following procedures that I’d never heard of before. She tried to give this vibe like she was sticking her neck out for me and I needed to trust her. She also gave me the talk about being careful who I associated with.” She got glances specifically at Melissa and Lavi as she said it. “Oh, and she’s promoting Xinyi to full squad saying she proved her dedication at the practice game.”

“The real WTF moment was for the whole squad though,” said Zahra.

Grace, “Yeah, she said she was considering pulling the squad out of competitions and wanted us to think about it as we could only compete if she felt she could rely on us.”

Lavi and Melissa exchanged one of those long looks with lots of information in them. Melissa, “How did the squad take it?”

Zahra sighed, “Amber wasn’t happy but you know how she wants to go with the flow.”

“T’wanna was fucking giddy,” added Grace, “she never liked the extra work.”

“Xinyi,” said Ji, “immediately popped up that she would support Richardson in whatever she decided. The little suck up.”

Grace, “And Emma stood right by Xinyi so I suspect she’s team brown nosers.”

“Coraline too?” Asked Melissa.

“That was interesting,” replied Grace. “She had been standing with them chatting but as it went on she stepped away from everyone.”

Lavi turned to Zahra. “And you? You’ve been team undeclared voter but you’re in our party headquarters.”

Grace turned to Melissa. “We have a party?”

Melissa dryly responded, “I think she means we’re going to have parties.”

Grace, “I think they call those orgies if I know Lavi.”

“Hey!” Lavi pretended to be offended. Ji turned a little flushed at that but tried to cover it up by drinking some lemonade. “You know, you act like I’m the slut but Mellie here is the one talking stewardesses out of their panties on the plane.”

Grace’s eyes went huge and held up one hand and yelled “High five!” Melissa gave the obligatory high five. “You go, girl!”

“Wait a minute,” a still indignant Lavi said, “how come I’m a slut and you high five her?”

“Well, she was practically a virgin until she met Robert. If you’d been shipped to a nunnery you’d find out if vows of marriage to God excluded girl on girl.”

“I ... well, yeah, of course, but still.” Lavi put her arms across her chest and harrumphed. “I think there’s a double standard here.” Zahra looked like she was trying to hold a laugh in and Ji was obviously amused as hell. I got the feeling not many got away with giving Lavi this much grief.

“She does have a point,” Melissa said, “I even told Robert I felt like he took my cherry even though he technically didn’t.”

“Well,” Ji said, “not everyone’s first experiences can be cockzilla.”

Now it was time for my eyes to bulge. “Uh, I’m NOT”

Lavi interrupted, “We’re talking about Owen babe.”

“Owen?” I asked.

Now it was Grace turning red. “He got that nickname when in 9th grade when a senior dared him to prove what the boys were saying. He was already 6’ then and built but not proportional. One part was bigger.”

Lavi, “When he and Grace became a thing the size queens cried for a week.”

“I still don’t see how you take it, you tiny thing,” added Ji.

“Let’s just say we have a safe word for regular sex,” Grace said grinning.

“Okay, enough about dicks, or we’re going to scare off Robert,” Zahra said.

Grace, “Oh, he might not be cockzilla but he’s got nothing to be ashamed of.”

“And how do you know?” Lavi asked.

“Vodka slushies and your mom got very talkative Saturday,” replied Grace.

“Excuse me,” said Ji, “But how does Lavi’s mom know?”

Grace, “Because Lavi apparently uses the same model of phone and passcode as her mom and they got their phones mixed up.”

“Seriously?!” Zahra said, “Sweet saints, Lavi. I thought you had a brain cell.”

Lavi looked around “Is this really ‘piss on Lavi’ day!?”

“Because she didn’t agree to watersports,” I said. I tried to keep a serious face but Melissa giggling made me lose it.

“It’s a good thing I love you two,” Lavi said looking at us.

“We know,” Melissa and I said in unison. Suddenly the whole table was giggling. I stood up and leaned over the table and gave Lavi a kiss. Melissa had to walk around the table but did the same and sat in her lap.

“Let me make it up to you for teasing you,” she said.

Lavi put on a pouting face. “I’m really hurt.”

“Poor baby,” Melissa said as Lavi put her grieving face to her wife’s bosom.

“Anyway,” Grace said, “getting back to why we came over. I didn’t want to do this on the phone but we still have two or three wild cards.”

“Haley,” Melissa started “and Jenny,” Lavi finished. I’d seen them at the game but I hadn’t met either.

Ji, “Both were standing kind of on their own. I don’t know what they think.”

“I’m not taking this,” Grace said, “we could at least place in nationals.”

Melissa was thoughtful, “So, that’s T’wanna, Amber, Xinyi, and Emma on team ‘twat-waffles’. The four of us on team ‘not-twat-waffles’.”

Lavi started laughing. “Twat waffles?”

“I heard it the other day and liked it.”

“Well,” Grace said, grinning, “among us not-twat-waffles one of you might get kicked and Zahra still hasn’t said.”

Zahra shrugged and played with an edge of her headscarf. “I’m sitting here aren’t I? Mellie and Grace have always had my back even when people were throwing towels at me during the games. So I guess I’m on team ‘not-twat-waffles’.”

“So, what can you do if Richardson is determined to shut it down,” I asked.

“School board,” Grace said. “They could require the school to change things and just a good enough threat of them getting involved might reverse things. But we’d need some solidarity.”

I looked at Melissa and Lavi, “Should I tell them?”

They both shrugged and together said, “Go for it.”

“So, I have paperwork to file a slander suit against the school. Right about now the school’s attorney is probably looking at what to recommend to Escobar.”

Ji, Zahra, and Grace all looked across Lavi, Melissa, and I. Finally, Zahra asked, “For reals?”

“For reals,” Lavi supplied.

“I don’t know how that’ll play,” said Grace, “but not much to do until we find out where everyone stands and what Richardson plans on doing.”

“Yeah,” Melissa replied and everyone else just nodded in agreement.

