

## Chapter 20 – Wednesday Morning

### *“Purple Haze”*

#### Luis

Will was sitting at lunch in a corner by himself, as usual. I waved to my friends and teammates, then headed to his table and put my tray down.

“Do you mind if I join you?” I asked the hunched over figure staring down at his tray. Not eating. Not moving.

“Whatever.” His voice was as flat and void as a newbie karaoke singer. He didn't look up, nod, nor move.

I took a calming breath and sat down. “I have a Reasonable Request. Would you tell me why you're hiding over here?”

Suddenly, his head jerked up. His eyes glowing red—lasers pointed directly at me. His gaunt, scrawny frame tensed like a hunting bow at max pull, ready to release at any second.

“FUCK YOU! I'm NOT hiding. You bastards think you can do anything...” He launched himself across the table, his body growing to something the size of the Incredible Hulk. His voice screeching...

Just like my alarm clock.

My alarm clock?

Shit.

Dragging myself from this nightmare, I moved to turn off the obnoxious sound generator. Every muscle, joint, fiber, and molecule in my body screamed at me. Had he really hit me in the dream? Damn, it felt like it.

*'Fear is internal,'* said my teachers, through the fog of pink pain, as I began cursing the universe.

“I'm mad!” I screamed. It sounded to my own ears like some growl instead of words. My body screamed back at the injustice of being forced to move. Hell, even my toenails hurt.

*'Anger is fear.'*

“Fuck you!” I groaned to all my teachers living in my head.

*'Your path is not supposed to be easy. Just the path that is yours alone.'*

I moved my legs off the bed with care. Shit, I've had hangovers that felt better than this.

“I just want to be miserable!”

*'Too Bad.'* The alarm screeched again. Had just moving my legs taken 10 minutes?

“NO!?!?” The built up adrenaline from the dream found a release through my fist.

Now I needed to get a new alarm clock. Great.

*'Your choice.'* Great, it's still speaking to me after I killed it.

“What choice?” I was beginning to hear actual words coming out of my mouth. Almost. It was better than a groan. More like a wounded growl.

*'Your choices brought you here. Your choices take you from here.'*

I made the mistake of shaking my head. WOW! A whole new set of muscles I didn't know about.

“DAMN! DAMN! DAMN! FUCK...! Fuck! Fuck...! Shit...” With that I managed to sit up in the bed.

“Are you always so grumpy in the morning?” Through the pink fog, I thought I heard Becca's voice. Couldn't be. I shook my head to clear the cobwebs. MISTAKE! “I'd come over and kiss you, but...” There was that voice again.

“Huh?” I wanted to collapse back on the bed. Death sounded like a good option right now. How had I ever managed to do reps with 475 on the bar?

“I love you...” That voice was back. Small and... scared. Shit.

Choices. Yeah, I said to myself. More choices. I made mine and screwed up my courage. Slowly, I forced my eyes open. The pink fog was replaced by a blinding, headache-inducing glare. Slowly it focused into an image of Becca standing away from the bed. As my vision slowly cleared, more details came into focus. She seemed small. Her eyes were red and tears streaked down her cheeks. Her nose was red and her breathing ragged from a stuffy nose. She was absolutely beautiful to me.

It didn't hurt that she was naked.

I reached out to her. MISTAKE! Thanks muscles. The pink fog was coming back. “I... Ugh... love... Argh... you...”

She took a step back, the flood now released anew. “I'm sorry... I... I... thought... you'd... be happy... to... see me.”

God! More choices. I need to reassure her quickly.

“Becca... Your being here... is...” My body was deprived of oxygen from the stress of sitting up. Breathe, bastard, breathe.

She collapsed.

Choice made.

I jumped up and scooped her up before she hit the floor. In the same motion, I twirled and sank onto the sofa. Okay, fell onto the sofa. My muscles reminding me that I shouldn't be doing that. I ignored them and wrapped her up in my arms, let her fall into her Cave.

Choices.

My next words, and the way I said them, made the choice of which future we had. The strength of my desire for one with her helped push the pain away. The warmth of my love for her eased the stiff joints in my body, and hopefully my mouth.

“Becca...” Now where did that muscle in my right foot come from? “I love you.” My aching chest got wet. She was starting to move and fight against my trembling arms. “I... I hurt... from all the... exercise yesterday. If... I could...” I had to breathe. I'm sure a groan escaped as I did.

“Reject me!” She spat out, through the tears and sobs.

The pink fog completely evaporated.

While somebody might want to patent this cure, I don't think my heart could take it too often.

I tilted her head towards me and pushed my lips onto hers. The warmth, the energy flowed through me, healing me while I tried to push into her lips all my love for her. Our lips stayed closed, but the energy rose. She wrapped her arms around my neck and tried to join our heads permanently. She opened her lips and pushed her tongue against me. I held firm to the chaste kiss. Slowly, I broke our kiss. We did our kissy-break thing with short, light kisses.

“I love you.” My pain gone. My mouth working fine. I put all of my hopes and dreams of a future with her into those three words.

Her eyes searched mine, checking. The hardness of the imagined rejection fading.

“Y-you still w-want me?” She sniffled out.

“More every second.”

“W-What happened?” Her fear was changing to concern, her eyes told me. Something deep inside her shifted, I could feel the change in her energy.

“A weird dream and waking up in a very sore body from my torture session yesterday.” She gently rubbed her hand along the edge of my jar. The warmth of her finger tips pulled the residual pain from my head. “They figured that if I could lift a 275 pound plus Principal, then setting new personal weight lifting records shouldn't be a problem. Since I made that look too easy, they decided that doing reps with high weight loads would lessen my urges.”

“Where do you hurt?” I could feel her energy continuing to grow and sense a new strength within.

