

## 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, Rebbeca. 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 Nakedes. 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. *Capisi?*”

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. Litesome. 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 Nakeders 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 were—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 \*\*\*



## Chapter 21 – Wednesday Morning

### *“Clarity”*

**Luis**

You know, in football, they call a penalty for piling on.

Susan?

Where’s the ref? He’s an out-of-towner, that’s where he is. It is a given in football that out-of-town refs are a bit biased—the wrong way.

So, here I am. Still trying to wrap my mind around being with Becca. Pondering Becca and Rosalee. Then the three-way kiss we shared. Not to mention the Naked Program, Will, and, oh... East in two and a half days. Throw in football scholarships, college, the future. Will my car start in the morning? What is bugging Jason...? Now, Susan. What did she want?

I almost thought it. Caught myself. I learned my lesson in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It was the last game of the season. We were ahead by four points. On a goal line stand as the clock was running out, I ended up on the bottom of the pile. My face down in a muddy puddle. At least eight other people on top of me in various forms. I actually had said to myself, *‘It can’t get any worse than this.’*

Murphy has really good hearing. Right about the time I was wondering if I could grow gills, someone landed on my hand. With their cleats. Hard. Plus, the other team scored and won.

I can still see the scars, faintly. The broken bones healed. All my fingers work, as well as they did before—mostly. The lesson about not tempting Murphy lives on. Burned into my being.

I wasn’t going to say it. I banned the thoughts from my mind. I prayed that it was

enough.

Slowly, I came back to the moment. Becca's hand in mine. Her sweet, adorable, lovely face looking at me. Her eyes asking the question, *'What does she want?'*

I shrugged my shoulders and gave her a quick kiss. I think to reassure myself more than her. Then we moved through the funnel of the door and into the cauldron of the hall. I was praying the whole time I could shrink about a foot and not be so noticeable.

We had just broken the kiss and had been temporarily separated by requests, when Susan appeared from nowhere. She scanned the crowd, then approached me.

"Well, since your partner isn't around," Becca was behind me at the time, actually leaning her back against me. "I'd like to ask you out for Saturday."

Color me stupid. "Erg... I can't, Susan."

"Do you already have plans?"

"Nothing firm, yet."

She put her hands on her hips. "Well, then, what's the problem?"

"I've kinda hooked up with Rebbecca this week."

Cocking her head to the side. "Anything formal?"

"Not yet."

"So. What's the problem?"

"Susan, I appreciate the offer. I can't, though." I could feel Becca squirming behind me. Obviously getting very excited. Susan edged closer.

"I'm better for you than that art freak." I felt Becca tense behind me.

"Art freak?" I managed to get out. Becca's hand gently ran over my butt. "I'd have to say a very talented and gifted artist."

That got me a loving squeeze. Is the cavalry coming to my rescue or what? I have no idea what to do when a female shows her claws other than to run. The male of the species is just not equipped to handle them.

“Yeah, and what does a big, strong football player like you need to know about art?” Was she actually cooing? Is this what they mean by vamping? Where is the ref and his yellow flag?

The sweet bundle of loveliness behind me began quaking then tensed. I could faintly hear her gasps and then the moaning sigh as she relaxed. Before I could say anything to Susan, Becca thanked the person for the orgasm and gracefully slid under my arm, facing Susan.

“Well, I’d say he appreciates fine art and wants to explore it further. Plus, I like to have strong, virile models around.” She squeezed me with the arm behind my back and then patted my chest.

I think I know what the process of a supernova looks like now. Susan’s eyes collapsed and she tried to suck all the mass and energy of the Universe into her being. Then her eyes exploded, throwing all that energy back out to create havoc and chaos.

“At least I know what to do with a hunk like him.” I wonder if they’re going to start pulling each other’s hair and trying to gouge out eyeballs?

“I know enough to swallow, like when I woke him up this morning.”

“When you... WHAT?”

“Let’s go sweetie, we’re going to be late to class.” Becca turned us, gracefully I might add, and started moving us down the hallway, leaving the remnant of a dead star, spluttering energy aimlessly.

Had I just witnessed this allegedly shy, retiring—no, retreating girl just zap another girl verbally in a cat fight? As I was trying to wrap my head around it, I managed to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

“I don’t mind you playing around and having fun, even falling in love. Just be choosy, okay?” She gave me a hug.

“Er...” Maybe it is the effect of intense gamma rays.

“My Mountain, just go with it. Okay?”

“Erg...” Lord only knows the number of particles that went through me during the supernova. That must be it.

“Strong silent type! I love it. I love you.”

“Er...” Is that Mission Control? “Ah... I love you too.”

She actually escorted me to my next classroom. Calculus. Yeah. Pretty numbers and symbols. I can focus on that instead of the scattered thoughts in my head. I’m sure I made noises in response to the requests being made, because there were hands other than Becca’s on Junior.

“See you after class, okay love?” She gave me a quick, discreet kiss as she said that, then moved gracefully through the crowd to her class. Somehow, I made it to mine and folded myself into the seat. These school chairs and desks just weren’t made for someone my size. They were better than the airlines seats I’ve wedged myself into over the years. Not much, though.

As I got out my notebook for class, the thoughts just kept rolling on. The airline seats reminded me of my travels this summer. Not only did the family do a couple of countries in Europe, I had traveled to one football camp in Los Angeles and made unofficial visits to Boston, Atlanta, and Austin.

I tried to remember anything about the art departments at the various schools. Then it hit me that I wouldn’t know good from bad. I knew that a few of the schools I was looking at had excellent music conservatories either on campus or nearby. And music has to do with East, how?

“Luis?” Mr. Singh’s voice penetrated the play maps in my head.

“Ah... Sorry sir.”

“That is quite alright Mr. Contadino. I do understand that the Program week to be a distraction for the participants. More so on a Wednesday than any other day. It would be a most fascinating study.” His sing-song accent wasn’t hard to understand and

actually quite pleasant to listen to.

“I-I’m sure it would be, sir.”

“You have had no problems with simple integrals thus far, have you?”

“No sir. I’ve been using them for a couple of years. I did enjoy learning the history and basis behind them, though.”

“Good. Good. Most outstanding. This week, we will cover rotating an integral around an axis. In other words, double integrals. Do you feel comfortable?”

“Yes sir. I do. Not until we get to logarithmic and trig integrals do I have problems.”

“Most excellent. Then your program distractions will not impact you this week. I will refrain from calling on you.”

“Ah... Thank you, I guess.” He went back to the board and started showing rotating a simple integral about the Y-axis. Just like East is going to try to rotate around our defensive line. I need to make sure the outside linebackers play their assignments and not get sucked into fakes.

I wonder how many assignments I have messed up this week. It couldn’t have been too many or I would have had notes from my teachers.

Notes. Maybe I should write something for Becca. A poem? Hell, I’m not a poet. I could write her an equation!

What are all the variables I need to look at when selecting a college? I’m assuming that most of them would want me, at least academically. I know quite a few wanted me athletically.

I haven’t seen my T’ai Ch’i teacher this week. Did I need to?

I need to breathe.

As soon as I said it, my body started a relaxing, focusing series of deep breaths. Ah, all I had to do was remember to start it! My body knows.

In. Feel the rush of rejuvenating energy flow through my Crown and into my Center. Hold. I hope the refs will be watching holding. East is famous for it.

Out as slowly as in. Push up from my Center, pull the built-up toxins from my toes while pulling in grounding energy from the Earth. The painting on Becca's easel—  
WOW!

Hold. Repeat. Just like my lessons in school and in T'ai Ch'i. Repeat, repeat, repeat. Why we run plays over and over in practice.

Breathe.

Let the energy in my Crown pull me up. Let the Earth ground my feet. Relax into the energy flow, like I relax into a Becca hug.

Breathe.

Let the thoughts go without engaging. The soft acoustic guitar of John Meyer drifted through my head.

Breathe.

Let the sounds become just that—sounds. Don't label them. Don't name them. Just let them flow through you. The music flowed until it became background.

Breathe.

Relax into the chair while letting the energy flow naturally. Become seated with the chair. Let go the chattering mind.

Breathe.

Accept the ringing of the bell. Know that it is time to become aware around you. Engage without surrendering again.

I packed up my stuff and noticed that I had actually taken some notes. So some of the class had filtered in. I felt calmer. Not completely centered, but calmer.

I headed towards the door. Time for Physics.

Not three feet from the door, I had my first request. I smiled, gave permission, and a sweet little thing wrapped her hand around Junior. He was very pleased. I actually found myself enjoying just feeling and not giving into the chatter in my head.

I scanned around the hall and didn't see Becca. Given the number of people changing classes, I wasn't surprised. Yet, you'd think a beautiful naked girl would stand out.

Every time I took another step towards her class, another request was made. Wasn't the novelty of the Program supposed to wear off by the third day? I guess the disruptions of yesterday delayed it. I looked down at one point and counted four small hands playing with Junior and two playing with his friends. At least that many hands were rubbing my butt and countless number were stroking the muscles of my arms, legs, chest, and back.

I gave into the feelings and just drifted with them. Every chance I got, I took another step down the hall. The girls were all very polite, asking before touching and looking me in the eyes for answers. Yet, I really wasn't engaging with the person. How should I?

I filed that question to tackle when there wasn't so much stimulation.

The door to the classroom for physics appeared long before the requests ceased. While I wasn't in danger of cumming, Junior was pretty pumped up. Mr. Thomas's class was one place I doubted I'd ask for relief.

"Ladies, I need to go to class now."

"Aww... Just a few more strokes!"

"We can make you cum if you want."

"Please, just a minute more!"

"Mr. Contadino, care to join us for class today?" Mr. Thomas was eyeing Junior the way the girls were. With a chorus of disappointment, the hands disappeared and I found a seat. "Do you need relief?"

"No thanks, sir." I settled in and tucked Junior under the desk, got out my notebook, and prepared to take notes. Breathe, boy. Breathe. I calmed and slipped right into my

center. The first time today. You know it when it happens. The world shifts. You feel connected, completely. The energy just flows. The roots grow from your feet down to the center of Earth.

Physics was... Physics. We worked with the Newtonian gravity equations and dove into Einstein's view to add relativity to the mix. While he was explaining gravity lenses and drawing pictures on the board, a picture started to build in my head. The planets were key considerations. The star light was the different paths I could take. Comets, asteroids, solar winds, and debris were distractions.

I could see there were many paths. And, yet, those paths bent, joined, and mixed. Suddenly, I grasped that the first few steps would allow me to see more, without closing any of my paths. As long as those steps were in the general direction of where I felt pulled.

Undergrad was about football, with enough of a basis in physics to get me to the next step. Later. Football was my path now. Becca was my path now.

Soon, we needed to really talk so I could learn about her choices.

At the same time, some of the things I was thinking about for college no longer made sense. It was time to focus on schools that would be in the top five in football consistently over the next five years. All of them had talked to me. All of them seemed eager. I still had four official visits to make. Which of those schools would have a good art school?

I could find my way, now. I knew how. All I had to do was keep the fears and doubts at bay. Stop from losing my head.

In other words, get my ass back on Center!

I wonder how I missed Becca during passing period. Miss her I did. In a little over 48 hours, she's taken possession of my heart. I've given it willingly.

The tigress that showed herself this morning. Wow! Where did that come from? Here I was hoping for the cavalry and I got something better. Becca. The new, improved model. Damn! She hit Susan as hard as I hit offensive lineman, and she did it without pads! Plus, she's as complex as cosmology, wrapped in the soul of an artist. She's beautiful. She's wonderful. She's... WOW!



As class drew to a close, Mr. Thomas assigned problems calculating the bend of light around various masses—gravity lenses—as homework. Simple now. Plus time to work on my own homework.

Out into the teeming masses, again, to find Becca and head to our long lunch/planning session.

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## Rebecca

Okay, who is this pod person occupying my body?

*‘Maybe the pod person has just surrendered and given you your body back!’*

*‘Could be, Muse. Could be.’*

My plans this morning, almost destroyed because I didn’t understand how sore—and grumpy—Luis was going to be. That got back on track, but the collapse...

Just don’t do it again, my Muse had said. Yeah. Well... I’ll do my best. Then Rosalee this morning. Oh. My. God!!

Then, just now, leaning back-to-back with Luis while Rashad, from my art class, gave me a nice little orgasm. Did I really say that to Susan? Yep!

So much to think about.

Just as I was walking into biology, Ms Carlisle stopped me.

“Rebecca, given how your Program week has been going, please take your normal seat and I’ll give you a lot of space today. Okay?”

“Thank you, Ms Carlisle.” She winked at me and patted my arm.

“Wednesday is ‘adjustment’ day, you’ll need the time.” I returned her smile with a nod of my head and went to my seat. I guess it is adjustment day, kind of like when Daddy

adjusts a rock in the yard with a sledgehammer.

When class began, she kept her promise and made it a review session. Since I was ahead in the class, I didn't feel bad about zoning out.

I sat and waited for the shakes to start. I was expecting the overwhelming desire to retreat and hide. It was my normal behavior for the past five years. Why wasn't it happening?

Did just saying I wasn't going to do it any more really work?

I let some boy bring me to orgasm in the hallway. It was a nice one. Not howl-at-the-moon and shaking-earth strong, but a nice one. He had requested to touch my... pussy. Okay, I can still say it. Not cunny. Pussy. While he was touching, I was thinking about Luis's bed, his... cock—I can say that too—in my mouth, and drinking his cum. I started to get more and more turned on.

The feeling of squirming against My Mountain while getting off was incredible. Yet, shouldn't I feel guilty? It wasn't him getting me off. But we did share it.

Susan. I can't believe she was hitting on him. I guess she hadn't seen me at first. Then her attack. Art freak? I guess I marked my territory, not with Luis's cum, but with words.

What all has changed this week? Other than walking around nude. And, gaining a boyfriend. It would seem my art has taken a turn for the better. But, I'm not writing at all. I haven't even thought about writing since Monday morning. That is way out of the norm for me.

I picked up a pen and opened my writing notebook... Okay. Write.

Any time now.

Ahm... Any time now.

The insolent blank page just stared at me. Unblinking. Mocking me.

My hand started moving.

*The soft wind swept through the hills as the clouds played tag with the blossoms of spring. In the distance, the sounds of the village...*

I zoned. Moving into that place where my characters live. Into the world where they let me observe and listen, hopefully catching their spirit. The words flowed onto the paper.

The bell marking the end of class startled me. I did a quick scan of the notebook. Ten full pages of writing in less than an hour. Nope, that old part of me was not dead.

Good.

Even better, what I had written felt right.

Now, the painter/writer who has discovered love and sex needs to get her ass to her next class. I packed up and started towards the door.

“Rebecca?” Ms Carlisle called.

“Yes ma’am?” I couldn’t have knocked that smile off my face if I had tried.

“Feeling different?”

“Very.”

“I take it from the smile that this is a good thing?”

I gave a little laugh. “Yep. A very good thing.”

“Good for you. Come see me if you have any questions, though. Or doubts.”