Ji looked like she was about to say something when the doorbell rang. I checked my phone and then looked at Lavi and Melissa. “Were either of you expecting Coraline to come over?”

They just shook their heads no. Melissa got up to go get the door. I sighed and got up. If we were going to have this many people here I might as well make a cake.

**Chapter 30**

By the time Melissa was back with Coraline, I had decided on a lime and coconut cake with passion fruit icing. I was puttering around when they walked back in. Coraline was cute, with brown hair and glasses. She waved nervously at everyone as Melissa offered her some lemonade. Coraline held to her chest a large manila envelope. I’d already made the icing and lime and coconut would pair with it well I thought.

“Hey, am I interrupting something,” Coraline asked. She looked at the kitchen table surrounded by fellow cheerleaders.

Grace looked at the newcomer, “Not really.”

“What’s up?” Asked Lavi.

“I was hoping to talk to Mr. Carlo,” she said shyly.

I paused, butter in hand. “Why?” I asked. To say Melissa and Lavi were eyeing Coraline would be an understatement.

“It’s kind of complicated, can we talk?” She looked around at everyone as if to imply somewhere less crowded.

“I’m making a cake.” I still had butter in my hand so I returned to measuring it. I didn’t know what was about to happen but I was pretty sure I was going to want cake by the end of it. Who was I kidding? I wanted cake right now.

“Uh, okay,” she shifted around on her feet and then took a seat. “So, I don’t know how much you know about me.”

“Not much. I don’t think we’ve talked except at the pool party.”

“Yeah, that was a blast, thank you. I’m sorry for whatever happened with Xinyi.”

The room mostly froze. Ji tried to sound casual, “What do you know about that?”

Coraline fidgeted. “Not much, but afterward Xinyi was super awkward, like when she gets called out on something so I figured something happened. And not you and Mr. Carlo, that wouldn’t embarrass her like that no matter what others are saying.”

Ji, Grace, Melissa, and Lavi all sent looks to each other. To distract Coraline I said, “It’s Robert, not Mr. Carlo please.”

“I don’t want to be disrespectful.”

“I need all the help I can get not feeling old,” I said with a smile. Melissa made a scoffing sound but didn’t say anything.

“Okay. Robert then,” Coraline said.

Lavi, “Can we move along with the whole, ‘why you’re here to talk to him’ thing?” It was a bit grumpy which caused Melissa to shoot Lavi a reproachful glance.

“Right, so, the thing is, I guess to understand,” she was tapping the envelope, “you kind of have to understand that I grew up without a dad. My mom said she didn’t know my dad.” I didn’t like where this was going. Envelopes can have legal documents, right? Seventeen years ago. I didn’t date that much. Did any of them look like Coraline? Why was I worrying about a cake? What was the bill for sixteen years of back child support? “So, I really empathized with the themes in Mrs. McCallister, I mean Heller’s, books about absent father figures. I’m kind of a big fan.” I breathed again. “And the other week Melissa mentioned your last name. Then it clicked for me, your name was the same as her college editor and Mrs. Heller said you were an old friend. And you’re him, right, the editor, her first editor she dedicated her book to, am I right?”

As she was talking Ji got up as if she was stretching but she moved to the island. Soon she was leaning against it and I kept getting the feeling she was watching me. In fact, I would periodically see her watching what I was doing and then move back to the group talking. Melissa’s eyes followed her.

I responded to Coraline, “Yep.” I got out the finely shaved coconut. How much? 160 grams? I got out the scale and it tipped at 171 grams, close enough I thought. I looked up. They were still looking at me. Was I supposed to say something else? “I edited her stories for the literary magazine back in college. She was super talented even then.”

Lavi looked suspicious, “How did you know her college editor’s name? I don’t think mom ever mentioned it anywhere. I’d never even heard it.”

Coraline, “I paid to interlibrary loan her stories from the magazines. The college photocopied and mailed them to me along with the cover and inside cover so it had the staff names.” That was a dedicated fan. She was out of her seat and still holding the envelope. “So, I know this is a lot and I don’t want to be a pest and I’ll ... I’ll do anything but ... oh my god, I feel like I’m spazzing.”

Lavi rolled her eyes at her. “Take a breath girl.”

“What she means,” Melissa walked around and put a hand on Coraline’s shoulder, “is that you’re among friends, no reason to be nervous.”

Coraline looked at Melissa, “Thanks. So, I get that it’s weird but ... would you read my stories?” She held the envelope out halfway as if she was afraid to have it too far out.

I was measuring out lime juice now. Her face was pleading. “Sure,” I said. “I’m not a literary agent or anything though. All I can do is give you my opinion.”

“Yeah, but Mrs. Heller said you helped her achieve what she wanted instead of pushing your own view. And, I want that. You can tell me where it’s bad and maybe what is worth improving.”

“She told you about me?” I asked.

“Well, not directly. She wrote in a blog post about five years ago when she started her Red Pen workshops that she wanted to foster young writers like her college editor had encouraged her. But thank you, thank you so much! If you ever need anything just ask.”

“There is nothing to pay back, it would be my honor Coraline.”

“Thank you. I guess I already said that but thanks. I, uh,” she looked around, “still feel like I interrupted.”

Grace, “We were discussing Mrs. Richardson’s bombshell today.”

The, “not competing”?

Melissa, “Yeah. What do you think?”

Coraline shrugged. “I was kind of surprised. I mean when I applied everyone talked about putting in lots of time for practice including her but it’s not a big deal to me.”

“Why did you apply,” asked Grace?

“Honestly, Emma pressured me, said it would be good for me, told me it would get me out of my shell. I was going to drop it.”

Zahra, “You were already on JV, right?”

“Only to be with her and Xinyi. It actually did help me some. I can do public speaking in class and stuff better now. And I do like that I get to spend time with Emma and Xinyi. They’ve been friends since we started as freshmen.” Ji nodded her head to that, clearly aware of it herself.