“Everywhere, including a few places I didn't even know existed. I haven't hurt like this since my first two-a-days back in middle school.”

“Is... Is... Junior okay?” Concern, shock, fear, disappointment, shyness, fear... The range

and the quickness of emotions passing through her eyes was amazing. I couldn't help myself. Must be the male gene (or lack thereof) that explains what I was going to do.

“Why?” I had the most confused face on I could muster while hiding a smile.

“Well... Er... I... Um... I t-thought... you know...” Her eyes were down, the curtain of hair threatening to close over them. Her skin beginning to turn a nice rosy color.

“Know what?” I said in a fair act of innocence and sweetness. Any second, my side was going to rupture with the built up laughter.

“Y-you know. Guys... Um... w-wake up with... Er...” Rosy to fire engine red in point four microseconds.

“Wake up with... what?” I said softly.

She looked up and into my eyes. Shit! Caught! She can read my eyes as well as I'm learning to read hers.

“You bastard! You're teasing me!” She hit me! She actually hit me! HARD! It hurt! Really!!!

“Yes,” I confessed. Before she could inflict any more damage on my already abused body, I pulled her to me and kissed her as hard as she had hit me. She struggled at first. Slowly, she melted into the kiss. Finally, she started giving as good as she was getting. While our tongues waltzed, our hearts synchronized.

While the kiss was one of pure love, Junior decided to prove he wasn't broken. Becca felt his interest and moaned in pure passion into my mouth. She slowly pulled back.

“Junior still works! Goodie!!”

She actually clapped her hands, her eyes lit up, and she played patty-cake on my chest. If she had been standing, she would be doing the Snoopy Dance. As it was, it was a damned erotic lap dance.

I couldn't help it. I laughed. Roared, actually. Damned that hurt. My diaphragm was in pain. From lifts? Wow!

“You can't go running with Junior like that. What would Jason think?” She was tisking like

I was a little boy. With a sad shake of her head, she slid off my lap onto the floor. Her look and voice reminded me of a teacher. “You need relief.”

“Ahmm...” I think that was my last coherent sound as her lips descended over Junior's crown. Her tongue traced around the ridge with unexpected trips through the slit. Her touch was as gentle as a butterfly and driving me insane. She slowly jacked the shaft while sweetly making love to Junior. What sore muscles? What stiff joints?

Now, this they should patent!

She locked her eyes onto mine. I saw infinite love and raw, wanton desire. Slowly, her cheeks caved in as she sucked more of me into her mouth. A sharp gasp strangled the moan I was about to release as she moved the head to the entrance to her throat. The suction, her lip action, and her tongue were creating sensations I had never felt. Intense. Yeah! That's the... word...

Either seven eternities had passed or I was being a teenager. The familiar feeling in my center started building, moving past the point-of-no-return.

“Oh God! Becca...” Her left hand squeezed my balls, just right. Perfect!

“Shit! I-I'm... Oh God! I'm...” Her eyes told me yes. Do it. Do it now. The building sensation, the tensing forced mine closed. Every muscle tensed. I felt a hundred times stronger than yesterday. She stayed with me as I began vibrating and bucking off the couch. I was seeing stars. My hands killed the cushions with the grip I used when tackling. My toes curled.

I tensed and went rigid and unloaded.

Exploded.

Deconstructed.

The only physical sense I had was waves being pushed out of my body through Junior. I heard her ecstatic groan, muffled as she swallowed. That sensation drove me higher, pulling more from me. Even after the well was dry, she sucked and swallowed. Her hands were now softly running over my abdomen and thighs. I was hyper-sensitive, yet this felt incredible. It kept me on the edge without being painful.

Some century or two later, my whole being collapsed. I fell onto the sofa and became one

with it.

She slowly backed off Junior, cleaning him thoroughly. It was the most tender and loving thing I had ever experienced. I opened my eyes. It took a moment to clear the fireworks and gain focus. Slowly, the most beautiful vision emerged. My Becca, looking into my eyes. She was looking deep into my soul. What I saw in her soul was contentment, pride, joy, and unbounded love.

“Thank you,” she said with a smile. Her voice sounded reverent.

“Umph. Ah... Agh... Er...” The delight twinkling in her eyes brought a face splitting smile to my face.

“You're welcome, My Mountain. I love you.” Her eyes spoke of the infinite beauty of the universe. The love I felt sent a shiver through me. Slowly, I found my voice.

“I love you,” emerged from every fiber of my being, powered by the beating of my heart.

The world was eclipsed as I was engulfed in a fierce hug. Her nipples pushing into me. Her arms around my neck. Her breath in my ear. The warmth, the absolute connection made me realize the depth of love my parents had. What Momma has tried to tell me for years. I gently wrapped her in my arms and let the feeling wash over us, our hearts still beating in sync.

Slowly, I pushed her up to look into her being again. I felt a tear in my eye. I saw hers and knew we were both just watering our love. I laid her back down on my chest, heart to heart. My tears of joy now flowed freely and I felt hers dropping onto me.

Suddenly, my body tensed.

PANIC!

Uncertainty flooded through me as easily as my happy tears a minute ago.

Becca pulled back and looked at me. Worried.

“Sorry, *cara micina*. This is so new to me.”

“Me too.” Her eyes held an intense certainty of the perfection of us that supported and strengthened me.

We both dove back into a hug and our lips met, washing away the uncertainty. A minute, a lifetime. Promises of more. We broke.

“What was that you said?” Her brow furrowed in a question, not a demand.

“When?” Confused? Me? Never!

“When you told me how new this was, you called me something..”

“I really don’t remember after that kiss.” She helped me lose more of my memory.

“Jason's waiting for you.” That was worse than her hitting me.

“Huh?” Have I mentioned my addled mind before?

“My warrior, go prepare yourself for battle. Yet, think of me all day. Think of tonight when we share more of our bodies.”