“Oh, I’m sure I will. Thanks.” With a nod of my head, I headed out the door.

At least I made it outside before the first request. Some boy with a camera I didn’t know wanted me to pose for him. He took a couple of pictures while making suggestions. He actually made me feel good about myself.

“If you give me your email, I’ll send you copies.”

“Thank you, I’d like that.” I realized I really would and I wasn’t embarrassed.

Another step and the requests for touching started. I managed to get all the way to my English class without stepping over the orgasm cliff or running into any walls. It was pleasant, yet a little annoying, because I missed Luis.

I so wanted to see him. Hold his hand. Give him a little kiss. Just be around him. It wasn't to be. I'll see him next period, though. We've got that long lunch together.

Oh, Rosalee will be there too! Goodie!

I made it to class with seconds to spare.

"Rebecca, do you need relief?" Mrs. Richardson asked.

"No, not today, thank you." I loved this class. It was one of the few that I had actively participated in before. I had handled all the required reading years before, so all I had to do was brush up and then expand my knowledge of each of the writers.

Not many have patience with 19<sup>th</sup> century English writers, as witnessed by having only ten people in this class. I loved the stories, yet wading through the archaic language could be challenging at times.

"Very well, let us begin. We're going to move beyond Dickens today and begin a discussion of the Brontë sisters. Rebecca, would you like to start us off?"

"Yes ma'am. The Brontës, while prolific writers, starting at a very early age, didn't have much success publishing until later in life. A poetry book, their first publication, only sold two copies..."

And the discussion began. *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey* all achieved success, yet two of the sisters died shortly after publication. Only Charlotte lived long enough to publish more. It was her unfinished novel, *Emma*, that we focused on.

Class flew by. When the bell rang, I felt... High. No other way to describe it. I wanted that feeling again. And again. All from engaging and actively participating.

I quickly gathered my stuff and headed out the door.

"I have a request." I'd know that deep, rumbling voice anywhere.

“Only if it is reasonable,” I giggled.

“I’d like to escort you to lunch, my sweet Becca.”

“Not only is that reasonable, kind sir, it is desired.” His very large hand swallowed my offered hand. A quick kiss and a loving smile for each other, we headed towards the cafeteria.

“Sorry I missed you between classes.”

“Me too. The requests started as soon as I left biology and didn’t stop until I was to my English classroom.”

“Same here, from Calculus to Physics.”

“Were they all reasonable?”

“So far.”

“What about Susan’s request?”

“Erg...”

“My, we’re articulate today.” I really like this teasing game.

“Ahm... Er...”

I couldn’t help a little giggle. “It’s alright, My Mountain. You’re just not used to women fighting over you.”

“You’re right about that!” I looked over to catch his blush.

“Did it give your ego a boost?”

“No. It confused me more than I was already this morning.”

“Still confused?”

“Let’s just say I have a lot of things to work on, but I’m feeling a lot more centered now.” He paused for a second. “What...”

I tried to hide a smile with a serious, concerned mask. I could feel what he was going to ask. Yep, teasing is fun. “What about what?”

“Hmm... W-What happened with Susan this morning?”

“What do you mean?” Damn, this was fun watching him sputter and blush.

“I, um, s-saw a different you.”

“No, you saw the real me. I’ve been hiding too long. Not going to do that anymore. Still love me?”

He looked me in the eyes and a shiver went through me. My legs got weak. “Yes, I do. I think I like the real you. No.... I love the real you.”

“Good.” I thought for a few seconds. Teasing was nice, but we had something more important to deal with. “I’m glad you do, because now it is time to start putting on your game face for Friday.”

Okay, add ‘double take’ to the list of words and phrases I now have good mental pictures of. “Yeah, you’re right.”

“Damn straight I am. I don’t want you getting hurt because your mind isn’t in the game.”

“What will that do to us?”

“You getting hurt? A lot.” I couldn’t help laughing at him. He gave me a mock frown. “Sweetie, I understand. As long as we still have snuggle and kissy time, no problems. Maybe even a little more—or a lot more!”

He growled. Like an angry grizzly bear. And set his face in this scowl. Yet, I could see in his eyes laughter.

I couldn’t help but laugh. “That’s your game face? I think you can do better than that!”

“Okay. For real.” We stopped walking. He relaxed.

I mean, he relaxed. From the position he was standing, he could move in any direction without having to relax any muscles. His face relaxed, yet his eyes turned to... That I'm going to have to think about. He was seeing everything, he focusing on nothing—looking through, not at.

This was a man you did not want to try to get by. A shiver ran down my spine, hoping he would never aim that look at me.

I looked around the crowded hallway to see reactions of others. I saw Susan turn and head the other way—rapidly! Others were instinctively giving him a wide berth. I briefly saw Rashad's face in the crowd. His naturally dark complexion turned ashen gray.

“Wow!” I managed to whisper.

Slowly a smile appeared on his face and his entire being changed. “Yeah, wow. This morning, I was scared shitless that I couldn't center enough to be able to do that.”

“Well, let's just keep you centered until Friday night!”

“No, let's keep me being able to get back onto center. Forever.”

“Deal.” He put his arm across my shoulders as I wound mine halfway across his back. I still needed more arm.

“Now, let me shovel some calories into this body. It's been a long morning.”

“And, we need to plot a little revolution with the other Naked.”

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

**Note:** The title of this chapter comes from John Meyer's song *Clarity*, which can be found on YouTube and [www.last.fm](http://www.last.fm) (a great online music source).

## Chapter 22 – Wednesday Lunch

### *“Sultans of Swing”*

#### Luis

The feeling of Rebecca’s arm around my waist, at least as far as it could reach, was better than almost anything I’ve ever felt before. Okay, honesty with self—the best so far! I can’t believe that Becca got me to show my game face. I think I scared a few people off. That’s fine, I could stand a trip down the hall without being pawed at.

That lasted two steps before the requests started.

‘I’m Luis Contadino and I’m naked in school,’ I thought to myself.

*‘I’m so-and-so and I’m naked in school. Blah-blah-blah...’* When we became aware of the Program, everyone was looking up things about it. Amazing the number of journals that have been published online, aside from the official sales pitches. Many have that line. Bet they can’t say they’ve got such a beautiful, intelligent, talented lady walking with them!

We separated as requests were made, but stayed within eye contact. When we got a chance to take a few steps, our hands found each other. Finally, the bell rang and the stragglers headed off to class and we had the hallway almost to ourselves.

I should have predicted it. She started skipping and swinging our hands.

*“We’re off to see the Nakers, the wonderful Nakers of West.”* She sang, not too badly, either.

*“The Wizard of Oz? That I never would have predicted.”*

“Yep. I even have new lines I’m trying to work in.”

“Can I hear them?” Addled brain. Yep.



*“Because, Because, Because... Because of the wonderful cock he’s got.”* She started giggling while stroking Junior.

“Erg...” Smooth Luis, smooth. Such the articulate wit we are.

“Well, you do.” Junior was about to make the floor slippery thanks to her wonderful hand.

“Er...” I think I found the same low branch Jason had discovered this morning.

“Poor baby. I won’t tease you any more. Well... Not too much.” Another bout of giggles.

“Thanks.” I managed to draw it out. My stunning wit and repartee, don’t you know. Fortunately, the lunchroom approach-eth.

All I got in return was another bout of giggles and being dragged down the hall by a bouncing, naked female. Damn, her ass looked wonderful. Perfectly shaped, from my perspective. Of course, being the expert that I am on bare asses...

Not!

Yet...

We made it into the cafeteria line and I had to wait a couple of minutes as they prepared my special meal.

“Sweetie, what are we waiting for?” My Beautiful Becca asked.

“My training table meal.”

“Huh?”

“Trust me, it’s not better food, just a lot more of it.” The food service folks passed my tray over to me then. I thanked them and turned to see Becca’s eyes getting big as she examined it.

“What.... No, I won’t even ask what it is.” Her nose turned up slightly.

“I did ask what it was once. Better that I don’t know. Plus, lots of ketchup and hot sauce... well, it becomes sort of edible.”

“How many calories?”

“More than a human should consume in one week, except really big athletes,” came Dr. C’s voice from behind us. “See what happens when those big guys get older.” He showed us his tray with a chef’s salad and some strange dressing.

“I don’t think I could duplicate the color of that dressing, thank God.” Becca said, as if to herself. Dr. C and I both cracked up. My Beautiful Becca became Blushing Becca.

Getting himself under control, and not looking at his tray, Dr. C said, “Luis, if you don’t mind, I’d like to join the Nakedes for a while.”

“Please, Dr. C, you are more than welcome as far as I’m concerned. Are you going to join us... all the way?” I put on my best innocent smile. The same one I give quarterbacks when they come to the line. The one that says, ‘I’m not going to eat you for lunch, honest.’

He stopped for a second, got a real thoughtful look.

“Good for the goose...,” said Becca.

“There is that...,” he looked internally for a few seconds. “Let’s sit and talk about it. Since you’re working on improving the Program, this fits.”

Tim and Shirley had already claimed a table. We all exchanged greetings and settled in.

“Dr. C asked if he could join us for a bit. I’ve tentatively said yes, but want to hear from everyone once they’re here.”

“No problems,” Tim said.

“I think it’s a good thing,” Shirley said with her editor-in-chief voice. I could see her running a seemingly chaotic newsroom with great authority, extracting the best from each person.

The conversation flowed easily as the Nakedes gathered. I was glad to see that no one

was intimidated by having Dr. C at the table, not even the freshmen. Everyone made an effort to include him in the group and he readily contributed, acting more as a peer than an authority figure.

The whole time, my *Micina* had her hand on my leg, slowly tracing her nails on my inner thigh with the lightest, yet most intense pressure. If I had to stand, everyone was going to be quite aware of the effect. Junior wasn't waiting for me to stand, though, and was beginning to act like a periscope.

Suddenly, Becca squealed and quickly pulled her hand from my thigh leaving some definite lines.

Ready to fight, I turned... to see Rosalee bent over Sweet Becca's shoulder. She was cupping her breasts and nibbling on the ear away from Dr. C.

DAMN!

Definite periscope!

Somehow, I managed to pull my eyes away from the erotic display and tried to assess how Dr. C was handling the blatant PDA. God, I wanted to learn how to keep my face that inscrutable as he "observed" something on the other side of the cafeteria. More amazing, to me, was how he controlled the energy in his body. No indication that anything was going on right in front of his eyes.

Becca's hand returned to my thigh and sought out Junior while Rosalee draped herself over my back, attempting a reach around. This was more than the circuit breakers in my teenage mind could handle. Junior was going to explode any second...

"Ahem..." rumbled across the table in Dr. C's deep voice. Instead of guilty reactions, there were giggles, sweet kisses on my face, and two definite squeezes that almost added special sauce to my meal.

"Are you okay, sweetie?"

"Ergh..."

"I think we killed him, Becky."

“Er...”

“He doesn’t appear to be in full possession of his mental faculties.” Dr. C’s bass voice floated up to my cloud.

“Erg...”

“What did you ladies do to this poor man?” Paul Templer asked, a chuckle escaping halfway through.

“Us?” Rosalee and Becca responded simultaneously. I swear I could hear batting eyelashes. Then... then, they giggled.

Apparently, all the Nakers had arrived and were quite enjoying my Moment. The comments and laughter continued, unabated, as only high schoolers can manage. And I thought the locker room was... course? Graphic? Ribald? They ain’t got nothin’ on Naked People At Lunch.

“Breathe!” My sweet whispered in my ear. As soon as I finished the first full cycle, I felt myself coming back on center. I turned my head and gave her a wink and a smile. A few more deep breaths and I was ready. The room returned to normal. All the sounds of a busy lunchroom. Conversations, squeaking chairs on the floor, laughter, and kids just being kids. Music from half a dozen sources added to the texture of the room. The only one I could pick out sounded like some classic Dire Straits, ‘*Way on downsouth way on downsouth London town*’.

“Dr. C, would you like a moment to finish your...,” I waved my hand towards the mass of wilted green covered in puke orange on his plate, “Or, would you like to address us now?”

“Luis, when I was playing basketball seriously, and I was younger, I could eat like you do. Now, I have to be a bit more prudent.” His eyes had a smile, no matter how serious his voice sounded. “Why don’t we enjoy our food, first.”

“And whatever that is!” Fingers pointed and the words echoed around the table.

“I notice that your meal is a level or two above the normal sized servings of this establishment.”

“This is one of those times it pays to be a football player.” I looked down at my plate and added, “Except the taste.”

While we ate, the conversation stayed light. Dr. C did participate and added a few choice tales from his youth. His powers of observation did startle us, as he was up on all the latest gossip and goings on.

“Dr. Cavanaugh,” Margie started, “our family had a conversation recently about cliques in high school. It doesn’t seem like we have the same problems as my parents. Why is that?”

“Are you referring to social status being related to your clique?” Dr. C asked.

“I think so.”

“That’s a complex subject. The simple answer is we’ve changed, as a society, in our view of what is important. It used to be the social status was defined by sports, perceived beauty, and the wealth of your parents. Of course, that was about the same time that the educational system in this country was going down the tubes.” He really should be in a classroom. “Well, the educational system was fixed and in the process, success in school became important. That, plus many changes in society, I think, destroyed the old system.”

“But, we have cliques today in school,” Shirley observed.

“There will always be some form of grouping. It is only natural. Humans are culturally oriented to tribalism. We need and want to belong to groups. The cliques haven’t disappeared, just their makeup and importance. This group would never have functioned in the old culture.”

“Why so?” Ginny asked. It was good to see her participating considering how shy she had been in the beginning.

“In the old system, very few of you would have been in the same clique. As a result, putting you together like this would have created turmoil, at best.” The conversation continued, but I just faded out. I’m glad people are interested in the soft subjects. Give me the hard sciences any day.

My meal disappeared at about the same rate as Becca’s sandwich and Dr. C’s “salad.” I

felt my body beginning to stiffen up again, though. I would need to hit the whirlpool before practice. Fortunately, I only had a light workout planned. More get the blood flowing, loosen up, and do some aerobic conditioning. I didn't need to worry about adding muscle mass, but needed keep my system oxygenated and blood flowing at this point to rejuvenate after yesterday's session. And, keep my joints loose. How many hours to the whirlpool? I understand at the college level, the trainers also give massages. Enough of that dream, I needed to plan my workout.

As I lost myself in the weight room and visualized my workout, my spotter started speaking to me in Becca's voice.

“Sweetie?”

Wait, I need to lift this bar one more time...

“My Mountain?”

The weight room vanished and was replaced with the detritus of teen-consumed cafeteria slop.

“Sweetie? Time to start the meeting.” Becca's lyrical voice drifted into my ears, her breath registering on every nerve ending of the battle hardened surface. Damn! Shivers were rolling down my spine, right to...

Breathe. Nod head. No, not that one. Breathe again. Collect self. Begin.

“As you might have noticed,” I said as I scanned the Naked's at the table, “there is one of ‘them’ amongst us.”

Eyes danced all around the table, missing the obvious. The relaxed looks from the banter earlier turned to confusion.