Grace, “When you came in we were talking about our options. Some of us might not even be on the team if it wasn’t for the competitions.”

Coraline, “It might be rough. Even if Richardson goes ahead some of the team looked pretty happy at not doing it. They might be disappointed and drag their feet which would pull everyone down, right?”

And I had a mixture in the KitchenAid and the oven preheating. I didn’t know about the future of cheer competitions, but I was going to have a cake. I glanced at the girls. Melissa and Grace were exchanging looks, clearly not having thought about how others could sink everything even if Richardson was overruled. Richardson might have done more damage with just that suggestion than they had realized. I grabbed a wooden spoon and banged it loudly on the side of a metal mixing bowl.

“Enough with contemplating the end of the world,” I said. “You’re going to talk yourselves into a miserable frenzy.”

“You have an alternative?” Grace asked.

“Cake.”

“It won’t be ready for, what, an hour?” asked Melissa.

“About that. I still need to put it in the oven and then it’ll have to cool for the frosting.” I got out two springform circular pans.

I heard the television over the sink turn on and then suddenly Zahra went “Oh!” I looked up. A selection box was over the file folder “Cheerleaders.” Someone was browsing through my networked storage, specifically my porn collection. I hadn’t made that folder though. I looked over and Lavi had her phone out and was grinning. Melissa was turning very red. I think I knew who made it.

“I’m out.” That was Grace and she was already standing.

“Oh, don’t act as if you’ve never watched porn with us,” said Lavi.

“Little different this time, Lavi,” Grace replied.

Zahra seemed amused at Grace’s discomfort but she was the ride so she got up, too. She waved at us as they left. “Cheers!”

I waved bye but kept working on the cake as I heard sound kick in.

“This isn’t professional is it,” asked Coraline?

“It looks like a cam girl kind of semi-amateur thing,” said Ji.

“Ji is the porn guru,” added Lavi.

Ji looked indignant, “Just because I know who Rocco Siffredi is, does not make me a porn guru.”

“No one else knew,” Lavi retorted. She turned to Coraline, “We did this trivia thing we found on the web last year. Some people got some kinky questions. Ji got every single one.”

Ji held up one hand defensively, “Hey, I am not going to be shamed just because no one else even reads the descriptions on Pornhub.”

Lavi interrupted. “Right, you’re more educated about porn, a guru, like I said.”

Coraline started laughing. That made Ji and Lavi both smile. They returned to the video. I glanced up but was getting the batter into the pans.

“Robert,” Ji asked, “why did you download this one?” She was still standing at the island where she could watch me.

“I didn’t, you’ll have to ask those two. I don’t recognize it.”

Melissa cleared her throat. “I got it. There were a bunch of videos but most didn’t have girls in uniforms.” It was then that the guy started to say something as he was getting a blowjob.

Lavi, “Oh my god. That voice. I’d walk away from giving a guy head if he sounded like that.”

“Does the voice matter that much?” Asked Coraline. Lavi paused the video.

Lavi, “Mellie can’t watch a nature documentary narrated by David Attenborough without getting wet, so ask her.”

Melissa stood up, “I’m getting wine. If I’m going to watch porn and have my kinks spread around I don’t feel like doing it without a little something.”

Ji, “Can I have some too?”

“Only if you’re staying for dinner. No driving and drinking”

“What are you having?”

I answered, “Korean BBQ.”

“I’m sold. I mean, if it’s okay.”

“You should ask your mom,” Lavi said, grinning. I didn’t need to speak teenager to know the look she got from Ji could translate as ‘eat shit and die.’ Still, she took out her phone and started texting.

Melissa was getting glasses out. “Coraline?”

“I can’t. My boyfriend is waiting for me.” She looked embarrassed like she was being the uncool kid. Melissa walked over and gave her a hug and stepped back.

Melissa, “It’s all good. We’ll hang some other time, all right?”

“Great!” She smiled and made her way to the door.

As she walked away I said, “I’ll save you a piece of cake.”

“Thanks!” She waved to me. Lavi followed and was back seconds later. In the meantime, Melissa had given Ji a glass of wine. Ji’s phone dinged. She looked at it and turned it off.

“So... , “ Lavi asked, “what did she say?”

Ji took another drink of the wine, “She said to have fun and be safe.”

Lavi, “Anything else?”

Ji sighed. “I told her I was having a glass of wine and staying for dinner. Then ... she said she would bring me over a change of clothes if I needed to spend the night.” Then the Chinese cheerleader laid her forehead in her hand and growled in frustration.

“And your alibi just went out the door,” said Melissa.

The cake was in now so I poured a glass of wine myself. “Living room,” I said and grabbed the bottle to take with me.

“We’re going to get comfortable?” Melissa asked.

“I am,” I replied. “Nubile harlots have been watching porn while I make a cake. It’s been hard for so long I can’t feel it anymore. I’m at least going to get comfortable.”

“Ah, poor baby,” said Melissa who followed quickly.

Melissa and I reached the living room as Lavi and Ji were still chatting and leaving the kitchen. Melissa said, “Hey, Robert, I wanted to...” I turned to look at her. “Oh.” She was looking in my eyes. “I know that look.”

I put the bottle and glass down, grabbed the back of her neck, and pushed her into the wall as I kissed her. Her wine swished around and a drop spilled out onto her wrist. I took her wrist, lifted it up to lick the wine up onto my tongue and faced her again. I laid my forehead against her.

“Your friend is about to walk in here, our guest, and I’m one bad choice away from fucking you in the doorway so she’d have to step over us to get through.”

Melissa was purring now, “Maybe not a bad idea exactly...”

I pressed her against the wall with my body. “I’m not joking,” I said into her ear.

“I’m not either.” She sucked in a shallow breath. “Go ahead, do it. Fuck me. You want it,” she ran a fingernail across my earlobe, “you need it.”

“We have a guest,” I repeated.