“I...” Was all I could get out as I tried to process what she'd said.

“And, I love you too, My Mountain.”

With a quick peck and a wink, she let me up to start my morning routine. When I started stretching, I realized I'd never had such an attentive audience before. I hoped my muscles were warning up faster than my face.

“Thanks for the interesting beginning to my morning routine!”

“Trust me, it was my pleasure. I never thought I'd like that. With you, though... And, the taste was something I want again.” She smiled and turned pink at the same time. Junior wanted to rise up and thank her too. I managed to control myself. Somehow.

“I'm going to have to sneak over and wake you up some morning with my tongue.”

“T-That would... be wonderful.” She was now glowing red, yet panting some. “For your information, I didn't sneak. Your mom let me in, after my mom dropped me off.”

“I think I'm in trouble.”



“I think you'll like the outcome.” She turned redder, if possible, and still managed a giggle. Her nipples crinkled. I was so tempted to bend down and give each a kiss. “But, you need to get going. Jason should be at the end of the drive.”

I did bend and gave her a quick kiss. But, I couldn't help it. I bent further and gave each bud a quick suck and lick. I thought I was going to have to scrape her off the ceiling.

“GO!” She screamed as she shuddered.

I was out my private entrance in a flash. I went through my leg stretches again. No sense in taking the chance of pulling something this close to The Big Game. When I came up the driveway in an easy jog, I didn't see Jason. Then a flesh colored bullet went by. He jogged back from his sprint with a big smile on his face. We were in matching uniforms today. Although Jason is shorter and smaller than me, he's still a big guy and well muscled with excellent definition.

“Nice outfit.”

“Seems to be all the rage these days.” We both laughed. “Actually, it feels really neat running this way.”

“Our ancestors thought so.”

“They didn't have a lot of choice. Now, are you going to keep up with me today?”

“You gonna keep up with me in tackling practice?”

“Let's go, slow poke.” With that, he took off. Over his shoulder, “Catch me, you can tackle me.”

I hauled ass after him. I really didn't want to tackle him and break our rising-star running back. Yet, the more he pulled away, came back, ran around me, and took off again, the more I wanted to catch him and slam him into the ground. Yep. Pure testosterone. Ah, teens. Quick recovery.

Most defensive linemen aren't the leading tacklers on a team. Normally, they control the line and clear lanes for the linebackers to make tackles. Yet, I was the leading tackler on our team and in the state. Also, had the most sacks and tackles for loss. Don't give me a tempting target like a running back who is showing off.

I watched him run. Time and time again, he approached me, played his little games, and ran off. I studied his movements, as I do with films of our opponents. It didn't take long to pick up his cues. Plus, I was letting him get closer and closer to me. I could have easily taken him down on his last five passes, but didn't. I'm not about to take down one of my own teammates on a hard surface road. It wouldn't do either of us any good. The way we were dressed wouldn't have helped at all.

We were passing a local park when I struck. I faked a move towards him. He cut and headed closer to the grass. Then I committed my movement to where he was ending up, struck him solidly in the chest with my shoulder and wrapped him up in my arms. I pushed him onto the grass before taking his feet out from under him. At the last second, I resisted slamming into him with all my weight. Still, there was a very satisfying whoosh of air as he hit the ground.

“JESUS!” He managed to get out when he caught his breath.

“You okay, Jason?”

“Shit, you hit East like that and we win.”

“Jason, I pulled up.”

“Shit.”

“Hey, we need you Friday night, not smeared all over the ground in a park.”

“Thanks, I think. Shit.” He rubbed his chest. “What took you so long to get me?”

“I was studying you and your moves. Just like East has been doing all week. Then I waited until we were by the park.”

I helped him up and we went back to our run. The blood flowing rapidly through my system was easing all the sore muscles. We ran about a mile.

“I’ll be glad to tell what I saw. You know East will be keying on it.” I was hoping Jason would be open to learning. We needed him for this year and to carry on our legacy of State Championships.

“Thanks.” I could see in his eyes he wanted to. Good.

“At Practice, then.” We consumed a bit more road.

“I thought you'd be too sore after yesterday to run.”

“Your sister cured me.”

“Huh?” He actually stopped.

“You didn't know she came over this morning?” I'd run by him and came jogging back.

“She did?” His eyes were huge. “My sister?” He looked like he was thinking about trying to take me out.

“Hey, dude, no offense. I've been on enough of an emotional roller coaster this morning.”

“What happened?” He tensely demanded. Hey, I knew what it was like to be a brother to a cute sister.

“You probably have an idea of how sore I was when I woke up this morning.”

“Yeah.” He looked me in the eyes. “Your eyelids probably hurt, right?”

“Bingo. Well... I woke up grunting, groaning, and cursing the gods. All with my eyes closed because of those painful lids. Didn't want to admit existence of the world until I had gotten full out of bed, either. Becca had snuck in to awaken me and took my mood as...”

“You rejecting her. Shit!”

“We got past it, though.”

“How?”

“Jason, that's something I will NOT share with you. Or anyone.”

“Yeah, but... she's my sister!”

“All the more reason not to share it. Look. I respect her. Hell, I'm past falling for her, I'm big time gone. And... I don't talk about what we do. Okay? Or... Do I need to follow through on the next tackle?”

“Dude, if you hurt her...”

I stood in front of him and stuck out my hand. “Jason, same promise. If I ever intentionally hurt her, or unintentionally and then don’t do anything, I won’t fight back. Deal?”

“You’re known as a man of your word. Deal.” We shook.

“Now, before I stiffen up completely, let’s get back to running.” We hit the road again at a brisk jog to warm back up. While we consumed more pavement, I willed my mind to settle and compelled my muscles to get stronger, faster, and more flexible.