“We have... one of... the Clothed at our table.” All eyes went to Dr. C and I swear, he blushed.

“Becca, Becky, and I made a reasonable request that he join us naked. Yet, alas, here he is. Clothed!” Man! Did his energy go up! Too far? No. We had points to be made and this was a viable path. Yet, I had to soften it some. “Dr. C asked if he could speak with us. On the part of the team, I accepted.” I looked around the table and got nods of

approval from everyone. “Plus, I thought it would be a good for him to hear some of our conversations.” Again, nods all around. “So, Dr. C, welcome to the Naked table.”

He snorted out a laugh. “I feel like I’m back in the NBA and I’m facing Byrd, Jordan, Magic, Shaq, and LeBron on the other team.” As if anyone needed to be reminded of his days as a pro playing power forward. “The talent, skills, drive, and energy I see at this table humbles me. Yet, it makes me proud. You give me hope. Not just for the Program, which is why you were chosen first this year, but for the future.” He took a second to collect himself. “The official reason I’m here is to convey a message.”

Damn, he was good. He used the ensuing pause to gather our full attention. “Will’s family has sent their heartfelt thanks.”

Wow! The reactions around the table were all over the place. Dr. C continued, “Without the compassion that this group exhibited, a bad situation could have become a tragedy for the whole school. They’ve also heard of the commitment to prevent another ‘Will’ from happening and offer their full support.”

How is it that optimism can also include the press of the full weight of the world?

“As I said, I believe in this group. I know that you will do great things.”

Paul, Chris, Luke, and I preened as only athletes can. That cracked the whole table up, including Dr. C. Even Becca’s glare couldn’t hide the smile on her face or the corner of her eyes. Stress relief is a good thing.

“Well, that’s all I had officially. Now, I do have some free time, so...”

“Of course you’re welcome to stay,” I said after checking with everyone.

“Well, there is an outstanding request....,” Becca smiled an evil smile as she squeezed my leg. Note to self: don’t ever do anything to earn that smile from her!

“There was a request. The question is, was it reasonable?” Dr. C countered with.

“What are you guys talking about?” Asked Margie. There was a general consensus that others wanted to know as well.

“We requested that Dr. C join us naked,” I told everyone.

“Okay, why not?” Paul asked Dr. C.

“Let me ask all of you this, what would you think if you saw me walking down the halls naked?”

“Oh, YEAH!” Thanks, Rosalee. She grabbed Junior in her excitement. There was enough room for both girls’ hands.

“Kewl!” From Margie. Many nods followed her statement.

“I wouldn’t think it was right,” said Shirley, looking very contemplative.

With a smile, Dr. C asked, “And why, Shirley?”

“Well, two reasons. First, if I remember, not all the nudity laws have been removed from the books. So, potentially, you’d be doing something illegal.”

“Correct, it is still technically illegal for males over 21 to appear nude in certain places, including schools. Although it is rarely enforced. And?”

“Propriety,” Paul Templer said.

“Ah, the Colonial speaks. Tell us more.” It was easy to see that Dr. C had been a teacher. A good one.

“In a way, it would be the same as the King walking down the street in cutoff jeans and a ratty t-shirt. It is not something a monarch should do.”

“And, school principals should look like school principals,” Margie contributed.

“Until the legal and social codes change, that’s why I won’t be going around the halls naked. Now, should you see me at the beach or other place away from school, then you might not have to ask.” I noticed that more than one female at the table had a dreamy look in their eyes.

“Well, Dr. C, I can understand your reasoning.” He nodded to me. “Now, if we can get this show on the road.”



“Before you do, one piece of official school business I almost forgot. It seems that I’ve been designated messenger.” Dr. C proceeded to hand out messages to Luke, Becca, Shirley, and me. I immediately opened mine to find a note from Coach Mac. ‘I need you to stay for a bit after media day. Let me know if that’s a problem.’

“Becca?” I turned to her. She was holding open her message and just staring at it, eyes wide and mouth open. Not really meaning to pry, I did look down and could read it. ‘Dean Massey from the Fine Arts Department at USC called and would like you to return her call,’ and there was a phone number. “Becca?”

“I-I..”

“Sweetie, does this mean what I think it does?”

“I-I..”

I hugged her and whispered in her ear, “This is great.”

“And a surprise.”

“Do you think the Italian Pixie of an art teacher had anything to do with it?”

“I’m positive of it,” she said as she pulled herself together. “That is, if this is what I think it is.”

“And what’s that?”

“An invitation to submit my portfolio!”

“You need to find out, then we can celebrate tonight.” She nodded her head and gave me a quick kiss, then folded the note and put it in her bag.

I looked over at Luke and Shirley, curious now about their notes. Luke must have already read his and put it away. Shirley was huddled with Stacy and Sheri.

“Now, let’s get this show on the road,” I said, interrupting the newspersons conclave.

Margie immediately set about handing out a batch of papers as if there had been no interruption. I couldn’t wait for the perfect personal device that would eliminate paper.

I quickly reviewed what she'd put together. Before I could get a word of praise out, Dr. C spoke.

"This is excellent, Margie. How did you have time to do this?"

My sister beamed. Everyone at the table began to praise her organizational skills and telling little stories about how she gets things done and keeps it all together. I'm going to have to live with that swelled head! Yet, it did make me proud that she was gaining an identity of her own. A strong one at that. Too often, I've seen my own friends trying to overcome the identity of a big brother or sister. This was cool.

"Okay, let's get back to it. We've got a lot to cover. Any suggestions of how we can best use Dr. C's time?"

"Sure," said Shirley, "why doesn't he give us a history of the Program and what the thoughts and hopes of the administration are."

There was universal nodding of heads. "Dr. C?"

He gave the standard spiel about the Program in general, but focused on the history in our State and school district. Nothing much new, society was loosening up and the Program was designed to help school kids with that.

"Dr. Cavanaugh," Ginny spoke up, "That explains the nudity requirement. It doesn't come close to explaining the Reasonable Request."

It seemed a hundred voices spoke at once. I let the commotion go for a few seconds, then coughed. "Dr. C, maybe you could explain the history and the reasons behind the Reasonable Request. We'll save you from our discussions," I caught every eye until they agreed to wait, "until we have a unified voice."

"The Reasonable Request. No doubt it is the most controversial aspect of the Program. All I know about its history is that it wasn't in the initial proposals nor was it in the initial research. But, it appeared by the time the legislation passed. Fortunately, it is also the most loosely worded part of the requirements for the Program."

"What do you mean?"

"It means I have the most latitude on how it is applied here."

“Good, because that might be an area that we’ll have the strongest recommendations.”

“Any other areas? I need to get back to old guy stuff.”

“Uniforms.” I think all the jocks said that at once.

“Expand.”

“I’ll start. I’m glad that sanity finally prevailed and declared the football uniform as both protective and supportive. I don’t even mind the dressing in midfield, although it complicates the logistics and interferes with my game prep. I can live with it. But, I can’t go in the locker room at half time.”

“Why not?”

“I have to strip, then redress. A lot of my taping is over my uniform. To strip would take five to ten minutes. I’ve already missed the beginning of halftime. Then it takes 10-20 minutes to handle the exterior taping – halftime is only 15 minutes.”

“Good point.”

“Baseball. Our uniforms are protective as well, unless you expect us not to slide into a base or dive for a ball.”

“I’d say the same goes for soccer and volleyball.”

“For women, not having support up top is an issue in all sports. Men at least have built-in mechanisms to retract their vulnerable parts.”

“Track is okay for us guys, but the field events are an issue.”

“In swimming, the suit can provide a competitive edge.”

“Okay, okay! I get it.” Dr. C shook his head. I could tell he was getting overwhelmed.

“And the Prom.” Jane Chung doesn’t speak out often, but when she does, watch out.

“Homecoming,” added Stacy, getting Jane’s drift.

“Any of the dances,” Margie finished.

“What about the Prom and the dances?”

“People don’t know ahead of time they are in the Program. I’m already thinking about my dress for the Prom. I’d be royally pissed at having thrown away hard earned money on a dress I couldn’t wear, if I’d been chosen for the Program during Prom week,” Jane expanded her original thought. All the girls nodded agreement.

“Another good point.” He nodded. I could see him building a list of items in his head. “I don’t have any answers, but it sounds like you’ve got a lot of work to do putting all this together. On that note, I’ll leave you to it!” With the grace of an athlete, he quickly disappeared.

“I think Dr. C was in a bit of a rush to get out of the lunchroom. Was it something we said?” You can always count on our Rosalee.

“Thanks, Rosalee. I mean it. We needed a little comic relief after that.”

“Speaking of relief...” That got laughter from everyone at the table.

“Okay, let’s tackle Reasonable Requests...” I’m sure that was the last coherent sound for the next few minutes as everyone began talking, trying to have their points heard. Wow! I let it go for a few minutes to see if some order would emerge. I leaned back and put my arm around Becca and, without even thinking about it, put my arm around Rosalee as well. They both snuggled in and I felt their hands move across my back and find each other. It was interesting feeling their fingers intertwine.

I’m not sure what’s going on here. I mean, I like Rosalee. I find her attractive and fun. Interesting. Engaging. Yet, I don’t feel for her the way I do Becca. Confusing? Completely.

*‘Focus brings clarity.’* Thanks Sensei.

Now, how do I focus this group? And, how do I find clarity with Becca and Rosalee? It really didn’t help that my joints and muscles were starting to scream at me again.

Focus!

Breathe!

Bring order.

Lead.

At that moment, my sweetie chose to sigh. A full, deep expression of contentment. Even with that, my hormone-addled brain managed to see a path.

A deep cough on my part got everyone's attention. "It is apparent that we all have very deep feelings and opinions about requests and the definition of reasonable. Here's what I'd like you to do. Pull out a piece of paper--"

"Is this a test?" It didn't matter who said it.

"In a way. More like getting our collective thoughts organized. Now, I want you to list three positives about reasonable requests." Groans. "Then list your top three negatives about reasonable requests." A quick glance at Margie and she read my mind and nodded. "When you're done, give them to Margie and she'll organize it all for us."

"Do you want us speaking from our own experiences and beliefs, or about our feelings about the Program in general?" No surprise this came from our resident, naked editor-in-chief.

"I want us to give our personal feelings, based on what we've experienced in two and a half days."

"Thanks, Coach." Not that again!

Everyone got busy. I stared at the paper for a minute or two, organizing my own thoughts. Well, number one on the positives was easy. Becca. I picked up my pen and started to write.

## Rebecca

How did I feel about the program?

*'You got Luis out of it and possibly Rosalee.'*

*'Thanks Muse. You're a lot of help.'*

*'Anytime!'*

Positives? Was it positive to be running around naked and not hiding any more? If you had asked me Monday, I would have said no. Now? I guess so. After all, casual nudity was becoming a cultural norm, or so they said. But, is it a fair way to do it? Forcing kids, against their will? That's a question I'm not going to be able to answer in a few minutes. Exposing my art to others? I guess that was a positive. I had done the murals anonymously, or so I thought. But, I was outed now. I guess that's a good thing. Was awakening my sexuality a positive? As long as I didn't turn into a slut, I guess. Reaching out to others? Yes. A good thing.

Easier than I thought. Now, which three do I chose? Reaching out, outing my art, and... Okay. Awaking my sexuality. Luis is damned important, but I won't base our relationship on the Program, damn it.

My first negative? Requests. Now there is a topic for a doctoral thesis! The forced nudity wouldn't be a bad thing, but the requests... Now, that is... Wrong? Yes. Completely. Exposing my body is one thing. Being required to let people touch me, that's another. Where does my private space begin? Bringing it closer to my body, that might be reasonable. And, the nudity does that. But pushing that private space inside me? No, that's abuse that's been legalized. Has it been legalized or just not challenged? So, Requests is number one. Choice about the Program. Is that still a negative? Well, in a very personal way it is. But, remove the requests and it doesn't seem to be that negative.

Another negative. Hmm... Just two more. Easy.

Piece of cake.

Ahem...

Staring at the paper isn't helping.

I took a quick glance at Luis's. He only had two negatives. Requests and the sports issue. I could see that. But, it really didn't directly impact me, so I couldn't use it. Maybe after Friday I'd feel differently.

Just two more...

I wonder if Luis and I are going to be able to go all the way tonight. God, I so want to. Yet, I'm scared of it-

"Anyone finished?" Asked My Mountain, pulling me back into the moment.

"No!" I wasn't the only one. Sounded like a unified voice, but not the one Luis was expecting!

"To be honest, I'm having a problem as well. Does everyone have at least one for a positive and at least one for a negative?" Everyone indicated they had. "Why don't we pass them to Margie and she'll do some magic-"

"Give me five minutes," she cut Luis off as she focused on her task.

"So, what was harder, positives or negatives?" Another free-for-all started. My Mountain regained control and polled each of us. By the time he finished, Margie signaled that she was finished. "Let's hear what Margie has put together."

All eyes turned to the cute girl. She took it in stride. I think I'd be blushing like mad.

"Well, a quick look through shows that, for the most part, the nudity isn't a problem but a positive." Nods all around the table. "And, the clear number one negative-"

"Requests!" Rosalee broke in with. Everyone agreed.

"Rosalee, I thought you'd like requests," Luis said.

"At first, but after a while, it got really old. Plus, I found out I didn't like the loss of control."

“That’s one way of putting it,” said Shirley.

“I didn’t mind some requests, but not having a choice-” started Sheri.

“Isn’t part of the program about expanding what we are comfortable with?” Mike Watson asked.

“How would you like it if someone stuck a finger up your ass?” Jane Chung spit out.

“I.. I... wouldn’t,” Mike said, meekly.

“Well, that’s what we’re talking about. That’s not expanding what we’re comfortable with.”

“It’s more about loss of control and violation?”

“It feels like... rape.” Ginny said quietly.

That got everyone’s attention.

“Have you...?” I asked her, softly.

“No. Well, other than stray fingers while in the Program.”

“That’s the same thing!” Shirley nearly shouted.

“No... No where near close...” Ginny’s already quiet voice slowly faded.

Everyone tried to talk at once. Luis let it happen and eventually, smaller groups of conversations emerged naturally. I settled into a group with Tim Carter, Shirley Keon, and Jane Chung. While Luis, Rosalee, and Stan Rosenberg formed another group.

“Becky, since you’ve... uhm...,” Shirley started. And, blushed.

“Discovered my sexuality?” I said, more confident than I felt.

“Ahem...”



“It’s okay. I’m aware of it. For the lack of a better word, I was a prude.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” Jane joined in. “More like unaware.”

“Not really. I was hiding from it just like I was hiding myself.”

“Why?” Tim asked.

“Tim,” Shirley said, “This beautiful lady, about five years ago...,” She looked at me and I nodded, “Just disappeared.”

“It was when my boobs grew, way ahead of anyone else in my class. I felt like such a freak and was teased by everyone. So, I just hid.”

“Damn, Becky, I didn’t realize that,” Shirley said. “I’m so sorry, did I... uhm... Did...”