“She might as well know what she’s flirting with. I saw her watching you in the kitchen. Maybe she needs it.”

“Do you know what you’re flirting with?” I asked.

“I don’t know what I’ll think later, but right now I think you fucking a lifelong memory into her sounds like a really good idea.”

I looked in her eyes. I loved this woman and she knew it but my blood was about to boil over. I wasn’t quite gone yet though. “Give me your panties.”

Melissa smiled and without hesitation handed me her wine glass and with one hand on the wall lifted a leg to pull her panties down and over one foot and then the other and then gave them to me in exchange for her wine glass back.

I turned to Ji and Lavi, who were both watching from the hallway. Lavi was smiling and Ji looked both shocked and was squirming as if resisting the urge to rub her thighs together. I walked over to Lavi. “Yours.” I held out my hand. She had less agility than Melissa but Lavi managed to quickly get her own panties off and flash us simultaneously.

I turned to Ji who took a step back. I shook my head, “No, these are for you.” I held Lavi’s and Melissa’s out to her.

“Why,” she asked.

“These two flirts have been seeing what they could provoke now it’s your choice. You take these. You want them to do something, you hand them their panties. That something by the way could be to leave you alone, stop teasing, anything you want. Anything.” I stressed the last word and looked at Lavi sternly. For once she nodded solemnly.

Ji took the panties. I turned back to find Melissa in the living room now with her hands-free. “What if Ji wants you to do something?” She was smirking.

“Fine.” I stopped, dropped my sweats and pulled down my own boxer shorts shooting Ji and Lavi a full moon that Lavi wolf-whistled at. I pulled my sweats back up and tossed the boxers to Ji. “There you go.”

With that, we finally made it into the living room. In minutes Lavi had the TV on and queued backup to the video she had been playing in the kitchen. Everyone was tense but Ji seemed to be in good spirits and Melissa was high on adrenaline. I lay on the end of the couch with Melissa in my lap grinding against my erection. Lavi in turn lay up against Melissa. Ji sat on the other end but let her feet reach out and touch Lavi’s leg but that’s as far as she seemed to want contact right now.

“At least she had a blanket under her knees,” said Melissa, referring to the girl giving the blowjob on screen.

Lavi, “I want to know why there are two footballs on the ground.”

“To let us know he’s a football player,” I offered.

Lavi, “They’re different sizes, one is peewee size.”

Ji giggled, “You know what they say about men with small hands.”

“Well, he’s proving it,” Melissa said.

“Am I the only one distracted by that black thing on the groun?,” Asked Ji.

“No, that’s bugging me too,” I said. “It looks like trash.” The other thing bothering me was that I could feel Melissa’s sex just a few inches from my cock. I was very hard and her body heat was like having a fire in my lap. I felt the moisture between us, I don’t know if it was sweat or from her cleft, but it allowed me to shift gently and rub against her which made her tense. I saw her hand turn into a fist holding Lavi’s hair.

Lavi was shifting her legs and Ji discretely looked. Melissa and I watched while we discretely coupled.

Ji, “She is super quiet. Who wants porn where they’re quiet?”

“It’s probably a backyard. They don’t want the neighbors to check out the noise,” I said.

“She does seem to be enjoying it,” Melissa offered.

Lavi, “I’m sorry but he’s wearing sneakers and no pants. I would never let a pantless guy in shoes near me.”

“A woman in heels is sexy but yeah,” said Ji.

“Seems like a sexist distinction to me,” I offered.

Melissa, “I can not wear heels again if you feel strongly about it.”

“I don’t feel that strongly.”

Ji giggled and Lavi grinned. Suddenly the porn was over and Lavi threw up her hands. “Scoring time!”

“Scoring time?” I asked.

Melissa, “Whenever we had squad sleepovers if we watched porn everyone had to give a score, one to ten. I’ll start, six out of ten. It didn’t seem fake but it wasn’t really exciting.”

“Five,” said Lavi. “And I think I’m being generous.”

“That uniform looked like a costume and I don’t watch porn to watch mimes. It gets a three,” Ji said.

Melissa turned to me, “Your turn.”

“I’ll go with five too. It was all right but yeah, not exciting.”

Lavi set the next video to play. It opened in a bedroom with a girl on a bed facing away from us playing with herself.

Ji, “Did someone license the worst dubstep in the world for this video? Oh my God, this is bad.”

Melissa, “The uniform looks real though, it even says Eagles on it like a real school.”

“Even the spanks look legit,” said Lavi, “Costumes don’t usually have those.”

Ji, “All right, so she might be, or have been, a real cheerleader, the sound is still crap. She has a nice ass, though.”

Lavi, “Are you an ass woman?” Lavi shifted, letting her shirt dress ride up showing her own posterior.

JI, “I can appreciate a nice booty if that’s what you’re asking.”

Suddenly the girl in the video turned and we could see her face. I commented, “She is pretty.” All the girls nodded in agreement.

Then a guy walked on screen and ruined it. “I’ve got something else you can be naughty with,” he said. I tried not to laugh but failed and we all started giggling.

Melissa was feeling her wine, “They need a distinguished English professor who is going to help keep her from failing modern poetry.”

Ji was staring at Melissa, “Oh my GOD! I did not need to know you roleplay that stuff!”

“I don’t! I was talking about porn, not my bedroom!”

“Or the kitchen, or couch, or jacuzzi, or the pool, or under the tree...” Lavi added.

Ji held up her hand in a stop gesture. “I get it.”

Lavi, “I’ve grown to see Mellie’s viewpoint more and more on this.”

Ji, “Really?”

“Robert reads me poetry. It’s sexy as fuck. Listen to this.” Lavi crawled over to Ji and on hands and knees as a predator faced Ji on the couch. Ji pulled her legs up under herself protectively.