“So... You guys are okay now?”

“Yeah. She reluctantly threw me out of my own room to come running with you.”

“My sister? Threw? You?”

“Yeah.” I had to laugh. “She hits.”

“You?”

“Yep. It’s abuse, I tell ya.” Laughing hard and running don’t mix well.

“My sister? Aggressive? Hell, sneaking into your room for a wake up...” His eyes were as large as my mom’s lasagnas and he was starting to blush. He had stopped running. “My timid, vanish in any situation sister?”

“That sounds a bit like the girl I sort of knew before Monday. Definitely not the woman I’m going with now.”

“My sister?”

“Do you mean that incredible human that I’ve gotten to know in the past few days?”

“My sister?”

“Yep. That’s the woman.” I took off running. Finally, I got a lead on a running back and got ahead of him. He kept mumbling something about sister as he easily caught up with

me. He actually tried to tackle me by jumping on my back and wrapping his arms around my neck.

I didn't break stride. I'm not fast. I'm consistent. What's another 200 pounds?

"Damn! I can see why they use you on trick plays as a fullback. Fall down, damn it!" He struggled trying to get me to lose my balance. I think he discovered how thick my neck was when he attempted a choke hold. "Shit! At least slow down!"

"I'd throw your puny ass off, but I wouldn't want to run into Coach for the rest of my life."

He laughed with me and slid off my back. We got back up to speed.

"She says you're real gentle." I could barely hear him he was speaking so softly, looking down.

"What?"

"How? I-I... mean... how do you go from this... well, this!" Using his hands, he exaggerated the size of my body, I think "To being gentle? How do you go from picking up Dr. C to being compassionate about Will?"

"Huh?" That addled bastard is back, again.

"I always turn to physical action first." His voice was small and pain was evident in his face and eyes. He was definitely related to Becca.

"Jason, that's usually my first reaction." Our pace was picking up. I could feel the warmth of my blood nurturing my abused muscles.

"Yeah, but..."

"Reactions are. They just are. Actions count. You have to learn to intercept the reaction before doing damage, then find the right action."

"How?"

"Practice. Like anything. Coaches help, but lots of practice."

"How do you do it?"

“Badly, usually!” His glare gave me a chance to get serious. “My parents got me into meditation practices early. That’s a good first step of becoming aware of yourself. Then T’ai Ch’i, where there exists no move for attack. It’s all about controlled response.”

“Would you teach me?” He wasn’t quite pleading, but something was going on. This was not the right setting. Not the right week. Yet, he was having one of those ‘Oh Shit!’ moments that is the beginning of real change.

“Meditation, yes. It’s an easy practice to start. Matter of fact, I’m working with Becca on it.”

“Hey, thanks for not calling her Bec.” I almost missed a step. We slowed to a fast jog.

I couldn’t help but smile. “No problem. I didn’t know at first that that was your special name for her. To me, she just feels like a Becca.”

“Back to teaching, why not T’ai Ch’i?” I used a bit of road to gather my thoughts.

“If a hundred people work for twenty years, maybe one will master it. I’m not a master, I can’t teach you. My teacher is, though. I can introduce you.”

“Does it work?”

“How many people have you seen my size that aren’t klutzes in everyday life?”

“Well... None. Except you around my sister!” He snorted. I snorted back. “Okay, introduce me and start me on meditation.”

“Done. After this week, okay?” He nodded agreement and we started running hard again. We worked up to a decent pace for both of us.

“Why ‘My Mountain?’”

“She likes my caves.”

“Your... What?” Did he hit a low-hanging limb? Sure looked stunned to me.

“She likes to snuggle into my chest, it’s a safe place for her. She calls it her Cave.” I was grinning.

“Do you have any pet names for her?”

“Yes.”

“So...”

“She hasn’t heard them yet.” I briefly flashed to earlier. Had I let ‘my dear little kitten’ slip out? Well, it sounds better in Italian.

“Why?”

“I haven’t used them yet. When the time is right. Why so curious?”

“I... I’ll tell you later.” He blushed a bit. Must run in the family. “See you at school.”

He headed for his house and I headed towards mine. When I got to my door, I grabbed a jump rope and started working it. Yes, most Mountains can’t jump. Yet, this helped me with agility and balance. Plus, it is a great way to cool down after a run. I was breathing deep and doing a series of easy hand crossovers with alternating feet when Becca opened the door.

She didn’t say anything, but I could see the artist creating pictures. That prompted me to do a Rocky-style finish, spinning the rope as hard and fast as I could, then planting with an arms-over-the-head victory whoop.

“Do that often?” Her breathing was a bit labored, panting, actually. That rosy glow was coming back.

“Jumping rope?”

“Mm-Hm...” Damn, those rubber legs were back, with just one look!

“A few times a week.”

“Damn!” She smiled. It was... sultry? Sexy? Passionate? Hungry? Hell! All of the above and more! Junior definitely noticed and decided to investigate.

She winked, gave Junior a short wank, and said, “You need a shower.”

I took a chance. “Wash my back?”

“Some other time, stud. I have to fix My Mountain breakfast.” She winked, turned, and headed in. I could only hang my mouth open and stare at her ass. Was Rosy ever going to get a workout in the shower. Was that cheating?

“No cheating. Save it for later,” she said while finally disappearing up the stairs.

I did a short form for T'ai Ch'i, only 15 minutes long. Just enough to settle my body. Usually it settled and emptied my mind as well, helped me find my center. I couldn't get Becca out of my mind today. Her eyes and how I fall into them. Her mind and how it intrigued me. Her emotions and how they confused me.

After a long shower, and no cheating, I headed up to the kitchen. My teachers stressed that staying on center was not the goal—impossible, actually. Life was about how quickly and gracefully you came back to center. I could see that Becca was going to help me learn my lessons well! Hell, better than being thrown on the mat.