“I don’t remember you saying anything, but I was really confused. I didn’t know how to handle it, so I just retreated. I shut everyone out, including my parents.” Breathe! That’s what My Mountain would tell me to do. “No need to be sorry, Shirley. It was my choice. I realize, now, a bad one. But, I’m past it. I hope...”

“Well, we like the new, improved Becky and we’re not going to let you retreat again,” Shirley said, with Jane agreeing. A couple of seconds later, Tim joined in.

“Thanks! I don’t want to go back to Rebecca the Wallflower. She’s gone. Becky, the alive and aware one, is here.”

“So, this week has been a bit confusing for you?” Tim asked.

“That’s an understatement.”

“How did you feel at first, coming out of the office naked and then the requests starting?”

“Freaked! Especially after that hit I took to my... uhm... pussy. See, I can say words like that now. Then I had real problems when my body started responding to all the touching, stroking, and squeezing. I-I had... I thought.... Oh, heck, I thought I was turning into a slut.” I suddenly had trouble seeing and my cheeks started to feel wet. Yet the tears felt cool compared to the heat of my skin.

Shirley and Jane immediately enveloped me in a hug and told me over and over that it was okay. And, I'm not a slut. Just waking up. It's overwhelming at times, they told me. No kidding.

Tim got my attention with a gentle hand wiping my tears away. "Becky, welcome to the mad, twisted, confusing, and freaky world of teenage hormones—"

"And, when the pussy—," Shirley started.

"And, the cock—," Tim added.

"Take over and rule," Jane finished.

"A friend of mine," Tim said, "found some articles on the Net. One was called '*The Facts of Life*'. One of the facts was that Physics rules the universe while Biology rules life."

"As I heard it," Shirley jumped in, "Physics is King and Biology is Queen."

"And their rule is absolute." Tim finished. "To ignore the drives within us is just as dangerous as ignoring gravity."

"Slut is such a horrible word, a relic of past generations and cultures, I hope," Jane stated, pulling us back to the original topic. "A word meant to demean any woman that enjoys and celebrates her sexuality. Just another means men had of controlling women and forcing them to be submissive."

"W-Was it... really... that bad?" I sniffed out.

"You remember the conversation about cliques?"

"Y-Yes."

"Labels like slut, dweeb, nerd, jock, and such were all used to keep us apart. Create pigeonholes to put people in because it's easier than getting to know a person. I mean, look at this table, this group—I'd be the dweeb, maybe even the homo, queer—"

"And, I'd be the little brown fuck bunny or slope or—"

“And, I’d be the A-List Perfect Girl,” Shirley said while making haughty gestures and primping her hair. Just the opposite of the focused, driven person we were all getting to know.

As shocked as I was, I was able to laugh and add, “And, I’d be the resident, eclectic artist slash nerd slash class slut.”

Luis chose that moment to turn towards us. “Hmm... I don’t know. Being associated with an artist is bad enough for a Jock, and it does nothing for my A-List status. But, an artist that is a nerd?”

That got all of us laughing harder.

“What about me being a slut?”

“Why don’t you show me, little girl?” He said with an exaggerated leer, pushing one eyebrow up in his head, and waving an imaginary cigar around.

“Is that the Empire State Building in your pocket, or are you just glad to see me?” I retorted in my best Mae West voice and sexy moves.

“Why don’t you come sit in my lap and we’ll see what comes up.”

“When I’m good, I’m very good. When I’m bad, I’m better.”

The whole table joined in throwing out their best lines. Hey, we’re teenagers. Our life has been too short take things too seriously! I’m amazed, though, at the number of classic film buffs.

Luis, struggling for breath, said, “Well... Ahem... Glad to see we’re all so focused. Serious...” That got everyone going again. “Okay, okay! Let’s focus for a minute. I think we all agree that something has to change with Reasonable Requests.” The nodding heads were unanimous. “Now, instead of sixteen of us trying to come up with something, how about two or three of us work out something that the rest of us can consider, tweak, add to, or approve?”

“Sure!” “Perfect!” “Great.” “Kewl.” And on.

“Any volunteers before I pick them?”

Chris Flanagin spoke up immediately, “I’ll do it. The Jock/Debate Nerd to the rescue!” If he was seeking snickers, he got them.

“Baseball? A sport? The players Jocks?” Luis growled.

“Better than that pansy-assed game called Feetsball,” Chris growled in return.

Everyone at the table was losing it; their caricature of jocks was too much. The rolling on the floor began when Luke, all five foot, a half, and a smidgen, stood and did his impersonation of a Pro Wrestler posing. “You puny punks ain’t got nothin’ on us B-Ball players!”

Eventually, My Mountain got them settled down. Chris, Shirley, and Jane took on Reasonable Requests. Luis, Luke, and Paul tackled sports and uniforms. Tim, Stacy, and Margie joined to address extra-curricular activities. Margie’s pronouncement that plays with random naked characters were insane assured her position.

“We spend weeks, sometimes months, costuming a play. Finding out five days before an opening that a lead character is going to be nude is just plain stupid. Plus, we use the costumes to hide props and in some cases safety devices—like a harness when a character ‘flies.’” I felt Luis about to object to her deeper involvement, until we could all see the fire in her eyes and how important this was to her.

While the others talked about connections, preventing another Will, and our “bet”, I looked at Luis and felt my insides melt. Could I be this in love, this quickly? What is love anyway?

*‘You know it when you feel it!’*

*‘Thanks, Muse.’*

*‘No need to be sarcastic with me!’*

*‘Sorry, this is just hard to figure out.’*

*‘And easy, once you know it in your heart.’*

*'But, how will I know?'*

*'Your heart knows for sure, it is a matter of seeing if your mind thirsts for the same. Your body will know by how it... well, fits.'*

*'That explains Luis. But, what about Rosalee?'*

*'What about her?'*

*'I feel it in my heart. So far, our bodies seem to fit.'*

*'Your mind?'*

*'Turmoil.'*

*'You need to figure out what it is thirsting for. Whether it is the love of another or the lust of an attraction, or the exploration of something new.'*

*'I need to learn to listen to myself and then trust it?'*

*'Bingo! You know, this is the longest conversation we've had this week.'*

*'I'm hiding again, aren't I?'*

*'A blinding glimpse of the obvious.'*

*'Back to sarcasm?'* I felt her smile at me.

I pulled myself together and looked at Luis. Really looked at him. At the same time, I could see Rosalee. I felt myself take a deep breath and realized that with that simple act how deep he was already inside me. And, how right it felt. Not manic, not obsessive. Not needy. Just right.

Rosalee...

I feel something strong in my heart. My body definitely responds to her. It is my mind that hasn't decided—

*"Cara Micina mia? Are you okay?"* My Mountain whispered in my ear. I turned into

him and looked up at those wonderful, dark eyes. Once again, I saw his soul, how open he was with me. Now it is my turn.

“Pondering, my sweet.”

“About?”

“My love for you.... and, how I feel about Rosalee.” There, I said it. Now, how will he react?

“And?” I used my artist’s eyes to study his face, seeing the muscles and the subtleties of his feelings expressed there. He was... calm. Loving. Respectful. Above all, deeply concerned. My Muse was right, I’d know. I did.

“I feel so sure about you. It’s how I feel for Rosalee that concerns me.” There. I admitted it. His eyes and face softened and became more loving. Damn!

“I’m here for you and to help anyway I can.” It’s a damn good thing I was already in love with him. My body and soul wanted to climb into his lap right there and start making babies. My mind was trying to find all its pieces from the fracturing his non-judgmental support had given it.

“I just can’t figure it out.” While a huge part of me wanted to run, hide, and cry, I managed to stay in the present.

“You were just talking to your Muse, weren’t you?” The acquisition started to rip through me... until I saw the love in his eyes. He wasn’t accusing me, just seeking confirmation for an observation, trying to understand himself how far into my head he was getting.

“You know about her?”

“Of course and I’m glad you have her.”

“Why?”

“She helps you be you. As I told you a day or so ago, she’s the ‘you’ you want to be. I’d be a damn fool not to love her. So, what did she tell you?”

“It’s more what I told her that I think I need to tell you.” He nodded. “We talked about love and how I would know.” I paused as I read his face and eyes. I had to know how he was reacting. Okay, so I didn’t trust one hundred percent, yet. Hey, this is new to me. Looking at him, I knew I could trust. There was also a trace of a smile on his lips. A joyous smile. I can do this. It is right and it does fit. “I know I love you with all my heart, my mind, and my body.” Before I had a chance to assess his reaction, he... enveloped me? Yep. Enveloped. He wrapped his arms, body, mind, and soul around me. I let go and did the same.

“I love you, completely,” He said, so softly. Yet, it screamed through every fiber of my being. It was finishing the perfect painting, a great orgasm, and talking to God all rolled into one.

Just hugging, looking into each other’s eyes—in a crowded cafeteria—became the most intimate moment of my life. Slowly, we returned to the room and the questions in my mind. I could feel him coming with me. That was intense.

“And?” He knew the right moment, even.

“Rosalee.” Knowing what he was asking.

“And?”

“I’m confused!?!?”

“Tell me.” It wasn’t a demand. He was lovingly opening a space of trust, lined with silk and with his strength, for me to walk into and share with him.

“I’m concerned about you and how all this will affect you.”

“Don’t be. Your happiness is all I seek. True happiness, not self-destructive ‘happiness’ like hiding.”

“Caught me! Okay, my heart has feelings. Similar but different from you. My body definitely responds to her. It’s my mind that is confused.”

“You need to spend time getting to know her. I mean, while we’ve not known each other deeply, we have, for many years, at least been around each other. Then, Monday night, we-”

“Connected.”

“Yes. You need to find out if the same thing happens with Rosalee.”

“Why would you want me to?”

“Because I love you.” His words traveled through me. My body resonated, my soul cheered, my mind saw the logic, and it... fit.

“I will.” Now I have seen a smile split a face and a soul radiate joy out of the eyes. The dear, sweet man put an arm around Rosalee and pulled her towards us.

“Rosalee,” he said, “I think you and Becky need to have a talk.” I felt my skin heat from her blush. “No, no, no. Nothing bad.” He paused as he looked back at me, then her again. “I know you feel something for Becky.” She nodded. “And, Becky feels something for you. You two need to figure out what it is.”

“B-But... Wait! I’m not getting between you two... You’re not breaking up are you?”

“Not planning on it.”

“Well... How do I fit?”

“Don’t know. Plus, it’s really not up to me.”

“Huh?” Rosalee gasped.

“What!?!” I exclaimed.

“It’s not. This is something you two need to work out. Just as Becca and I have to figure us out.”

“What about you and I?” Rosalee asked him.

“We’ll have to see. I don’t know you well, but when you and Becca figure things out, we’ll have to figure us out, won’t we?”

“So,” I said, “This all comes down to me?”



Luis laughed. Remind me not to slap his arm. That hurts me! Like hitting a rock!

“In a way, you are key to what happens with Rosa and me.”

“Rosa?” We both asked him at the same time.

“Do you mind?” My Mountain asked her. I got it right away. He was offering Rosalee his beloved grandmother’s name. Why does melting feel so good?

“M-My father called me that... be-before he was k-killed.” Tears were running down her face. “I-I’d... be... honored.”

“Rosalee, are you sure?” I felt tears on my cheeks as I leaned across Luis to see her. Our eyes locked. Oh. My. God! I’m going to leave a big puddle. Big enough that someone might need to think about building an ark. Right here. Right now.

“Would you call me that too?” She looked so hopeful when she asked me.

“I will.” A certainty spread through me.

“May I call you Becca?” I would never have guessed she was so vulnerable, at least showing it to us.

Before I could tell her to ask Luis, he broke in. “I don’t have a problem.”

“Rosa, welcome to our world!” I said.

“What do I call you?” She asked Luis.

“Anything-” he started to say.

“Our Mountain,” I said for him. It felt right to me. He and I looked at each other in the eyes. We did it again, that connection. We gave each other our souls. Our minds joined around it. Without thought, our lips touched. A half-a-second or 65 million years later, we parted. Yet another lesson in relativity. He’ll get me hooked on physics yet.

Rosa’s voice gently rolled onto our cloud with a long drawn out, “Hell-o?!?”

Was that desire for both of us? Damn, this is confusing.

“Uhm... I think I need to get this meeting back on track,” he managed to get out of his mouth.

“Becca, I think you broke him,” My other sweetie said. I finally managed to open my eyes. The poor boy did look shell-shocked.

“Not broken. Doing just fine,” he said drunkenly. Junior looked like he was doing great, though.

“I think that I need to conduct an experiment,” Rosa said. With that, she wrapped her arms around Luis’s neck and pulled him into a kiss. Suddenly, I could feel their lips together. And, not just with my artist’s sight, but felt it. I knew the moment their lips opened and when and how their tongues danced. I was in the kiss. I was in both their hearts. My body responded as if they were both kissing me. Oh boy, did it respond.

I felt them breaking the kiss. That moment where they were still actively engaged in it, but mutually ending it. It was too soon! God, I could have tripped over the edge into the abyss if...

“Wow!” They said simultaneously.

“Look, we broke her!” Rosa’s voice filtered through my clouds.

“Oh. My. God! I almost... Almost...,” I tried to say.

“Came?” Rosa completed for me.

“Did you guys feel-” Luis managed to say. We both nodded our heads.

“We still have one more test,” Rosa said, giving me a definite look. The look changed to... I saw her. Her soul. Just like I could see Luis’s.

“Whoa...,” I heard from Our Mountain as Rosa and I leaned into each other, across his chest. Quickly, the heat built as we got closer. I could taste and feel her before our lips met. As soon as they did... I felt her soul. No. Not felt. Became. Rational thought left... Yes, we were leaning across Our Mountain’s chest, yet his soul, lips, and being were... Joined? Yes, joined with me.

Slowly, after a very nice tongue waltz, we pulled apart. Our eyes locked. I felt her within me, strong. I also felt Luis inside me, yet he wasn't inside Rosalee and she wasn't inside him. This I need to think about. We smiled at the same time and sat up.

"Wow!" Rosa said.

"Yes!" I agreed.

"Well, I have an early analysis of the testing," she said.

"Let me guess, you and I were fun, nice, and sweet. You and Becca were intense and connected," Our Mountain said.

"Exactly. I have a connection with Becky I've never felt before."

"I felt both of you inside me, no matter who was kissing who. On the last one, I felt both of you inside me, but Luis wasn't inside you."

"So, what now?" Rosa and Luis asked at the same time.

"I don't know why you're looking to me for answers!"

"Well, you're the central point in this."

"I-I don't want to be. I mean, I started this week off as my perfect hidden self. And, two and a half days later I find myself with two exceptionally strong... connections?"

"Good word for it," My, Our, Mountain agreed. "Look, what I feel for Rosa is affection. Maybe it becomes love as we get to know each other. I don't feel-

"In love?" Rosa finished for him.

"Exactly. But I do feel that for Becca and I'm pretty sure you two feel that way for each other."