She began by looking into Ji’s eyes, “See the mountains kiss high heaven.” Her voice was breathy and heavy. Then she rubbed her cheek against Ji’s, “And the waves clasp one another;” and in a loud whisper she spoke into Ji’s ear her tongue briefly touching Ji’s earlobe, “No sister-flower would be forgiven / If it disdained its brother.” Lavi sat up on her knees and pulled the cut in her shirt down even further, “And the sunlight clasps the earth,” she spread her legs going low and moving forward over Ji’s lap, “And the moonbeams kiss the sea.” Leaning towards Ji and Lavi whispered across her lips, “What is all this sweet work worth / If thou kiss not me?”

Melissa was holding my hand like a vise. I don’t know how she did it but suddenly Melissa was leaning to one side and pushing my sweat pants down. She moved and I was perhaps an inch inside her. The entire movement had taken a split second as if she had practiced it. The angle was bad but she moved and I was further in. She was breathing hard but seemed to relax some once I was in her. I leaned in and whispered, “If you move much I’m going to cum inside you.”

“Okay.” She was watching Lavi and Ji. She pulsed around me and it was heaven and she made very small movements with her hips.

Lavi’s face was just inches away from Ji’s “Uh, what is this,” Ji asked?

Lavi pulled back. “I’ve always thought you were sexy, I just didn’t like you. Now I do.”

“Oh.” Ji swallowed. “I think I see what you’re saying about the poetry.” She then scooted back a little from Lavi and started taking deep calming breaths. She was still looking at Lavi but it was clearly a mixture of feelings.

The video had ended and Lavi grinned. “Ready for the last video?” And she started it up from her phone. No one remembered to provide a score for the last one.

Melissa began bucking against me but I grabbed her hips and whispered in her ear. “Slow, make it last. Good girl.” The video started. Two teen looking girls walked on screen and sat on a loveseat talking about how one is a virgin.

Lavi, “Oh, this is awesome, those outfits are almost like ours!”

Ji, “They just need to have silver stripes instead of white.”

From there Ji and Lavi just started going back and forth. Melissa was making tiny little movements of her hips causing herself to rise and fall back on my cock about half an inch at a time and getting too distracted to talk though she was clearly watching the video too.

Lavi, “I like how they’re casual about it. Wow, that was quick to the pussy licking!”

Ji, “I can get wanting to be the receiver but does being the giver feel that good?”

Lavi grinned, “Only one way for you to find out. Seriously though Robert eats me out for ages and he seems happy.”

“Yeah, it’s something in the taste and smell that just hits the back of my brain,” I said.

Ji, “So is he good?”

Lavi smiled, “Oh, yeah. I’d say Robert is up there with the best I’ve been with.”

Melissa started trying to move faster but I ran my hands on her thighs and slowed her down. She was tense as a bowstring and increasingly frustrated by being unable to cum.

Ji, “Careful, you’ll give Robert a swollen head.”

“I don’t think I could make it more swollen than it is now or it won’t pull out of Mellie,” Lavi replied.

Ji blinked. “What do you mean?”

Lavi tilted her head to the side, “I mean Robert is in her right now.”

Ji, “Oh wow!” On the screen, one cheerleader was pushing a glass dildo into the other. Ji looked around Lavi, “I can’t even see anything.”

“That was the idea,” I said. “We got a little excited but you didn’t agree to watch us.”

“Um, well, it’s fine, you know, it’s your house, you should be comfortable.”

Lavi, “So do you want to see them?”

“Dear fucking Jesus say yes if that means I can get a better angle,” said Melissa.

Ji smiled and said, “Yeah, I’d like that.” With that she shifted to sit up and sat on the edge of the cushions to see us better. Melissa didn’t have to be asked twice. She lifted up and got her knees underneath her. She pulled her dress up and Lavi leaned forward to help, guiding me back into Melissa. On the television, the two girls had gotten out a double-ended dildo but no one was watching it.

Melissa, “Finally, thank God!” She was slamming down on me and I feared for her bruising my thighs, but damn it felt good. She slammed down three, four, five times and started cumming, biting her lip and panting like she had just run a mile. When she settled she said in a struggling, “I need more, please more.” I hadn’t cum yet.

I looked at Ji. “What do you say? You’re the guest.”

Ji tossed my boxers at me and was breathing fast. “I want to see it.”

“You heard our guest slut. Lavi, pull that dress off her.” Melissa’s fingers were already unlatching her bra and both pieces of clothing were gone nearly at once. Ji was watching so I took my time standing up and taking sweat pants and t-shirt off. Melissa lay down on the couch and put her head in Lavi’s lap. Lavi began playing with Melissa’s tits while I got between her thighs. I took my cock and laid it along her pussy lips and teased the clit with my head.

Melisa, “No, no, no, come on.”

“No teasing?” I asked.

“Just fuck me,” she whined. So, I obliged. I fucked her hard and fast and I was barely half a dozen strokes in before she came again. I couldn’t keep this up long. Lavi was watching and so was Ji. I saw the look in Ji’s eyes and it made me even hotter so I fucked Melissa as hard as I could and came inside her but I was still hard so I kept going. We made a mess of her and my juices which ran out of her. The couch would need cleaning later. She came twice more before I calmed down enough to pull out of her. We all sat in silence for a short while, everyone smiling.

Eventually Ji broke the silence. “That was amazing,” she said.

“Anyone want water?” I asked. Melissa shakily raised her hand. Lavi was stroking Melissa’s hair while Melissa regained her senses. “I’ll grab some for everyone.” My knees were just a bit unstable as I stood up. I didn’t bother to get dressed but walked to the kitchen and came back shortly with four bottles of cold water. Lavi was running her hands along Melissa’s back as Melissa licked up my sperm that had gotten on the couch. I put the water bottles down.

Lavi looked at me, “We were explaining Melissa’s rule.”

Ji, “That is so nasty.” Her tone of voice did not have any disapproval.

Melissa got on her knees in front of the couch. She grabbed a bottle of water and took a sip. “I think I lost some fluids,” she said smiling broadly.