Of course, she does hit.

As I came to the closed door at the top of the stairs, the giggles of multiple females filtered around it. The sounds of Shostakovich mixed and obscured their conversation. The whispers, shrieks, and cackles served an excellent counterpoint to the piano voicing the melody. My hand hesitated, waiting to see if I could figure out the nature of the estrogen party I was going to walk into.

A grumble from deep within me ended my attempt at espionage. Even if they didn't hear it, I had to eat... Now!

I opened the door.

Imprinted on my being for eternity will be the picture of three beautiful nude women in aprons. Becca was bent over at the waist looking for something in a lower cabinet. Junior really liked that view. Margie was bent over looking for something as well. When had she grown curves like that?

Momma turned and caught my leer. Giving me a wink, she bent, at the waist, and whispered to Becca and Margie. They all giggled and started wiggling their asses at me.

Oh! My! God! I'm in deep shit.



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## Rebecca

I watched Luis stretch and then head up the driveway for his run. Looking around his room, I couldn't resist and dove into his bed and burrowed under the covers. Some of his heat was still trapped in the soft fabric and his scent rolled over me. As my hands found the right places, I thought how I'd like to wake up in this bed every morning.

After a surprisingly quick build and fantastic release, I just melted into Luis's scent. My head was dancing. If my feet had wanted to move, I'd be doing a happy dance. What was the line from one of Luis's songs? Something about excusing me while I kissed the sky? Bend down here, sky!

When my mind returned to the here and now, I flashed on my waking dream. Sorry Scotland, your heather just lost to Luis's covers!

*'Then you'd better get past your insecurities.'*

*'Hi Muse. Enjoy the show?'*

*'Both of them?'*

*'Glad we could entertain you. Now, what should I do about breaking down like I did?'*

*'Just don't do it again.'*

*'Thanks, you're a lot of help.'*

Yet, I did think about it. It was my choice. If I remember, Luis called it my action after my reaction. I did control that. It was time to grow up. It was time to trust Luis. More importantly, it was time to trust myself. I can do this. I have to do this.

After making the bed, cleaning up, I headed up to the kitchen.

Carmella wrapped me in a big hug, sat me down, and joined me for some tea.

"How did it go?"

Oh. My. God! Am I going to have to discuss my sex life...? Whoa! Reaction. What's the right action? I looked at her face and saw... love, a true concern, and caring. There was no judgment. Just empathy. Now I had a working definition of that word.

“He woke up in pain and I took it wrong.” Amazingly, I didn't breakdown, didn't dissociate, didn't flee. I went through the whole episode, less the blowjob. I'm pretty sure she knew something happened, though. Yet, her questions, looks—actions!--spoke only of love, empathy, and... a new working definition—compassion.

As a writer, I'm definitely growing this week. Problem is, who would believe this story?

“Your son has taught me a key lesson. No matter my reaction, I own my actions. I'm tired of being invisible, hidden, small, less than...”

“You'll do just fine.” She patted my hand. “And, remember, it takes time to make a change. Don't berate yourself if you fall back into your old pattern. Just pick yourself up from it and go on. Now, what should we fix that man of yours for breakfast?”

“Man of mine... I like that.” Shivers traveled my spine and I felt a sudden burst of warmth in my chest. Not to mention the effects in my... Luis called it ‘the Center.’

She handed me an apron and helped me plan an Everest sized breakfast for Luis with enough for everyone else. Eggs, ham, potatoes, toast, juices, and other drinks. I knew Jason ate a lot during the season, but he ate like a bird compared to My Mountain.

“Good morning, ladies.” Dr. Contadino—oops, Pietro—cheerfully greeted us when he came in.

“Morning, Poppa.” Margie gave him a hug and a peck as she joined us.

“Good Morning, Love.” Carmella's kiss was... Yeah!

“Well, my other daughter?” He held his arms open. I practically ran to him. I hugged his waist and buried my head in his chest for a moment. Yep, he's My Mountain's father! Nice cave, but not My Cave. I gave him a quick kiss.

“Thank you. And, good morning.. Dad.” He blushed while I felt contentment. I see where Luis gets many things, now.

“Dear, I’m sure you have things to do in your office while your ladies fix you breakfast.” Carmella did that masterfully, her tone and look left him no options but a graceful exit.

“Ah, well... I do need to check on the Chinese markets...” As he left, his expression said staying and watching us would be his first choice. And his second choice. And third...

Carmella shook her head, but had a patient grin. Her love for him was plain. So was her desire. Do I look like that when I look at Luis? Hope so. It’s the way I feel.

“Margie, are you willing to help Rebecca and I tease your brother today?”

“Momma, is the Pope Catholic? Oh, this is going to be fun!”

We plotted strategy, and giggled. We plotted tactics, and giggled. I listened to Carmella, then Margie tell “embarrass” Luis stories, and we all giggled. We cooked what we could ahead of time, and giggled. I could get used to these special moments with other females.

Now that I’ve found it, I’m not letting go.

I saw Luis come back down the drive through the kitchen window. I pulled off the apron and ran downstairs to greet him. By the time I got to the back door, he was jumping rope, of all things. It looked so strange at first. It jarred my notion that it was an activity only for young girls, the movie Rocky notwithstanding. Yet, he did look good. I started to record images for later drawings while I opened the door. Even though I was in artist mode, I could feel the lake building between my legs. His muscles were really pumped. He didn’t jiggle anywhere, except that log and two softballs. Damn, this man turned me on!

“Do that often?” I managed to get out, despite the image of Luis driving Junior into me.

“Jumping rope?” His eyes were going to make me trip over the edge if he kept staring.

“Mm-Hm...” Remember, breathe!