"How do you feel about it?" I had to ask him.

"Happy. Joyously happy for you. Concerned."

“Why? Explain. And, remember-”

“Yes, hoisted by my own words, so to speak. Honestly, I am happy that you’ve broken out of the trap you’ve been in for five years. In joy that we have such an incredible connection. Concerned for you—this is so much, so fast.”

“Sweetie, that’s a fear of mine. But, so far, I haven’t felt... threatened?” I really hadn’t felt threatened. “Everything I’ve done and felt with you, and wanted to do, doesn’t seem to be something I would regret later. Just the opposite! Not taking advantage of this week would be something to regret.”

“Thanks, Becca. One thing does bother me.”

“What’s that, sweetie?”

“Rosa’s age.” I hadn’t thought about that. I wonder what else I’ve been missing.

“This is a good time to talk about that,” Rosa said. “I heard you mention honesty. While I’m two grades behind you guys, I’m only a few months younger.”

“How?” Luis asked just before I could.

“I’m a military brat and went to local schools overseas. When I came back, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, they held me back a year. I could have easily advanced, but I was having way too much fun. That, on top of the birthday cutoff, I just missed by a day. If my mom had not pushed for about another hour...”

“Why didn’t you go forward?” I asked.

“Honestly?”

“We demand it!” I said, as both Luis and I smiled.

“Kewl. Well, I’m headed for a life and career in classical music. I want to conduct one day. As soon as you get to a conservatory, your life becomes music; the pressure is intense. I want to enjoy my teenage years. Thus, Rosalee—Trailer Trash Slut.”

“And, now?”

“This insane ride called the Program made me realize that I needed... No, I wanted to grow up and stop playing.” I looked into her eyes and saw the truth. Then, Rosalee being Rosalee struck again, “Where are you guys thinking about going to college?”

“Why?”

“I can be there with you next year.”

“You-”

“Would?” I had to interrupt Luis.

“If there is a good music school.”

“UT-Austin, USC, Illinois, the Boston area, Atlanta...” Our Mountain said, sadly it seemed. “I’m...”

“Confused?” Rosa jumped in before I could.

“No shit. Right now, as much as is happening, I have to focus on East. Without that win, I might not have the college choices for football. Yet, I also want to study physics.”

“Have you and Becca talked about it?”

“Given his preferences, I won’t have a problem finding a good art school.”

“So, your choice, Luis?” She asked.

“That is the sixty-four million dollar question.” We could both tell he was starting to pull into himself.

“Rosa, he’s torn between what could happen with his football career and his love of theoretical physics.”

“Ah! The Jock/Nerd Conflict.” Which got us all laughing.

Luis shuttered, as if clearing his body of something. “I think your father had the right idea, Becca. Pursue football as long as it’s still fun. Learn and grow that side while I

can. Academically, set myself up for graduate work in physics.”

“Okay. I’ve missed a lot of the background. I want to catch up, but what does that mean now?” Thank you Rosa for asking that! I gave her a smile and a wink, which she caught the full meaning of and gave it back. Our Mountain, bless his huge heart, missed it.

“USC, UT-Austin, and Illinois come to the top of my list. Others might argue, but I feel I would fit both academically and athletically. Well, USC and Texas tied for first. Illinois third, but not a distant third.”

I had to laugh. My Mountain looked hurt a bit until our eyes connected. “Dinner last night comes back to haunt me?”

He saw the agreement in me and smiled. That led me to filling Rosa in on the conversation and us wishing Our Mountain luck with his dreams. I could see that LA or Austin would fit with her dreams as it would with mine.

The three of us moved inside ourselves, yet the energy between us deepened. In that moment, I understood what Luis meant by the Monkey Brain. There were no voices in my head. It was... Joy! Peace.

Powerful.

I moved inside Luis as he moved into me. I felt his heart as ours synced and became one. And a third presence came inside me and I into her. I could feel, as did Rosalee, that Luis could sense our connection, yet wasn’t directly a part of it. And, it felt... right.

No voices.

No confusion.

Just...

Love.

A happy tear fell from eye just as I saw one from Rosa. Luis hugged us both tighter and time become unimportant, yet critical.

“Coach?” Shirley’s voice brought us back to the moment. Judging by the other two, we all had shit-eating grins on our faces. “Connection time?”

Feeling Luis’s voice coming from inside me was intense. “Ah, my team... Such horrible task masters!”

As the chuckles died down, we wordlessly paired with others that we didn’t know that well. Amazing that just using eye contact we found our partners to begin a new connection. Tim and I found each other as The Trio slowly disengaged. We might be physically apart, but maintained a new, deeper connection.

*‘I should be scared.’*

*‘No reason to. Just listen to your heart.’*

*‘Thanks Muse.’*

*‘Love Ya!’*

Tim and I sat facing each other and began talking. In a very short time, I learned a lot about him. I found it easy to see that he would be a great actor, he generally loved life, but there was a deep sense of... angst. Yes, angst. Not a word used often in high school. As it turns out, his parents are fundamentalist Christians and hated everything he represented.

“I hid from everyone and everything, even the love of my parents, because of my stupid perceptions. I can’t imagine trying to hide from the disapproval of my parents.”

“Well... one thing it has done is made me look deep inside. I found myself and the strength to continue being me, regardless of my parents.”

“So, your parents really hate you wanting to go into the theater?”

“Well, that and... uhm...,” he blushed a bit. Then, it was almost as if he exploded when he told me, “I’m gay. I-I think.” He carefully watched my reaction. For some reason, I was shocked or surprised. Or maybe just curious. Almost an accusation, he said, “You don’t have a problem with that?!?”

“Tim, think about it. You ‘think’ you’re gay. I was just in terminal lip lock with

Rosalee. Why would I find anything wrong with it? And... I keep noticing your eyes flick downward when we're talking." He started to object. "I'm a trained observer. Don't try to pretend. You may be a great actor on stage, but your heart is giving you away. And, let's not forget how you look at Shirley." He just looked at me like Luis had hit him from behind. "Think about this. Monday morning I was asexual. Heck, I was anti-sexual. Now, I'm becoming a confirmed bisexual—while still a virgin! Tell me about the possibility of being confused."

"Well, fine. But, it's okay for women to be bisexual. Hell, it is almost expected by most males!" We both laughed about that. "But, males have to be hetero or homo. In between is not accepted by either side."

Tim saw it hit me as I processed the injustice of that surviving to this day. Looking each other in the eye, a connection of understanding and respect built.

"It's good to know I have one person in my corner."

"More than you think." We shared a smile.

"Time to switch," came My Mountain's voice.

Before we could say thanks and move on, Chris Flanagin spoke up, "Coach. I think we all need to hear, share, one story."

A quick scan of the table and Luis gathered attention. It was easy to see that everyone had been deeply sharing. Tim and I weren't the only ones with a new connection. "Well, this is supposed to be about creating individual connections."

"Coach, this is worth it. And, it's the right time." Luis thought for a second and nodded his go-ahead to Chris.

Chris stood, walked behind Ginny, and placed his hands gently on her shoulders. Bending down, he whispered in her ear. She straightened up and looked at each one of us. Her face was a mixture of pain and... sorrow, with a dose of loss and anger. For a moment, I could see the scars on her soul.

"I've been raised by my Aunt and Uncle for as long as I can remember. That is until a couple of weeks ago...." Her voice faded out. Her face went through another maelstrom of emotions. I thought one of them resembled the look of someone being hit in the



stomach with a baseball bat. Deep pain with a full-body reaction.

Chris diligently rubbed her shoulders while Paul Templer held her hand. She slipped back into this reality with a new determination and resolve. “I told myself, convinced myself, that my parents had died in a car accident.” She took a deep, ragged breath. And another. “I had... a moment-”

“You might call it that,” Paul said with nothing but love and support in his voice, now holding one of her hands with both of his.

“Okay, as Paul,” She gave him a look of pure adoration, “Has hinted, reality came along and crashed into my carefully built fantasy. I found a picture of my parents a-and... a-and... th-that night came back.”

With tears streaming down her face, Paul supporting and not smothering her, and Chris standing by steadfastly as a friend, she continued, her voice stronger. “My dad came home... a-a bit in his cups. He and mom fought. And... a-and... she-she pushed him.” A deep breath. A new river of tears. “He... He reacted. I know he didn’t mean to-but-he-hit-her-I-could-see-it-in-his-eyes-as-soon-as-it-happened-and... and... she fell back and hit her h-head on-on the fireplace.”

There was a collective whoosh as we all inhaled. Suddenly, we were all watching a car wreck and wanting to scream, “WATCH OUT” or cover our eyes, yet...

“I could suddenly remember Mom’s head hitting the bricks. The blood. Her-her e-eyes as they lost life. My Dad’s wail. The burn of tears on my face and in my throat as I screamed.”

A car wreck would have been a walk in the park. Central Park at midnight with a neon sign proclaiming “Cash and diamonds on board”. Then, the writer in me went on vacation as the rawness of the emotions was too much for words. The artist could only see black and crimson.

“M-My D-Dad.... He-He threw himself on her. Tried. Cried. Stood up. Pull a gun from his shoulder holster. P-Put it i-in his mouth...”

*‘OH GOD! DON’T SAY IT!’ My Muse screamed in my head.*

“And p-pulled the trigger. All I remember after is a hot, pink rain.” She shuddered.

Paul and Chris held her together. Somehow. My Mountain, Our Mountain, had his arm around me. Rosa's hand was in mine. Tim was gripping my other hand. All around the table I could see the physical, mental, and spiritual connections. Joined. Supporting. Absorbing this as a whole so we could give our love and support back to Ginny.

We absorbed it as one. No stories of our own. No pity. No sympathy. Just empathy returned.

“Oh, Damn! Thank you!” Ginny cried to all of us. Her voice becoming frantic. “Dr. C was so right. This was the group to tell my story to. Tha-”

She stopped so suddenly it shocked all of us.

“Ginny,” My (Our) Mountain said in a voice so pure and soft it traveled through all of us, straight into our souls. “We're here for you.”

She shuddered and almost collapsed. Yet managed to look around the table. Into each of us. When her eyes connected with mine, I couldn't not open myself completely to her.

When she finished with everyone, in a voice that rang like a pure, crystal bell, “Thank you.”

Chris stood her up, turned her towards him, and hugged her. Then Paul. Then everyone at the table. When I pulled her into my arms, I felt our hearts touch. In that moment, I really understood the power of a hug.

Slowly, we all settled into our original seats.

“Thank you, Dr. C,” Ginny said to her absent hero.

“Thank you, Ginny,” Our Mountain said, with all of us agreeing. Ginny took a few seconds to gather herself and then she raised her empty hand as if holding a goblet and toasted all of us.

After a few minutes, or a hundred years, of just being in the space around us, we all came back to the moment. Ginny's tears hadn't abated, just the energy had been redirected.

“I just ‘knew’ that the reason my mother had confronted my father that night was because of the toys I had left on the floor-and-that-she-had-been-mad-at-me-just-before-he-came-in-and-it-was-all-my-fault-because-I-didn’t-pick-them-up-and... and... Now, I know better. Now, I really know it wasn’t my fault. I’m not to blame.”

Talk about hearing a pin drop. Although the touches, looks, and silent communications went into high gear.

As we were all beginning to collapse from the emotional marathon, Our Mountain spoke again. With a squeeze around my shoulders and the instant response from Rosa’s hand, he said, “Ginny... For your courage, thank you. For your trust in us, thank you. For sharing yourself and accepting us so deeply, thank you.”

Ginny cried. Part release, part pure joy. I know I joined her. Then another of Luis’s patented time distortions occurred.

Eventually, conversations resumed. Touches and reassurances to Ginny. Affirmations of life and love to each other.

“He’s good,” I said.

“Luis?” A few people asked.

“Well..., Yes! But I was thinking of Dr. Cavanaugh.”

Another pin had the opportunity to ring out as we fell into another of Luis’s time black holes. Then Rosa spoke up, “Sooooo... Here we’re all Nekkid. And...”

Both of us kissed her. I got her lips! And, conversations resumed. We all paid attention to Ginny, but didn’t smother her. Eventually, she laughed at something Paul said to her and we collectively let out a sigh of relief.

Once things returned to normal, as normal as sixteen naked people can be sitting around the lunchroom, Luis said, “My Becca, I really, really need to go to the training rooms. I’m tightening up badly.”

“I know sweetie. We’ll carry on the connections and I’ll leave a little early and see you before my PE class.”

“I’ll see you inside the boy’s locker room then.”

“In?”

“I only have to ‘change’ and shower in the girl’s. All the training equipment is in the boy’s. So, I’ll see you there!”

“I love you.”

“And, I you.” He looked inside me and I knew it was not some automatic response.

“Luis, you headed to the gym?” Luke asked, breaking the spell and pulling us back to the moment.

“Yep.”

“Spot me?”

“After I get a whirlpool.”

“No probs. I’ll just use the 12 armed monster until then.”

“Twelve-armed-” Rosa started.

“-Monster?” I finished.

“Oh hell, Luis. They’re already in sync. You, sir, are in deep shit,” Luke stated with a shake of his head accompanied by a snort, then a laugh.

“But, what a way to go.” Luke could only nod while Our Mountain turned to us. “The Monster is a weight training machine that... Why don’t you both come check it out before PE?”

“We’ll see.” I gave him a kiss intending to curl his toes. It must have rebounded. Through my self-induced haze, I watched as Rosa kissed him as well. Through our connections, my toes did it again.

As he and Luke walked away, I couldn’t help but notice how big he really is. Rosa’s arm found its way around my waist as mine went on the same mission around her.

“I can see why you call him Mountain. Walking next to Luke, he’s...”

“Huge?”

“Yep. A mountain!” We look in each other’s eyes and started giggling.

Shirley’s voice brought our attention back to the table. Darn, another of those time-warp thingies. “I’m having a Naked Party Saturday night. Come dressed as you like, as long as you’re as free as you are now.”

Margie, bless her over-organized heart, passed out invitations.

“Now,” Shirley continued, “switch partners. But, not the way three of us have been.” Rosa and I gave each other sunburn. We also gave each other a kiss and a promise to leave lunch together before we began shuffling spots at the table.

Margie looked at me and said, “I think we’ll have lots of time to talk, don’t you?”

A smile spread across my face and being, “You better believe it.”

I got a wonderful smile in return. We both sought out new partners.

Calvin Johnson, Mr. President of the Freshman Class and future President of the US, paired up with me. I’d like to say I was open and present for our conversation, but I really wasn’t. I did learn a lot about Cal and one day I might be able to replay the conversation and sort it out. Luis and Rosa kept bubbling up, playing their stories, as Luis would say. Ginny drifted in and out of my thoughts, making my old fears seem so small and petty. The changes I’m going through were a brass band marching through my skull. College. Virginity—and, hopefully, it’s loss. To both Luis and Rosa. Rosa danced through my soul. Luis’s strong arms gave my heart comfort. My parents. My Muse...