“That was, I mean, hěn lì hài, like powerful” Ji said. “Did you like that?”

“Of course,” Melissa replied.

“I mean, us here,” Ji responded.

“Lavi is usually here but yeah, you watching was kind of fun. Watching you would be even more fun though.”

“Really?” Ji shifted around nervously.

“Oh yeah. And yes, I’m trying to seduce you but only if you want to be seduced. Like, no pressure.”

Lavi suddenly blurted, “I want her to be seduced!”

That made everyone laugh and while Ji and Melissa were giggling I pulled Lavi towards me, “Come here.”

“Clean up duty? My pleasure.” With that Lavi pulled my half-hard dick into her mouth and she began suckling on it like candy.

At the same time Ji was responding to Melissa, “Well, I don’t not want to be seduced.” She shyly held out Melissa’s panties towards her. My honey bee took them.

That was all the invitation Melissa needed. Melissa slid forward and sat on her knees so that she was straddling one of Ji’s legs and kissed her. They kissed slowly and passionately. I tapped Lavi’s head. She would want to see this. In response, she turned around on her hands and knees. With her ample posterior pointed to me I remembered the jib earlier about fucking her ass. It had been a joke but sounded really good right now. She still had her shirt dress on so I just pushed it up. I was already slick from her throat so I began pushing in, paused, Lavi wiggled and I started pushing harder. The ring of Lavi’s sphincter resisted at first but then opened as she made it relax.

Ji had her own hand under her dress and kissed Melissa. Ji’s eyes were open and also watched us. Melissa leaned in and whispered. I couldn’t hear what was said but Ji responded by first shaking her head and then nodding yes then paused and then yes again. Melissa didn’t reach out to Ji but Ji brought her hand out from under her dress and Melissa sucked the finger into her mouth moaning before letting it go. I reached under Lavi and found her clit. The angle was awkward to achieve but I was rewarded by the excited gasp from her throat. She was pushing back against me and must already have been pretty excited because she was soon cuming, shaking hard enough that I had to hold on and at the same time I came again in her bowels. Meanwhile, Melissa was kissing Ji again and running her hands over Ji’s smaller breasts on the outside of her dress. Ji’s hand was a blur under her dress and she then she closed her eyes and started shouting “Yes, OH YES, “ and continued with something that was either her losing coherence or slipping into Chinese, I wasn’t sure but it ended with her taking a deep breath and lying down on the couch smiling.

Melissa leaned back on her heels smiling. “Was that good?”

Ji blushed. “That was ... just wow. I didn’t think I could.”

Melissa looked confused. “What do you mean? You haven’t cum before?”

Ji grinned, “Yeah, I can get off but I never have with anyone else, just myself you know.”

“You’re not a virgin. Right?” Melissa was obviously perplexed.

“No, but the guys I’ve been with didn’t get me there.”

As Ji was talking Melissa scooted near us and I slowly withdrew from Lavi. Melissa inspected me and took me into her mouth to clean me. I then moved and she got behind Lavi and rimmed Lavi until she was clean. During this process Lavi leaned forward on her crossed arms and sighed contentedly.

Ji, “Woah. Isn’t that unsanitary?”

Lavi, “We did enemas after you texted, quick ones.”

Ji raised an eyebrow. “Were you planning...”

“No,” Lavi replied, “it was for after everyone left. Oh, uh...” Lavi pointed at Ji. Just visible on Ji’s knees was a smear of a pearly white substance from where Melissa had been astride her.

“Wa!” Ji’s eyes went wide.

“May I? Do you mind,” Lavi asked.

“Mind what?”

“Help you clean up.” Lavi smiled.

“So, yeah, that’d be cool.” I don’t know how Ji was expecting Lavi to help but it apparently wasn’t Lavi crawling across the couch and then licking Ji’s knee clean and sucking the hem of her dress where it had gotten some too.

Ji, “You are such a slut.”

Lavi looked up at Ji and beamed with pride. “I know.”

I was taking a sip of water when an alarm chirped. “Ooo, cake,” Melissa asked.

I stood up and pulled the sweat pants on but didn’t bother with a shirt. “It needs to cool.” Melissa pouted. “But it’s multi-tier and will cool pretty quickly my honey bee.” As I left Melissa was putting her dress back on while Lavi had never taken hers off.

In a few moments, the girls came into the kitchen, their wine glasses were refilled and the empty bottle added to recycling. I had the tiers on cooling racks and put a small fan I keep around for this in front of them to help cool them.

I leaned against the prep island. The girls were quiet and watching me. “So, how is everyone? Ji?”

She looked like she was considering it. “I’m good I think. I’m a bit weirded out but I don’t feel bad about it. I’m kinda sorry I said no Mellie.”

Melissa took a sip of her wine and made a dismissive gesture, “Don’t be. I had fun, you were a great kisser.” Ji blushed a bit. “And I’d jump you in a heartbeat but you have to be comfortable.”

“Agreed,” I added, “I’d much rather you do less and wish you’d done more than do too much and regret it. It’s kind of like baking, you can add to but you can’t take away from.”

Lavi rolled her eyes. “Leave it to you to make sex about baking.”

Melissa started giggling, “I think we just found out why Robert took to cooking while he was celibate.”

I replied, “You’re joking but food and sex are closer than you think. Two words: bacon dates.”

Lavi pointed at me, “That is an excellent point.”

Melissa held up her hands in surrender.

Ji, “You guys are so sweet. I mean, you really are friends and Robert and Lavi are a thing, and wow, all the things.” She turned to Melissa, “And what you and Lavi said about how you were cleaning his pool and all that?”

Melissa shrugged, “It’s how it happened. I still clean the pool by the way. I had hoped that Lavi and Robert would be friends because I didn’t want to be torn between them but then they clicked later and it’s just been perfect.”

Lavi looked at Ji, “I take it speculation has been high on where the real dirt is?”