“A few times a week.” Could I last the day teasing? Who cares! The buildup was fun.

“Damn!” I felt my face curl up in a smile, his flush wasn’t because of the workout. I was purring inside when I say Junior begin to respond. I gave Luis a wink with a promise and gave Junior a tender caress.

“You need a shower.” Being in control could be fun!

“Wash my back?” I almost melted at the thought, but kept to the tease.

“Some other time, stud. I have to fix My Mountain breakfast.” I gave him another wink, turned, and put as much runway model sway into my walk as I could. I figured he might be ready to relieve himself. Can’t have that right now. Over my shoulder, I cooed, “No cheating. Save it for later.”

I waited until I was out of sight. My knees felt like buckling. Not from fear. Okay, not completely from fear. This was so far outside my norm, yet I was turned on. Completely.

*‘You’re doing better than fine.’*

*‘Thanks Muse. It’s hard at times.’*

*‘Yes it is!’* The chuckle in my mind left little doubt the hardness she was talking about.

*‘So, this change has its fun moments.’*

*‘Mind blowing.’*

I couldn’t help but laugh out loud. As Luis would say, I roared. Damn this feels good. The stairs were easy to bound up with the new energy I felt. Laughter is better than crying.

“I bet he does a short form today,” Carmella said as I burst into the kitchen. She tossed me my apron.

“Huh?” Call me the Cheri-Bimbo. Now, how do you tie this thing? Yeah.

Carmella hugged me. “He was introduced to T’ai Ch’i through me and Pietro. There are many forms, but one only takes 15 minutes. That’s what we call the Short Form.”

“Ah, thanks.” It made sense. A slow, 15 minute long dance. And then the Mountain coming to the maiden!

“Yeah, he needs to rush so he can beat off in the shower,” Margie giggled.

“Margarette!”

“I told him no cheating with Rosy today.” Carmella and I had talked over each other. All

three of us broke up. We continued to laugh as we executed the breakfast plan and add to our Tease plan.

“You know, *funciulla*... You won’t be that at the end of the day.” Carmella looked softly into my eyes.

“Fun-cella?”

“*Funciulla*. It means young maiden. Pure.” Did it suddenly get REALLY hot in here?

“Ahm... Well... Sounds like a plan to me.” That got us all giggling again. The cooking and plotting continued. Even Margie wanted to tease, mercilessly, her ‘Really Big Brother.’ Carmella suggested the first tease. After she told us, she turned on the kitchen tap real low. When it increased flow on its own, she started the countdown.

“Given how short his shower was,” Margie said wide eyed, “I’d say he didn’t cheat on you. What did you threaten him with?”

“I just asked him not to.” I wanted to burst with pride.

“Wow!” Margie’s eyes got even wider. Carmella was looking at me with... admiration? No, respect. The three of us hugged and then positioned ourselves. I aimed my ass at the basement door, locked my knees, and bent to ‘find’ something on the bottom shelf. Margie bent, not quite as far, but oriented the same.

“Thanks, Rebbecca. This is so cool.”

“Margie, call me Becky, please.”

“No prob, sis.” I melted and kissed her check.

“No prob, sis!” We giggled and practiced our hip wiggle.

“Here he comes.” Carmella, Momma, announced.

The door... didn’t open.

Instead, Poppa entered the kitchen and started to say something. Momma hushed him and waved him back, out of sight of the basement door. Finally, the door opened. Momma bent down.

“His jaw is on the floor. Time to wiggle,” Carmella whispered.

We did. Oh, it felt so naughty! I slowly straightened up, turned, and sashayed up to him.

“Hungry?” I asked. His face hadn’t changed.

“I think we killed him,” Margie giggled.

“What have you ladies done to that poor boy?” Pietro couldn’t keep the laughter out of his voice.

We eventually got Luis’s legs working and sat him in a chair. Then we had a breakfast like I’ve never experienced before. It was fun, friendly, loving, educational, serious, light, engaging... And, I was included. It felt perfect.

“So, the jock is going with the art chick. How does that work with the cliques at school?” Pietro asked.

“Huh?” I think Margie, Luis, and I asked that at the same time.

“The cliques. You know, jocks, nerds, geeks, and such.” He went on to describe them.

“Ah... Not really, Poppa. I mean, as a football player, during the season I hang with my teammates more, but...” My Mountain carefully framed his response. “At lunch, I sit with different groups depending on my mood. This week, it’s the Naked. Next week, whoever joins Becca and me.”

“I guess I was a clique of one!” I couldn’t help it. I was. “Now, hopefully, I’ve joined a clique of two.” I felt a warm, gentle—and very large—hand on my leg. He gave me a loving squeeze.

“No hopeful. It is.” That’s right, My Mountain, make me melt right here. Hmm... I love that feeling of warmth that spreads through me when he says things like that.

“I move between groups all day long, so I guess I’m in all the cliques.” Margie still looked a little confused about the concept.

We talked about it for a while and discovered in our parents’ day, your “position” in school was defined by who you ate lunch with and the activities you were involved in. I think all

of us considered this to be yet another strange story of another time that didn't exist.

I could almost feel Carmella and Pietro thinking that kids just don't understand. Of course school was that way. It was for them, so it had to be for us.

Before long, Luis and I were in the car headed to school. How he folded himself into that small a space, I'll never know. Well, he is the physics guru and should be an expert on folding space! His hand felt so nice holding mine as he drove. The music was interesting, piano only. He explained the works were written by Chopin, something called *The Études*—very difficult compositions used to perfect or show technical skills.

Quite beautiful.

“Sweetie, I know it is a little early to be thinking ‘Rest of Our Lives’ kind of things, but you and I will need to start making college choices soon. You faster than me.” Had I overstepped?

“Hmm... you're right. I've been thinking about it since the discussion with your dad last night. I don't know what you're thinking.” Nope. Good.