*‘If you don’t get your head out of your ass and connect to the present, nothing good is going to happen.’*

*‘In other words, breathe?’*

*‘As the Master would say... DOH!’*

“I’m sorry Cal. My mind is wandering too much. It’s not you.”

“Me too, Becky. That was a hell of a story Ginny had to tell.”

“That and so much more.”

“Been a chaotic week?”

“Very.”

“Next week, then. Or the week after. Sometime, we can continue, if you want.” He looked so vulnerable, not like his normal persona.

“I’d like that. I see you’ve been through a bit this week as well.”

“We all hide, just in different ways. This week tends to beat that out of you.”

“Well said!”

Shirley’s voice rose above the conversations again. “I think we’re all on the edge of burnout.” There was near unanimous verbal and physical agreement. “Between this week, our role as ‘ambassadors’, our new mission to change the Program, revelations...”

“And not just Ginny’s,” Margie said. “We’ve all been going through revelations about self, friends... family,” That got a few chuckles. “Someone told me that Wednesday is ‘the Day’ in the Program. Chaos. Confusion. Overload. Overwhelm...”

“Well said, Margie,” Shirley said with nods all around. “Let’s just take the remaining time as we each need to.” Chairs began to squeak on the floor as everyone prepared to get up. “But, before we go, one last thing we need to do.” She put her hand, palm up, over the center of the table. “Nakeds on three.”

We all stacked our hands. The energy was incredible. It just built and built the joy, the love, the confusion, and the doubts. Our team, I thought.

“1... 2... 3...”

“NAKEDS!” We were one in the moment, sharing our strength and energy to handle

this week.

We slowly broke, each making a connection through eyes and sometimes touch. Rosa and I rejoined.

“Are you as confused, conflicted, and uncertain as I am?” She asked as our arms ‘assumed the position’ around each other’s waist and headed towards the doors.

“Do you feel like your world exploded and you’re having trouble finding all the pieces, much less putting them back together?”

“Yep.”

“Then, yes. I feel all that. Confused, confounded, and conflicted.”

We looked at each other and laughed together. A quick kiss, then she asked, “Where to?”

“Let’s go where we can watch Our Mountain and talk.”

“Perfect!”

Our arms tightened as one, we joined physically as we walked through the doors. A bit of a giggle, a bit of a flirt, some uncertainty, and a ton of love. Maybe I’ll not only survive this day, but also come out of it wonderfully. Let me see... My Mountain! Rosalee?! Bye-bye virginity?!? The new artist emerges? And-

“Rebecca, are you posing today in art?” Rashad’s distinctive voice asked.

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

Note: ‘*The Facts of Life*’ are from a story by Lazlo Zalesac, ‘*The Millionaire Next Door*’.

## Chapter 23 – Wednesday Afternoon

### *“Take it Easy”*

#### Luis

“How’s this week going for you?” Luke Nguyen asked me as we left the cafeteria.

“Intense.” As I reflected on the whole experience, “My life has been hauled out from all the rocks I was hiding it under. Many of the slimy things I wasn’t aware of. You?”

He gave a snort, “About the same. Amazing the things that come out from under those rocks.”

“Tch..., no shit. On Monday morning, my main focus was East. Now...”

“Confundium?”

“Exactly! Perfect word.”

“Rebecca and Rosalee?”

“Strange, ain’t it.” Before my mind could venture into that maze looking for cheese, I decided to change the subject. “Have you hooked up with anyone this week?”

“Welllll... Maybe.”

“Kewl. Who?”

“Ah... You may not approve.”

“As long as it’s not my sister,” I half joked. My sister? NO! She’s just a little girl that should still be playing with dolls and having tea parties with her imaginary friends.

“I’d better shut up. I’d make a lousy tackling dummy.”



I sighed. Damn. “As long as you don’t intentionally hurt her.”

“Not my style,” he exhaled as he relaxed. “We’re just trying to figure this out ourselves.”

“I know that feeling all too well!”

“You and Rebecca I can see. You two were made for each other. But, how does Rosalee fit?”

“I think she’s fun and nice and all that, but I think she fits with Becca, not me.”

“Sounds serious.”

“Well, compared to how I feel for Becca...”

Luke pulled himself up to his full height and tried to look threatening, except for the smile. “Just don’t hurt her or I’ll-”

I growled at him playfully. Sorta playful. I guess. After a look at his expression, “Just practicing my game face.”

“God, I almost feel sorry for East.” He was a bit pale but stood his ground.

I nodded. We fell into an easy silence as we headed into the boy’s locker room. We walked through the doors and into the “inner sanctum” of the Testosterone Temple.

“This feels strange, like we’re doing something wrong,” he said.

“Yeah, it does. Have you enjoyed the girl’s?”

“You’d better believe it!”

“We’ve been working so hard all week, it’s empty by the time practice is over. At least I get peace in the showers.”

“I’ve been getting piece as well.”

“As long as-”

“I’ll see you in the weight room, right?”

“Yeah. Weights. You have to be careful, accidents can happen.”

“Chill. I respect her, okay?”

“Yeah, it’s just-”

“She’s your baby sister.”

“Yeah,” I sighed. “Let me soak for fifteen minutes and I’ll come spot you. I promise to behave.” I stuck out my hand and we shook. Then I remembered the messages. “I noticed you got a note at lunch.”

“No big. I was planning on being at Media Day anyway. Coach just wanted me to hang around after for a few minutes.”

“Me too. Any idea why?”

“Nope. I guess we’ll find out.” We split and headed our own way.

In a few moments, I was lowering myself into the big whirlpool tank. I took a chance and just hit play on the boom box and the Eagles started crooning ‘*Well I’m running down the road trying to loosen my load...*’ Good advice.

I relaxed and let my muscles go as limp as I could, while letting the heat and the jets do the rest. While breathing as deeply as I could in my relaxation meditation technique, I managed to disconnect my protective-older-brother circuit and took a look at Margie. Our Margareta was a very cute girl. No. Beautiful. Her skin is lighter than mine and with the hair she’s been growing since, well—forever, she has quite an exotic look. A ball of energy combined with the Contadino compassionate streak, the ability to make herself invaluable, and seeks no reward other than doing an excellent job – she’s got tons going for her.

Okay, I could see how a guy like Luke could be attracted to her. I could also see how my precious *sorellina* could go for Luke. He’s like a foot shorter than I am, yet hell-on-wheels on the basketball court. I’ve seen him out jump guys taller than me. Plus, he’s going to probably grow another foot in the next few years. Aside from all that, he seems

to have his head screwed on straight. Although he paled at my growl, he still stood up to me. Something many guys approaching my size won't do.

Margie could do a lot worse.

Damn! I missed the entire song while thinking about that. I stretched, hit the back button, and decided to take it easy. For real this time.

It's a shame Jacuzzi or someone didn't make tubs like this for the home. Then again, most people would feel beat up by the pulsing action. To me, the high setting felt great. But, then again, I liked hitting offensive linemen. Go figure. To the average person, it would probably feel like a few rounds with the World Heavyweight Champion.

Ahh...

Damn! I missed the song again! A much more relaxed arm hit the replay button. Again.

Just as I was losing myself in the melodies of the Eagles, "Where's your rubber dickee?"

"Well, if it isn't the hollow dick. Girls still running in terror... No, wait. Collapsing in laughter." Mike Holloway, offensive lineman and his own zip code, settled into the tub next to me.

"I hear you're striving to be a great wit-"

"And, I'm halfway there, right?" I cut him off, with a grin.

"Oh, my. The science puke is studying languages now. You might even work up to real subjects soon." Mike was the resident student of philosophy and Western Thought.

"You know what happened to the first great philosopher, don't you?"

"It was brilliant. He chose the moral path, following his own convictions."

"I thought his last words were, 'I drank what?'"

"Jeez! Quoting '*Real Genius*'? Are the only movies you watch science based?" We shared an easy laugh. Then a serious mood settled over me.

“So, Mike, how do we beat East?”

“Carefully.” I just raised my eyebrow and he got it. Game time.

Not only did I miss the song again, I missed the next few as we talked The Game. We both knew this game would define our high school careers and the pressure was on. The press and pundits were favoring our powerhouse rivals. We knew better. We just had to turn our thoughts into actions. We compared notes and observations, tried to poke holes in our game plan, and reviewed all we knew about East.

Shit. I missed the whole album!

“Mike, I need to get out. I promised Luke Nguyen I’d spot him in the weight room.”

“Dude! Cavorting with roundball dweebs now? Have you no shame?”

“Dude? Gone surfer on us?” We tried out game faces on each other. We broke up in laughter at the same time. “Let’s humiliate them, Mike.”

“Deal.”

I managed to haul my boneless butt out of the tub, dry off, and flow over to the weight room. Luke was finishing a set of leg exercises on the twelve-arm monster.

“Ready for a real workout?”

“Bench press,” he said with conviction. In a soft voice, “Don’t look, but we have an audience.”

I helped him put a respectable 100 kilos on the bar and managed to discreetly check out the voyeurs. Rosa and Becca, arms around each other, were blatantly checking us out, mixed with whispers and giggles. When they caught me looking, I got a big wink from each.

## Rebecca

“Art? Posing?” Rosalee asked in response to Rashad’s questions, the hallway was it’s normal lunchtime zoo.

“Hi, Rashad,” I said, trying to pull myself back to the moment. Turning to Rosa, “Rashad and I are in an advanced art class.”

“Ah, makes sense. So, are you going to pose?” she asked me with a smoky look in her eyes. Damn!

“I hope not. I discovered a new depth to my painting yesterday. With this week being so crazy, the only time I’ve had in front of an easel is in art and during the early afternoon. I have to see if yesterday was a fluke or for real, so I really need time to paint.”

“Well, maybe you can pose for me sometime,” Rosa said. Rashad forgotten for the moment as our eyes locked and souls opened.

“Then, I have a request,” his voice breaking our interlude. “I’d like you to pose for me this afternoon.”

“I really need easel time, Rashad.”

“It’s a reasonable request.” There was something in Rosa’s eyes I didn’t quite get, but she was uncomfortable. With me?

“Rashad, another time, please?”

“We’ll talk in art,” he snipped. After a glare at Rosa, he turned and walked off.

“He’s creepy,” Rosalee stated.

“What? Rashad? No. He’s just an artist. We’re all strange.”

“The way he was looking at you. Creepy.”

“Is that why you tensed up?”

“Yep.”

“I thought there was something, I mean... You and me....” Damn! My cheeks are getting wet, again.

She hugged me and all my worries vanished. “It’s been a real emotional roller coaster for you this week, hasn’t it?”

“To say the least.”

“And, now I’m in the mix.”

“Yeah.”

“Should I be?”

“YES!” Oops. Too desperate. Breathe. Relax. Have fun! “Don’t you dare think about getting out of my life now.” She caught my grin, which broke the tension and got us to laughing.

Wrapping her arm around me, she leered and said, “Come with me little girl and I’ll teach you the ways of women.”

“Oh no, Auntie. I’m just a wittle girl.”

We laughed and giggled all the way to the gym. She held the boy’s locker room door open for me. “Right this way, orgy central!”

“Nooo! Anything but... S-E-X!” There were a couple of guys changing that just blushed, stared, and tried to cover the naughty bits.

“That’s okay, boys. Nothing we ain’t seen before.” Grabbing my hand, she pulled me towards the back. We entered a realm unlike anything on the girl’s side. Oh, we had offices and a couple of training rooms. This was like comparing a shanty to the Taj Mahal. Offices, training rooms, a room with huge tubs, meeting rooms... Wow! I guess it is true, football and basketball are the money sports. We settled into a room across from the weight room to watch. Luke was working on this... thing? Yes, thing with

twelve arms! I got it. A resistance machine. Except, this was nothing like the ones I've seen advertised.

I took a good look at Luke, who was moving his legs. As he did, a few of the arms moved. He looked good. I wondered what My Mountain would look like doing that. Maybe later. I turned to Rosalee. "So, what are we?"

"Good question." She looked deeply inside me and our connection came back, without the physical contact. "But, I'm afraid we're moving too fast."

"I-I don't have a reference..." She felt me beginning to collapse and wrapped me up in her arms and love.

"I really don't either. I've never been in love before."

"Well, it sounds like we need to figure all this out together. And with Our Mountain."

"I think he is yours."

"It doesn't bother me, you with him."

"Thanks. I think it would be fun, but..."

"Not the main attraction?" We both giggled at that.

"I think you and he need to get closer before you and I do much more than kiss and cuddle."

"Okay." Why did I feel sad about that? How should I feel? Would I ever know?

"No, really. Any plans?"

I told her about my allies and my hopes and dreams for tonight. We glanced at Luke every now and then while she helped me plan. I'm sure there was more than one giggle shared. We shared lives. I was fascinated to learn about hers. Living overseas when she was really young, she is still fluent in German and Tagalog—having found Internet groups to keep her immersed. I like music. Luis loves music. Rosa lives and breathes music.

It was easy to tell her about my sex life. That took... 15 seconds! Okay, I had more to tell about this week. Prior to that, it was romance novels, the occasional story off the Net, and my fingers. She gave me a PhD level dissertation on hers. I know Luke must have thought we were nuts with all the laughing and giggling. Not to mention the occasional stare, checking out his fine, developing bod.

“Oh, goodie,” she whispered to me. “Your Mountain is coming.”

“Our Mountain.”

“I think for now, we should leave it as Your.”

“We’ll see.” Then he came into my line of vision. He was floating... No, flowing into the weight room. Relaxed. Muscles loose. Not like his “game face”, just relaxed. Rosa started to tell me all about what a wonderful ‘weapon’ he had between his legs. I blushed, giggled, told her what it felt like to hold it in my hand. She promised to help me deal with something that large. We occasionally caught him looking at us, so we would wink or bat our eyelashes, then giggle and laugh.

Before things got too graphic, okay—before things got to the live demonstrations on each other, darn it, the bell rang. Time for PE for me, Trig for Rosa. I believe Luis had AP Political Science.

“Why don’t I meet you after art,” she said to me.

“As long as you don’t mind me painting.”

“I do want to see your work. If you’re busy, I’ll just work on homework.”

“I’d like that.” We gave each other a wink with a promise.

“Ladies!” My Mountain’s boom voice flowed into the room. I launched myself into his arms while Rosa snuggled up to my back. “Ummm... A Becca sandwich.”

“Delicious. Let’s start nibbling!” Rosa whispered into my ear, loud enough for Luis to hear. He kissed me while she licked and sucked on my earlobe. I’d been on simmer since before lunch. They just kicked me up to boil. Suddenly, we broke apart, Rosa grabbed his hand, and started leading him towards the doors.



“See you after art, cutie!”

“I’ll walk you to art, sweetie.”

I stomped my foot. “You can’t leave me like this! It’s unfair! Get me all turned on and just walk off! With each other!”

“Maybe now you’ll let someone help you out in the showers.”

They did come back and each gave me a tender kiss that promised a universe and lifetime of love. Damn them.

I squished my way towards the lockers to put up my bag and jewelry, vowing to have fun in the shower.

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## Luis

Rosa and I got into the hallway and just cracked up.