Ji almost laughed into her wine glass but moved it away from her lips. “You wouldn’t believe. It’s been everything from paid mistresses to some kind of hardcore slavery thing to a cult. I mean the rumors are crazy. The only thing everyone agrees on is there is something more than what you’re saying.”

My back was turned because I was checking the temperature of the cakes. “Of course there is,” I said.

Ji, “Huh?”

“All the details. I didn’t love Lavi at first nor did she love me. But we both loved Melissa and knew there was something worth working towards there. And we fell in love instead. But it was messy along the way.”

“This is just new to me,” said Ji.

“The sex? It’s pretty awesome,” said Lavi, grinning.

Ji laughed, “Yeah, but more than that. Like when Robert got behind you and ... you know...”

“Entered through the back door,” offered Melissa.

“Cornholed me,” countered Lavi.

“Went Greek,” Melissa said pointing at Lavi.

“Ooo, I like that one, I’m part Greek,” said Lavi while twirling her hair.

Ji laughed, “I was going to say put it in your behind.”

“That too,” Lavi said, primly.

Ji continued, “I saw him pause for a second, and then you wiggled your butt a bit.”

“I was letting him know it was all good and I was ready.”

“That’s what I mean,” said Ji, “it was all really natural and easy.”

“We had lots of talks leading up to knowing each other like that,” said Melissa.

“Still,” Ji said, “that’s nice. My experiences have been, well, awkward.”

Lavi, “Is that why you ... you know haven’t...”

“No, no. I mean I can tell a boy what to do but I still don’t feel anything.”

“So, do you think you’re gay?” Asked Melissa.

“I don’t think so. I mean, don’t take offense but I’ve never looked at your or Lavi and gone ‘I wanna do her.’”

“But you do now,” asked Lavi?

“Not exactly. It’s more like I’m comfortable so I can relax and if you’re relaxed then being touched can’t help but be fun right?” She looked at Melissa, “But that’s why I said stop, I’m not ready for more, not yet.”

I didn’t say it but I was glad. That had been going too fast. I was beginning to realize I was just as bad at getting caught up in the moment as I was when I was younger and that had gotten me in plenty of trouble then too. Fuck. I had kind of hoped I’d aged out of that. As it was I’m not sure how much of the spirit of my ‘no fucking the squad’ rule I’d broken even if I hadn’t touched her.

Melissa, “What’s your type normally? I usually saw you dating the pretty boys.”

“Meh, I just didn’t like the jocks. Too much yellow fever and not enough synaptic activity. But, honestly, I don’t think I’ve ever just looked at someone and been turned on.” She set her wine glass down and ran her finger along the base of it. I put a thin layer of passion fruit icing on one tier and moved the second layer on to start on the other.

Lavi, “So, I gotta ask, and don’t answer if you don’t want but what do you imagine when you’re taking care of yourself?”

Ji stared off into space. “Usually guys, like Idris Elba or Daniel Craig, you know I like a bit of rough,” she giggled. “I tried thinking about girls this weekend and it kind of worked.” While we talked I brought over the cake and Melissa grabbed plates and forks.

“When you think of those guys, what do you think of?” Melissa asked.

Ji shrugged, “Usually I’m at home and they come in and rub my shoulders and kiss my neck. Sometimes we’re at a restaurant and they crawl under the table, or we’ve gone out for the night and they take me to a club...” She giggled. “Anyway, this wine is good. I think I need some food.”

I was pouring myself a White Russian to go with the cake. “So, these aren’t random hookups?”

Ji, “No, I like scenarios where they watch me get dressed and we go out and hold hands and then get somewhere where people can see us...” she trailed off. “Sorry I probably sound weird.”

“No girl,” Lavi said, “I could listen to this all night, I just want more detail and to be horizontal for it.”

Melissa was passing out the cake. Lavi asked, “Dessert before dinner?”

Melissa grinned, “I already had dessert, this is just cake.” She handed a piece to Ji who was trying to not laugh at the silliness.

For a few minutes everyone just ate cake. “So,” I had to ask, “Ji, do you like the idea of people watching you?”

She grinned. “Yeah, I really do. I guess I’m a exhibitionist.”

“A closet one,” exclaimed Lavi. “You never dress super sexy or anything.”

“Well, I don’t want to get in trouble. I’m going to med school, it’s just a fantasy type thing.”

“Until tonight,” I pointed out.

“Yeah.” She grinned. “You and Lavi watching was ... this cake is amazing but that was better.”

“And have you ever thought about a girl,” Melissa asked?

“I... “ Ji looked back and forth to Melissa and Lavi. “Is this like private space? You know nothing is spoken of outside these walls?”

“Absolutely.” “Uh-huh.” Came the replies. I just nodded because I was enjoying the cake. The coconut and lime balanced really well and the passion fruit icing was exquisite.

Ji swallowed. “You know Anne right?”

“There are a lot of Annes, Ji,” answered Melissa.

“Anne Wallchuck, in AP English.”

Lavi, “No way!”

Melissa pointed at Lavi and made a zipping her mouth pantomime.

Ji threw up her hands. “See, that’s why I didn’t want to say anything.”

I looked around bewildered. Lavi picked her fork up and began eating again. “Melissa can explain, I’ll just get in trouble.” Indeed Melissa was glaring at Lavi.

When she looked back at me Melissa said, “Anne seems nice, I”ve never really talked to her but she has some extra weight and, well, it’s not in the best places. Not everyone” she glared at Lavi again, “can eat cake and become a natural hourglass. And she kind of has an upturned nose which has earned her some unkind nicknames.”

Ji nodded, “But she’s cute, I know they make those pig jokes but it’s not that bad and she really is sweet and I was lab partners with her for two years and hung out at her house. It was the one big fight I didn’t let T’wana win, the bitch.”

Me, “So, you imagined you and Anne?”

“Yeah. I don’t think Anne is interested in me like that so I helped set her up with a few boys. But that got me thinking and was part of me wondering if I was gay.” She was running her fingertip along her wine glass.