“Well, art school, definitely. I've only just started looking. Francesca is helping me put together a list of professors that would help me grow.”

“So, kind of like I'll choose my graduate school.”

“Yep.”

“Do you know what schools?”

“Actually, there are a lot of places I can go. I'm pretty sure I can find something that would be perfect for me wherever you end up.” A flash of uncertainty flew through me. I opened the door and let it go on about its way. Find someone else that wants you!

“I love you.”

“I know. I love you too.” This feels so right. Planning with ‘My Man.’

“We'll find something that works for both of us.” The warm spot grew and consumed me. I leaned over and kissed My Mountain's cheek and laid my head on his arm. The strength of his muscles, the power of his mind, the sensitivity of his soul—

“SHIT!” He yelled as the car jerked this way and that, the brakes squealing, the tires screaming on the road. I screamed as I was thrown into my seat belts.

“Asshole!” He screamed out the window while adding a universal salute. “Bastard ran a stop sign and almost rammed us.”

I couldn't move. From comfort, love... lust! To terror in no time flat. I fought against my throat trying to swallow needed air. My hands came up and tried to put my pounding heart back in my chest.

“Are you okay, Becca?” Just the sound of his voice, his deep breathing calmed me. I found myself breathing in sync with him. Settling.

“I'll be alright, just... rattled.” He slipped his arm around me. Reassuring. Comforting. Reaffirming. I leaned my head against his massive shoulder and just melted into him again.

Reaction. Action. Choices. Yeah!

The rest of the ride was spent in a very comfortable silence, the music and our love washing over me. I could feel the pulse of his heart and it matched my own. Touching him, being with him, it all seemed so right. So... Perfect.

“Where are you going to hang out this morning?” Luis asked as we pulled into the school parking lot.

“The art room. Francesca gets in real early to work on her own projects.”

“I'll meet you there after my workout and much needed whirlpool. Love you.” With a kiss and a hug, the contact was broken. Yet, the real connection was still there. I felt it. Our hearts were bound to each other.

I let Francesca know I was there. She didn't even look over, but I knew she heard me. I pulled out some charcoals I wanted to polish up for my portfolio. Any second, I expected the doubts, fears, and insecurities to come crashing down. Oh, the succubi still lived in my head, but I no longer felt compelled to live their lies.

My hands worked on the sketch while I focused on breathing. In with energy, out with fears.



“Rebecca, that’s amazing,” Francesca said over my shoulder.

“Ma’am?” She’s seen these before. All I was doing was adding some shading.

“There is a lot more emotion in your work now. Does it have anything to do with your young man?”

I pulled myself into the present and looked down at the two figures on the paper. Unconsciously, I had added more than shading and really changed the work. I could feel a much deeper connection between the people.... No, they were lovers now. Intensely, deeply in love and speaking rivers of emotions with just a look and a touch.

“Wow! I didn’t even know I was doing that.” I was aware of something different. What?

“You’ve taken a critical step with your art. Don’t push it away.” Her actions were tentative, as if a wrong move could make ‘it’ vanish.

“How so?”

“Before, you could invite the observer to have an emotion. Now, your art is living that emotion. It is a rare and powerful thing.”

She helped me understand more of the change and made suggestions as to how to keep the growth happening. This I’m going to have to process later.

Then we drifted into colleges. I passed on Luis’s list of possible schools and explained what he was looking for in a school, as I understood it.

“Sounds like his first would be an excellent football program with a head coach to mentor him. Second would be a solid enough physics program to get into the right graduate school.”

“You make that sound simple!”

“He has many talents, but the two he is focusing on (and is exceptional at) have different lifespans. Football is a young man’s sport when you’re playing. Physics will always be there.”

“That makes sense. I wonder why he hasn’t seen that yet. Or, has he?” I went on to explain to her the dinner conversation last night and Luis’s angst. She suggested professors

for me that would fit with most of Luis's plans. All of them, she said, would be good for me since I was far past the learning of the skills phase of art.

"Now, you need someone that will allow you to blossom. Also, someone that will help you present your art to the world, while protecting you until you can handle that world."

"I think I understand." I'm sure my face said anything else, like understand rocket fuels...

"The art world can devour you if you aren't prepared. You need teachers that can mentor you in surviving in that world. *Capisci?*"

I couldn't help a laugh at the Italian and the sudden connections. "Yes, I understand. Or, should I say *capisco?*"

"*Bene!* You're learning."

We went back to our individual projects. With a new insight, I was adding subtle lines and shadings to the charcoal sketches in front of me and seeing in my mind the same distinct changes I could make in the oils I was going to submit that would breathe new life into them.

Breathing.

That, of course, made me think of Luis, which produced that delicious warm feeling in my core again. Thoughts of our time this week and our time to come began swirling in my head and through my body. I could almost feel him covering me, spreading my legs...

"Oh. My. God!!!" That brought me out of my revelry with a jolt! I looked around and saw a wide eyed Rosalee.

"Hi," I said, tentatively. Would the sparks come back? Had I made a mistake assuming? Whoa, girl. Confidence. What is will be. Breathe! *Thanks, My Mountain.*

"That is SO good! I can't... I'm... Well... Wow!" She stared reverently at the sketches in front of me.

I took her in. The complexity of her eyes and the emotions behind them. The lush, inviting lips. The graceful and sensual curves of her neck. The sultry pose she adopted naturally. The fascinating way her breasts flowed into her chest. The rippling power of the muscles under her skin, exposed with every breath she took.

Slowly, while taking in every pore, small hair, and sublime curve, my eyes traveled upwards, locking onto hers. She felt me and drew me into her being when she focused on me. Our lips moved towards each other, drawn by a force beyond our understanding.