“That was mean. Fun, but mean.”

“Rosa, she’s been conflicted. At first, scared of the showers, then disappointed when nothing happened to her. Hopefully, she’ll be a bit more aggressive about it today.”

“As I said, fun but mean.”

“Yep, let’s go on to class.” We started down the hall, side-by-side.

“Are you going to ask for relief?”

“My next class isn’t one where, uhm...”

“No suitable volunteers?”

“Something like that. I know she’s going to have volunteers in the showers. She got really turned on Monday.”

“Will you get jealous?” she asked, looking up at me.

“Nope.” I felt certain of that down to my bones.

“Why not?”

“We’ve talked about it, this week I mean. And... I don’t know, just won’t.”

“Ookay. We can talk more about it later.” She looked up at me, “Would she get jealous of us if I gave you relief?”

I came to a full stop and looked over at her. “I thought we decided to hold off?”

She wrapped her fingers around Junior while wrapping herself around my side, pressing her tits into my side. “It’s just relief.”

“I don’t feel right about this.” Why did I have to groan in the middle of that!

“He feels just fine with it!” And it felt just fine to me. Maybe Becca would understand... Wait!! “Besides, just think I’m some random girl in class, but not someone in the class you’re going to.” The lines wrapping around the classroom came to mind and almost tripped me over right then. “I’m just some winner of the lottery.”

“Rosa!” Her hand speed up, her thumb running along the top in my second most perfect place and giving a little swipe across the head on each stroke. Her fingertips tickled my balls as she approached my body. “I’m..”

My mouth stopped functioning. My hips began to meet her strokes. Somebody was making these incoherent sounds, kinda like grunts. Amazing! It was in time to her hand.

“I’ll take the blame, Luis. Now... Come for me! Spray your seed. Shoot on the floor. Let me see your sperm! Show me what you’re going to flood Becca’s womb with.”

“Oh, YES!” My vision tunneled and suddenly I was looking up at the ceiling. One, two, threeeee, four distinct pulses before everything just quivered and oozed for a bit.

“God, Yes! Nice. So much. So wonderful. Next time in my mouth!” She purred into

my ear. Then she stood on her tippies and gave me a kiss on the cheek. “Thank you.”

Another student called out, “Clean up in aisle three!” It barely registered.

Finally, my voice began making coherent sounds as my breath slowed. “I should be thanking you. Do you want me to-”

“Nope. Not enough time. Besides, I don’t have a problem with potential volunteers in my next class. I might even ask for the lottery. Sounds like fun.”

“It’s unique. I’ve had a few guys in each line.”

“Not a problem for me.”

“I noticed!”

“Bad boy, now get to class. I’ll see you at Media Day.”

“You sticking around that long?”

“Becca and I are going to hang after her art and my music class. I normally stay late as well, it’s good practice time for me.”

“Yeah. Becca normally does as well. Well, see you at Media Day.” That thought brought me down.

“You don’t sound thrilled about it.”

“A bunch of reporters hoping I’ll fuck up and say something they can use as dirt? Yeah. Fun.” She laughed at me, gave me a quick kiss, and headed off. Damn, she had a nice ass too.

“Whoa! Are you and Becca broken up already?” asked a guy in my Poli Sci class as I walked in the door.

“Nope. We’re doing fine.” My smile came quite naturally.

“Cheating on her?”

“Nope. That’s her new girlfriend.” At least I hope we didn’t just cheat.

“Whoa, dude!” He had a look of admiration as he headed towards his seat and I found mine. Before the teacher called the class to order, it would seem that Becca, Rosa, and I were the main topic of whispered conversations, pointed fingers, and incredulous stares. This is going to be a long class.

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## Rebecca

How many different ways can you hit a volleyball at a naked girl? I’m not sure, but my personal experience is a lot! Not that they were hitting them right at me. Just enough out of my reach that caused me to jump, stretch, and otherwise bounce my boobs and display my other bits. Instead of turning me on, it settled me down.

Maybe I don’t need relief in the showers. I wonder if Rosa gave Luis relief? He her? I’d like to see that. No. I’d like to participate, fully!

TWEET.

At least this time, I remembered to head towards the boy’s. I stopped by my locker and took off my shoes, grabbed a towel, and walked to the shower.

And stopped. Look at all those... dicks. Cocks. Wangs. Peckers. All shapes and sizes, with more than one saluting my entrance. This could be fun.

Yet...

Why was I thinking about Luis? About Rosalee?

“May I wash your back?” a male voice asked.

“Sounds reasonable.”

“May I wash your front?” another male voice asked. I could only nod my head as the first set of hands began working the muscles of my shoulders.

While four hands caressed my skin, my mind shut off. I totally surrendered to what, not who. The feeling of rough hands across my nipples sent shivers up through my head, rendering me incapable of speech. Again, across the sensitive buds, and shivers shot through my stomach and down my legs, rebounding off my feet and ended up getting caught between my legs.

The hands on my back were massaging, relaxing, and traveling down over my ass. I found my legs opening without having to say anything to them. More hands were added to the mix. Some stroking my legs, adding to the fire already building inside me. Some on my arms, which led my hands to pulsing pieces of flesh for each. Satiny smooth on the outside and hard as iron on the inside. Instinctively, my fingers wrapped around them and began stroking, marveling at the texture. Hard, yet spongy. Then a valley and ridge before the end. A furry wall at the other end.

Hands stroking. Fires building. Moans echoing off the tile walls. Flashes of light through my eyelids. Grunts and hips rocking on either side of me. The water flowing over all of us, hot and sensual.

“Shit!” I heard on one side as a new warmth splashed on my legs.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!” Came from the other side as threads of warmth splattered onto my side and hips.

“Oh! My! God!” A female voice echoed just before I stepped off the edge of the universe and my pussy exploded.

As light returned to my eyes and slowly became boys in the showers, I could feel hands holding me up on shaking legs. My brain couldn't push words out of my mouth, but I felt my jaw moving up and down.

“Thank you, Rebecca.” Came from the hands behind me. It was echoed around the shower.

Slowly my legs began functioning again and my power of speech returned. “Thank all of you, that was nice.”

I did manage to get a quick wash, with a fair amount of help. I managed to help a few more appendages lose a load. I don't know why I find that fascinating. I guess because

I don't have one. None of them hard were as big as Junior was soft, which made me wonder if I really, really could fit that monster inside me.

Oh well, I'll find out tonight, if all works out. My list of co-conspirators just keeps growing.

Dried and dressed—I put on my shoes and jewelry and with bag on my shoulder—I ventured into the hallway to find My Mountain waiting for me. He looked a little sheepish. I took his hand and started walking towards art.

“What’s wrong?” Was it me? No. Get off that line.

“Umm... Rosa gave me relief on my way to the last class.” He looked cute with his head down.

“Good for her.” I slipped my arm around his back. I really did need longer arms.

“You’re not upset?”

“After what happened to me in the shower, are you kidding?” He looked at me with a stunned look. “Even if it hadn’t. I’m glad she did. You needed it.”

“Umm... thanks. So, what happened in the shower?” He did pull me into a side-by-side hug.

“Hands! Lots and lots of hands. And one very good orgasm on my part.” I felt my face warming with that pronouncement. Even after doing what I did, I was embarrassed about saying it. “Now I have to figure out how to work ‘*many pricks a popping*’ into my new song.”

It took him a second, but he finally got it and started to laugh. That deep wonderful rumble I love so much.

The requests came. Even when we separated, the connection was very strong and just intensified when we touched again. It didn't even register when others touched me. All I felt was Luis, his hands, his lips... And, Rosa wandered in and out of my daydreams. Her kiss. Her touch, the way she had fondled my breasts.

All too soon, we were at the art room. Francesca was outside herding her cats. “Ah, my

Naked. No posing today for you two. You,” she pointed at My Mountain, “need to get ready for the game. Right *connazionale*? And, you,” she pointed at me, “need to work on your new style. I’ll give you a minute.”

As she walked into the room, I melted into My Mountain. The hug turned into a kiss, the kiss into melding. Our hearts did their special dance, a Tango I think. All too soon and not soon enough, we broke. Damn. Squishy again!

“See you at Media Day?” He looked at me hopefully.

“Wouldn’t miss it. I’ll be there with Rosalee.”

We gave each other a little kiss, little for us anyway. Off he went after we patted each other on the ass. Okay, we caressed each other’s ass. I caught myself about to giggle as I walked into the classroom.

Francesca and Rashad were standing inside talking and looking my way. He was gesturing wildly and his voice tense and loud. “I made a reasonable request and she refused me.”

“Rebecca, could you join us?” Ms. Rotella beckoned me. “I understand you refused a request?”

“Not really, ma’am. Rashad asked if I was going to pose today, I said I didn’t think so since I needed to work on my new style.”

“I asked her to pose for me after class.”

“Again, I explained that I really needed to work on the discovery I made yesterday. This class and right after have been all the time I’ve had this week for my art.”

“You’re not against posing, then?” she asked.

“No ma’am. Just the timing.”

“Okay, we’ll work out a time. Would you be against doing it next week or later?”

“No.”

“I don’t-” started Rashad.

“Good. All settled. Rebecca, you go to work and I will join you in a minute.” I hurried off as soon as I could. I could feel myself dropping into the zone and didn’t need to be distracted right now.

I looked around my work area for a piece to work on. My eyes looked over at the blank canvases. I pulled myself back and tried to focus on an existing work I could change. Once again, the eyes wandered over to the blank canvases. I gave in and selected one that hadn’t been Gessoed and pulled out my oil paint supplies, palette, and brushes.

As I set the canvas in the easel, I could see the finished painting and the layers to get there. I mixed the pigments I wanted to start with, loaded the palette, and began applying it to the canvas. Except, I wasn’t just putting the paint on canvas, I was letting the emotions flow for each stroke.

This stroke, a careful line that will be the edge of a face. Sadness. Pain. A dream not realized.

Or, this one, the base of the logs in the fireplace. Warmth. Happiness. Home.

“You’ve still got it, don’t you?” Francesca’s voice floated into my world.

“Yes ma’am. I’m no longer adding colors and lines. I’m putting emotions on the canvas.”

“*Perfetto*,” she said while she leaned in to study what I had already done.

“What’s the music you’re playing?” I asked. It was... well, different. Something I’m sure Luis would love. I also found it wonderful to paint to.

“You like?” I nodded my head. “*Bene!* It is by Carlos Santana and Alice Coltrane and called ‘*Angel of Air/Angel of Water*’. It’s about a voyage of spiritual discovery.”

“Could you write that down so I can see if Luis has it?”

She nodded, then “Oh, how did the phone call go?”

“Phone call?”



“USC. Fine Arts department. Dean.”

“Oops.”

“Yes, oops. Now go into my office and take care of it. *Immediatamente!*” She wasn’t upset, just anxious for me to jump to it.

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## Luis

Glad to have escaped posing today, sorry to be away from Becca, and ready to get to work, I flew across campus to the gym. Through the empty girl’s locker room to drop my stuff and around to the men’s. Walking into the weight room, remembering yesterday all too well, I was stunned to see Coaches Mc, Ames, and Hammer standing there.

“Again?” I asked while my insides turned to jelly.

Coach McFarland looked stern, almost angry. Then, slowly, his face cracked into a smile. Coaches Ames and Hammer were about to fall over laughing at this point.

“Gotcha!” they all said and turned to leave.

“Damn it! That’s not funny!” I yelled. I suddenly wanted to break something, someone. Throw things. Shit. I didn’t need this.

“Remember that feeling. You’re going to need it Friday night,” Coach Mc said as he walked away. Their laughter echoing around the halls.

Grumbling, I set up the twelve-arm monster and went to work on a “light” workout. I started with my neck and worked slowly down my body. Each major muscle group I worked until they were stretched and filled with blood. Finally, twenty minutes later, I finished the last reps with my ankles. Somebody was playing some old Stones, ‘*Sympathy for the Devil*’. Yep. Now, who’s the devil? Me? Or this fucking machine? East?

Rosalee?

Whoa! Where did that come from?

Focus! East!

Standing, I wiped myself down with a towel and looked in a mirror. All my muscles were pumped. Veins standing out on my arms. My legs looked like sculpted oak. My torso solid. Six-pack, hell. I looked like I had the full case or maybe a keg. Now, to pump the blood around and push out the toxins.

I headed outside and started running around the track. Normally, there would be only a few people about. Today, there were trucks and vans with satellite dishes and reporters everywhere. I ignored them as I built up my speed until by the fifth lap, I was hitting a solid stride.

A sprinter from the track team appeared next to me. "Going out for track?"

I gave him a snort, "Right!"

"You're not doing bad."

"This is full speed for me."

"Oh," was all he said. He down shifted and disappeared around the next curve faster than Michael Schumacher in his Ferrari. I let my mind clear as I ran the next couple of laps. Just as I was starting the eighth and last lap for now, the sprinter reappeared. "Last lap?"

"Yep," I simply said. Good thing I'm conditioned and could still talk. Sort of.

"Why don't I pace you. We'll build up to a final sprint."

"Told you. Full speed."

"Wimp." And he moved out in front of me. I could swear he was taunting me. I kicked a bit harder and started closing the distance. Just when I could almost reach out and thump someone, he moved slightly ahead. I kicked harder. He moved away. Harder I

kicked. As I was just about to grab his neck and see if I could detach it from his body, we flew across the finish line.

“Holy shit! Did ya’ see the speed on that big bastard!” a random voice shouted. That distracted me from slaughtering the sprinter. Suddenly, I realized there was quite a crowd around the start/finish line, including Coach Mc and two people that looked strangely familiar, but I couldn’t place right then.

I couldn’t think about that right now. I slowed to a jog and let my body begin to cool down from the flat out run to pump the toxins out. The sprinter tossed me a big thumbs-up before taking off again. Halfway around the track I slowed to a fast walk and the sweat started pouring off me. As I approached the start/finish line again, Coach Ames, the defensive coordinator, threw me a fresh towel.

“Nice run, Luis. Fastest 440 I’ve ever seen you do.”

“That sprinter got me a little worked up.”

“That was part of the plan.”

“Plan? It was a set up?” He just laughed. Damn! Shit!

“Go on and get dressed and come out early. I want you to work the blocking sled with me for a while before practice.”

“Sure thing, Coach,” I managed through gritted teeth. If he weren’t a coach, and a damned good one, some choice words would be running through my brain, probably out my mouth.

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## Rebecca

“How did the call go?” Francesca asked me as I came back into the main room.

“She wasn’t in so I left a message and my cell phone number.”

“What took so long?”

“Just chatting with her assistant. Perhaps you can tell me who let the Dean see a preview of my work?”

“She has seen some of your work? That is wonderful!”

“Francesca!! Do Italians have pixie myths?”

“*Folletto* is what we call them.” Her smile was about to split her face. “Now get to work. You want to be able to send them examples of your new abilities.”

“Yes, Francesca the *Folletto*!” I gave her a mock salute which she returned with a pixie-ish smile.