“Seems to me,” I said, “that you like to have a personal connection to people. Maybe you can’t get aroused with someone you don’t have that with.”

“Like you?” Melissa bumped my knee under the table.

“Not really, I just avoid sex without a relationship because I’ve learned otherwise is a bad idea, not because I can’t. I wanted to crawl in your denim shorts and get that light blue shirt off you the moment I saw you.”

She looked at me. “You remember what I was wearing?”

“I will until the day I die.” The cake was really good, not too moist, not over baked. I was so happy with it. The lime balanced the sweetness of the coconut.

“Awwww,” went Lavi and Melissa together.

“Me?” Asked Lavi, “What was I wearing when you met me?”

“Light blue too, but a dress, I remember it showed a lot of cleavage.”

Lavi smiled, “Yeah, I wore that one to see if your eyes would bug out. That’s one of my best dresses for showing the girls off but not looking slutty.” We ate more cake. As usual Melissa took some of Lavi’s frosting. All three of us fed each other a few bites of cake.

“So, Ji,” Melissa’s wine glass was empty again, “we got distracted earlier but you said you came over to ask Robert something, what was it, or did the livingroom kind of answer it?”

Ji’s eyes went wide. “Oh, no, no, no, it was all really fun but I didn’t come over for anything, well, sexual.”

Melissa seemed surprised. “Oh. You were kind of following Robert around the kitchen earlier.”

“Oh, um, I wasn’t watching him, I was just curious about what he was doing, you know the cake.”

Melissa, “The cake?”

“Yeah, the cake. I ... I want to learn how to bake. And make pizza.” She sighed, unlocked her phone, did something and passed it to Melissa and Lavi.

Melissa looked at it, made a face like she had just bitten something sour and passed it without comment to Lavi. Lavi, “That looks disgusting.”

“It tasted worse,” said Ji. She turned to me, “I wrecked our kitchen yesterday trying to make pizza. I was following recipes online. You told me at the party you’d show me a few things and I might need that.” Melissa was looking at Ji intently, “I know this is weird but I figure next year I’ll be living on my own and I should know how to fix something other than rice plus something fried, which is all I think my mom knows how to make. I mean my mom rants about womanly skills. She’s willing to let some guy she’s never met nail me but do I know how to bake? No, that would be useful!” She sounded frustrated.

I took another sip of my drink. “So, you want me to show you how to make pizza?”

Ji, “And bread, and other stuff but yeah, especially pizza. I can’t really pay for lessons or anything but you offered. I’m willing to hang out, help, watch. I could pay for ingredients. I have a part time job. I came over tonight because Mondays are my free night. Please, I mean I know you don’t really have a reason to but I’d be super grateful.”

My life has strange synergies I thought. I looked at my wives. Lavi looked amused and Melissa surprised but they nodded in unison.

“Well, I already made the soda bread but I still have a few things to do for tonight but it’s not really baking.”

“I can still help,” Ji said.

Melissa smiled, “Don’t worry about it. Just relax. I’ll help Robert with dinner.”

“You sure,” Ji asked.

“You’re a friend, you just hang with us,” Melissa said.

“Thank you.” Ji looked on the edge of tears. “I’m going to freshen up, be right back.”

“Hey,” Lavi said, “let me show you the upstairs bathroom. It’s much nicer than the downstairs one. You can even rinse off if you want to.”

“My clothes might be a bit...” Ji looked down and we all got her meaning.

Lavi laughed. “I’m sure that between Melissa and I we can find something to fit while we wash yours. You can go home all clean.”

Ji smiled, “That would be awesome, thanks!” They hugged and then Ji hugged Melissa. Ji kind of walked towards me and I held out my arms. I did the polite, light hug and disengaged quickly. Ji and Lavi left together. As Ji left Melissa let everything go and looked ready to collapse. I went over and put my arms around her from behind.

“How are you babe,” I asked.

“Confused. I was terrified she was going to want to fuck you and then disappointed she didn’t want to.”

“Yeah, I also noticed a tiny bit of territory-claiming there. You normally wouldn’t help me with something as simple as cooking the meat.”

She looked up at me. “You can show me how to make the veggie spring rolls.”

I kissed her. “That I can definitely do. We will let Lavi cut the veggies though.”

“Deal.”

“Well, I want you to know something.”

“What?”

“I’m glad things didn’t go further. I still think it would be a bad idea for her to have sex with me.”

“I notice that you’re not saying you won’t.”

“I’m not good at saying no when in the moment. That’s part of why I decided to live by myself. My ex took advantage of it a lot. Seems I haven’t changed. I’m a bit mad at myself.”

Melissa put her hand over mine. “What do you think of Ji?”

“Honestly, she seems nice. I don’t know her like you do, but I could see getting to know her well enough to have fun with her. Is that what you were asking?”

“Yeah, it was. What about when I was kissing her?”

“That was really hot.”

“No,” she poked at the back of my hand. “How did you feel?”

“Not jealous. It just looked like fun.”

“Good, that’s what it was. I’m starting to like Ji but I don’t think I’m falling in love with her. It doesn’t feel like you or Lavi.”

“But you’re still scared?”

“Yeah. I mean people can’t help it if they fall in love right? What would be worse to find someone else now when we are still so new or later when we’re deep in our habits?”

“I don’t know. There may never be anyone else for us.”

“But I don’t know, you don’t either. But I want us to just be us and I don’t want less of you or Lavi in my life. And then I feel kind of weird, like why would someone hope to not have people they love fall in love? Love should be multiplied and not divided right?”

“Life isn’t as easy as saying something like that, babe. But I can only promise you one thing. As long as you stand by me I will stand by you. As long as Lavi stands by me I will stand by her. I can promise that with all my heart.”

“Thank you.” She snuggled against my arm.

“You know what though?”

“What?”

“Those spring rolls won’t make themselves.”

She giggled, “All right, I forgot goats had two appetites to feed.”