The kiss was light, brief, yet full. All encompassing. As powerful, yet as different, as when Luis and I kiss. All thoughts left my head as our lips slowly approached each other again. Eyes hungry. Our tongues made love while our hands began to explore. She eased over my lap, straddling my legs with hers. Our nipples were gently stroking each other. Our hands on each other's boobs keeping them in contact. She suddenly tensed and pulled back enough to look me in the eyes.

“W-We... C-can't...” she exhaled through her panting.

“Why?” Rejection, shame, fear started running through my mind.

“W-What w-would... Luis say?” The desire in her eyes for me was almost as strong as the fear.

“Why don't you ask me,” came his deep voice. I felt the love. Rosalee's eyes rounded and I felt her body tense, ready to spring up and flee.

Before she could, he wrapped us both in a hug. He gave me a quick, but sweet, kiss and a loving smile at Rosalee.

“Sweetie,” I said as calmly as my lust would allow me, tripled since he showed up. “What do you think about me smooching with Rosalee?”

“Are you being forced?”

“Nope.”

“Do you need me to rescue you?”

“Nope.”

“Then I'm cool.”

“B-But... Why?” Her eyeballs are going to fall out of her head if she opens any more.

“The simple answer is I love her.”

“Wha... What’s the not simple answer?” She was recovering. I wanted to hear it too, but I think I knew what he was going to say.

“Since I love her, her happiness is crucial to me. It is only my fears which would make me upset. Since I love her, then it is my job to banish my fears. I... It’s... Well... It’s more complicated than that.”

She looked at him, then me, and back at him. Slowly turning back to me, she asked, “What would you feel if I kissed Luis?”

“I would hope I’d feel joy for you both, since I know how wonderful it is to kiss you both. I’m just learning about my fears. This week, I’ve taken great strides in facing them. Hopefully, I’m getting past them.”

Her hands slowly encircled his neck and pulled him to her. Just before their lips met, both closed their eyes. A twitch of desire started inside me, threatening to take over.

*‘That is so hot!’*

*‘God, isn’t it, Muse. I want to join in.’*

*‘Give them a minute to explore each other.’*

*‘WOW!’*

The twinge was gone. Instead, I felt my love for Luis skyrocket. I also felt a deepening and growing of what Rosalee and I started yesterday. When they pulled back, I moved my lips forward and caught both of theirs. Six lips, three tongues all joined and explored. There were hands all over me and mine were everywhere. The raw strength and power of Luis, the gentle softness of Rosalee over firm muscles. Lithesome. All that existed was the physical touch, the synchronization of our hearts. The beginning of... Something. What, though?

“WOW!” All three of us managed when we came up for air. A quiet contentment settled over us. Each taking turns diving into the eyes of our partners or feeling the joy when the other two meshed.

“God, I hate to cut this short, but the other Nakeds are waiting to make their

Commitments.” She sweetly touched each of our cheeks and followed with a brief touch of lips.

I packed up quickly. None of us wanted to talk, trying to prolong the enchanted moment. With smiles, touches, quick kisses, looks of promises, and lots of questions on our minds, we left the art room and headed to the front doors of the school. I was ensconced between Luis and Rosalee. That felt... delicious? Right? Perfect!

Margie spoke up as soon as we arrived to let us all know that the school had given us all the three lunch periods this week to use for planning. Then we each stood in front of Luis and made our promise to him of what we were willing to commit to for this project. For some, like me, it was a simple “whatever I can contribute to make it succeed.”

When we were done, Luis told us what the two main goals where—make the Naked program better and prevent another Will from happening. Then he talked about standards for the team. Simple things that all centered around communicating. He offered to explain more at our combined lunch, since other students were beginning to arrive in droves. This was a good thing, as I was still reliving him and Rosalee in my very core.

Once again, the group hug and Team declaration. I hugged Rosalee, almost not wanting to let go. Luis and she hugged, but it was more casual. Friendly, sexy even. But not the hug of lovers.

Then we were off to Homeroom. Luis and I held hands, stopping for requests, which were all reasonable. At least I thought so at the time!

“Sweets, how do you feel about Rosalee?” I asked Luis. Am I going to answer that for myself?

“Becca, I like her. I don’t feel for her what I feel for you. How do you feel?”

“Confused. No... Well... Yes...”

Our talk was interrupted by announcements. I half listened as I let my thoughts process the morning. I knew where I was with Luis. It grew by leaps and bounds this morning. Then there was Rosalee. I felt a very strong pull towards her. How would she fit? Was it just exploration or—

“We can use all the support we can get. I’m glad they’re encouraging attendance at the games.” He tensed, then slightly relaxed. “The Pep Rally should be fun.”

Talk about shifting gears! There was something in the announcements about all that. His tone sounded different, though.

“You seem worried about East.”

“Just getting prepared.” I could feel a growing... Hardness?

“Jason calls it ‘getting on his game face.’” Luis nodded. “What’s Media Day?”

“It’s a chance for reporters to interview us and get our opinions of the game. Plus, sometimes, college coaches or members of their staffs show up to meet potential players. Today, I understand, we might have some excitement. Paul Rogers is going to sign his letter of intent.”

“He’s the quarterback?”

“Yep.”

“What’s he signing?”

“A commitment to play for a specific college. He hasn’t told us which one, so we all get to find out today!”

“Should be interesting. Can I come?”

“I think you’ve already proven that.” I hit him and tried to look stern and upset. His outrageous cries of abuse made me lose it.

The bell rang and we got up still chuckling. We held hands while we headed towards the door.

“Hey, Luis! Some chick named Susan was looking for you this morning,” someone said as they entered the classroom. I couldn’t see who for all the people converging at the door.

\*\*\* End of Chapter \*\*\*

Coming soon : Part III (Wednesday) - Chapter 21 – “Clarity”