It didn't take long to get back into my zone. I buried myself into mixing the oils from pigments, feeling the emotion and passion I wanted each color to evoke. Intentionally, I mixed some colors a shade off from natural, so they would push out from the canvas. Nothing the conscious mind would notice. After all, the emotions were part of the deeper mind.

Slowly the picture emerged from the layers of colors and lines. The palette of emotions. Sadness, joy in hiding, warmth, and a chilling cold. Normalcy, shock, with a layer of terror. Dreams suppressed and suddenly revived.

“Wow!” Rashad's voice jerked me back to the present. “That's intense.”

“Thanks,” I managed. So close. I'm almost done with the main scene. I don't think I've ever painted anything so fast. It would be just a matter of a couple of hours to finish all the little details.

“Do you have time to pose now, since you're done?”

“I'm nowhere near done,” I snapped. Couldn't he see it? Wasn't he an artist as well?

“It looks fine to me.” Was he whining? Was he that insensitive? Out of touch?

“I still have a few things to do with the main elements, then lots of details in the background that need to be there. I need to focus on this.” Just before I lost my temper,

my cell rang. "Hello?"

"Rebecca Davis?" A cheerful, female voice said from the phone.

"Yes, this is she." I was focused on the painting.

"This is Dean Ruth Massey of the USC School of Fine Arts. Is this a good time to talk?"

"Um, yes, let me just clean up for a second."

"Painting?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Please call me Ruth, Rebecca. Would you like me to call you back in five minutes?"

"Please call me Becky, Ruth. Five minutes would be great."

"Talk to you then."

I pulled to phone from my ear and just stared at it.

"Now do you have time to pose?" Sarcasm made the whines worse. "Or, are you just refusing a reasonable request?"

"Rashad, I told you that I would pose. Just not now." I began wiping my hands. "I need to be ready for a call in a minute."

"Who's so damned important, then. Your boyfriend?"

"Ruth Massey."

"Who's that?"

"The Dean of Roski School of Fine Arts at University of Southern California."

"Oh," he mumbled as he stomped off.

Before I could even put down the rag I had been using to clean my hands, a student I

didn't know approached me and handed me a note. She was gone before I could thank her. Opening it, I saw it was a message from the Dean of the College of Fine Arts at UT-Austin. More pixie action, no doubt.

"This is getting weird," I told myself out loud.

"What is?" Rosalee said behind me. Almost shocking me out of my non-existent clothes.

"Luis says he's thinking USC and UT as his main schools."

"Yes..."

"And, today I get calls from the Deans of the Colleges of Fine Arts at USC and UT."

"Sounds like a bit of a conspiracy."

"Or strange coincidence."

"Right!"

"Okay." Can she read my mind?

"I accused Ms Rotella of being a pixie."

"Well, the day gets more interesting!" With a wink, she patted my butt.

Before I could respond, my cell phone rang. I held up my hand to her as I answered.

"Becky Davis," I said into the phone.

"Becky, this is Ruth. Is this a better time?" Came the tinny voice from the phone.

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

## Chapter 24 – Wednesday Afternoon

### *“Fortunate Son”*

#### Luis

“Again!” Coach Ames shouted at me. I dropped into a four point stance, both hands on the ground, ready to spring. I dug my feet in to get the most power I could.

“Hut!”

I uncoiled, slammed my shoulder into the pad wearing an East jersey with the center’s number on it. Using my hands and arms to stabilize and focus my force, I pushed. When the sled lifted up, I began digging into the turf with my cleats as hard as I could, pushing the sled at my running speed, noticing as it dug another line of furrows into the practice field.

TWEET!

I dropped the sled on Coach Ames’s whistle, bouncing him and the two equipment trainers from the jolt.

“Take a break,” Coach Ames said as he headed towards the locker room.

Hands on my knees, I caught my breath. I think I moved that fucking sled, the coach, and the two managers up and down the field ten times. I took a look at the jersey on the pad and laughed. It was ripped to shreds.

“Do that in the game and we own the line,” Coach Mc said as he went by. “Locker room in five.”

I breathed deeply as the burning in my calves and thighs eased.

“Luis, move over by the sled and let me get a shot,” some photographer asked. I pulled my helmet off and stood by the pad, holding my helmet under my arm and giving him my game face. Flash, clunk of the mirror, and the whine of the recharge. I missed the

sound of film cameras and the whirl of the motor drive. Flash again, followed by a hundred more, it seemed. Christ, there must be a dozen photogs around now.

I turned and jogged towards the locker room, ignoring the questions. I gave a growl when one reporter shoved a microphone in my face. I behaved when what I really wanted to do was take the stupid thing and shove it so far up his-

“After practice guys,” I heard one of the assistants say as he cut me from the herd and let me stomp the rest of the way on my own. I. Just. Want. To. Play. This. Game. All the other bullshit aside.

On the way in the door, one of the trainers handed me a bottle of go juice. Just what I needed. Fluids, sugars, and electrolytes to replace all that I had just lost. I forced myself to drink slowly. Still, it was gone by the time I sat on the bench in front of my locker. Another appeared in my hand as my helmet flew into the locker with a bit more force than necessary.

I heard an echo next to me as Mike Holloway threw his helmet. He looked as agitated as I did.

“Settle down, folks,” Coach Hammer said. “Contadino and Holloway, save it for East. Now, Coach McFarlan has a few things to say.”

I half listened as he gave a pep talk, explained Media Day to the newbies, and laid out the plan for the day. For the first hour, the first teams would be in the gym away from reporters' eyes. Then the rest of practice would be running standard plays and drills. We were not to expose any of our new plays.

Shit! I need to work with Jason on his tells. Who else can I enlist? I'll talk to the other captains later.

“When we finish practice, they'll be requests for photographs. I want everyone to cooperate. Do not answer questions, though. After showers, I'll gather a few of you to sit with me and the coaches for a press conference. I'd encourage the rest of the team to attend, we have a couple of special guests and some announcements.” Coach Mc looked around at the team. Everyone understood that ‘encourage’ meant to be there.

On his cue, the four co-captains stood. I don't really remember joining the other three at the front of the room. But, there I was, standing with Mike Holloway, Paul Rogers, and



Michael Simms. Paul is the brains of the offense at quarterback and Michael, never Mike, the brains of the defense at inside linebacker. Mike and I faced each other, with Paul and Michael behind us. We locked eyes and growled at each other.

Paul spoke to the rest of the team. "Would you want to face these two on Friday night?"

"NO!"

"Do you want them to be the only ones fired up?"

"NO!"

"Let's hear your growl!"

It started low. More of a buzz than a growl. It built until it consumed the locker room. A primal sound that tore through the soul and turned bowels of the unsuspecting into liquids.

"Bulldogs-" Paul chanted.

"Suck!" Michael responded.

The growl turned to the jeer.

"Beat-" Paul began.

"East!" Michael repeated.

"Beat-" Paul continued.

"East!" Half the team joined Michael.

"Beat-" Paul commanded.

"East!" The entire team responded.

Soon the whole team was jumping up and down in time to the chant.

"Kill 'em!" Paul screamed.

“Wreck ‘em!” Michael intoned.

“Stomp ‘em!” Mike growled.

“Humiliate ‘em!” I threatened.

“Warriors on three!” We all shouted.

“1... 2... 3...”

“WARRIORS!”

We broke with most of the team heading out onto the field looking for victims. The first teams headed to the gym.

On the way, I told my co-captains about what I had observed with Jason and his tells. We quickly formed a plan where Paul and Michael would work with him.

Mike and I realized, just before stepping onto the wood floor, we still had our cleats on. We kicked them off and joined the team. For the next hour, the only sounds heard were the coaches' instructions, cadence counts, and socks sliding on the floor. Twenty-two very focused and intent people moved through the plays flawlessly.

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## Rebecca

I managed to stumble back into the main art room from Francesca’s office. My mind going a thousand miles an hour, yet registering nothing. Too much, too quick. How could I process it when I didn’t believe any of it. This can’t be happening to me.

“Everything okay?” Rosalee’s voice startled me.

“Wha... Yes. I think. I don’t know.”

“How did the call go?”

“Calls.”

“Okay. Tell me about them.” She pulled me into a hug. I felt safe and like I could relax.

“Well... I talked to Ruth Massey at USC first. She offered, pending a review of my latest work, a full scholarship. Then, I had a message to call Dean Kerkoff.”

“Who’s that?”

“The Dean of the College of Fine Arts at UT-Austin. She offered me the same deal.”

“That’s spectacular.” She hugged me tight.

“I guess.”

“What’s wrong?” She turned me to face her. I really wanted to hide, but she wouldn’t let me.

“I... I don’t know what to do.”

“Well, I think you need to get your portfolio done.”

“I agree,” Francesca said walking over.

I moved from Rosa’s grasp and practically threw myself on Francesca. “Thank you!”

With an enigmatic smile on her face, she said, “Well, you have to tell me what you’re thankful for.”

I let the *folletto* have her moment and I explained to both of them, and myself, the calls. Apparently, both deans had received copies of my portfolio from the end of last school year and glowing letters of recommendation from some of my teachers. I had to give the resident pixie a harsh look which turned into laughs for all of us. In return, they had conditionally approved me for admittance next year and full scholarships. Conditional since I still had to handle trivial details like applying! And, they wanted a review of where I am now artistically to make sure I hadn’t regressed to stick figures.

“*Bellissimo!*” The pixie said as she remembered something urgent needing her attention in her office.

“Well, things are working out, it seems,” Rosa said.

“I guess.” Is hiding such a bad thing?

“What’s wrong?”

“Too much, too fast.”

“Well... When do they need something from you?”

“The applications in a month or so, the portfolio soon after and, a decision in February.”

“Anything wrong with the schools?”

“Absolutely not. Both are very good art schools. Yet, it’s a shame the best school is in a city without a top tier football team.”

“Where’s that?”

“Richmond. VCU. They have one of the absolute best art schools in the country. Don’t get me wrong, I’d do quite well at USC or UT. Honestly, I don’t know if VCU would be that much better for me.”

“Come here,” she said softly and opened her arms. I slid into them and we hugged each other. We shared a light kiss. “It will work out.”

“I know.” I did know, down to my toes. How does she get away with this? Most people I would push away. “Now, how about you?”

“Well... I said I could pretty much go anywhere, but...”

“You have a favorite place?”

“Yep. The Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore.”

“I’m surprised you didn’t say Juilliard.”

“Not my style. Too cutthroat. Peabody is much more laid back and just as challenging and excellent but more humane.”

I couldn't help but laugh. I tried to calm down when I saw the hurt in her eyes. I hugged her tighter. “I'm not laughing at you or Juilliard or Peabody. It's just... Rosalee and laid back...”

She tried. She really tried to stifle the giggle. Which just cause me to giggle. And her to chuckle. And me to laugh. Okay, I snorted. Which caused her to point and bend over howling. As we spiraled out of control, we were loud enough to bring Francesca out of her office in a panic. As soon as I explained “laid back” and “trailer trash slut” she couldn't help but join in.

While we were struggling to control ourselves, tears rolling down our faces, Rashad walked into the room. He took one look at us, turned, and stomped out. So much for us calming down.

“Oh! I'm gonna pee!” Was all I could get out before having to run to the potty. Thankfully, Francesca had one in her office. I managed to more or less get aim, finish my business, and wash. When I headed back into the main room, Rosa and Francesca were involved in a serious conversation about schools.

“VCU?” Francesca asked me.

“Yes ma'am.”

“It is an excellent school. But, not for you.” She wagged her fingers at me. I love how Italians involve their whole body when speaking.

“Why?”

“While you need some mentoring with your skills, the main benefit you will derive from an art college is exposure. USC, UT, and a few others will give you the exposure you need.”

“Okay,” was all I could think to say right then. I needed to think about this. She could see it in my eyes.

“Why don’t you girls go see your boyfriend practice? I think this week has been enough confusion. You need a break.”

“Her boyfriend,” Rosalee corrected.

“*Ah! Si Si!*” She gave us a knowing wink. “Now, run along.”

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## Luis

“I’m gonna get you this time,” I snarled at Mike, resting on my knees, getting ready to move into my stance. My pronouncement carried across the field and echoed off the nearly empty stands.

“Try it, asshole,” he sneered back at me as he moved over the ball. We both set. Head to head just inches apart.

“22-Red! 22-Red!” Paul Rogers chanted. “Hut... Hut-Hut!”

As soon as Mike moved the ball beginning the snap, I sprung and hit him full force, shoulder pad to shoulder pad. The impact sounded like a rifle shot on steroids. Combined with our war cries, it must have sounded awesome. We locked up with our blocking moves, just this side of a holding penalty for either of us. Four feet clawing into the turf, slinging grass and dirt. Each trying to throw the other off balance.

TWEET!

“Alright you two. That’s it. Five laps,” Coach Mc yelled at us. “Anybody else want to try for some laps? Half speed walk-thrus guys! Save it for the game.”

Mike and I pulled our helmets off, smiled at each other, caught the winks from the coaches, and headed out on our laps.

“How many will be joining us in a minute?” Mike asked as we started our “penalty” laps.

“The whole team.”

About halfway through our first lap, the sound of multiple rifle shots combined with grunts and war cries echoed through the stadium followed instantly by the coaches whistles. As predicted, the rest of the team joined us on the track

“So, what do we do to keep everyone fired up?” I asked Mike.

“I think we let the tension just naturally build until the Pep Rally tomorrow night.”

“Sounds good.”

“Ah... Luis... How are you planning on handling Friday?”

“What do you mean?”

“You can’t exactly wear your jersey to school, can you?”

“Oops.”

“Yeah, oops.”

“Let me talk to the equipment managers. I’m sure we can figure something out.”

“I can’t wait to see you in paint.”

“I hope you get picked next week.”

Before he could respond, two sweet, sexy voices rang out, “Hey number 96! Looking good!”

“Shit! He’s even got naked groupies!”

“My girlfriend and her girlfriend, I think,” I said as I waved to the girls.

“Damn! How does that work?”

“Don’t know. We’re still... I don’t know. Confused.”

---

## Rebecca

“There he is, number 96,” I pointed out as I spied Luis on the track running with Mike Holloway.

“Who’s that he’s with? Damn, he’s as big as Luis!”

“That’s Mike Holloway, the starting center and one of the co-captains.”

“How do you know so much?”

“I like football!”

“And a certain football player?”

“Oh yeah! Let’s try to embarrass him.” It only took a couple of seconds to work out what we wanted to say. By then, he was getting close.

“Hey number 96! Looking good!” We both yelled at the same time. He gave a wave as they went by.

“Must be the end of practice. Oh, look, there’s my brother, Jason.”

“Really? I didn’t know he’s your brother. He’s a cutie and sweet too.”

“Got a crush on him?”

“Not really. I think I’m too...”

“Smart?”

“Welllll...”

“That’s okay. I’ve met most of the girls he goes out with.”



“Thanks. Now what?”

“I’m not sure. I’ve never been to a Media Day before.”

We hung around, watching the players run laps. Rosalee kept me in stitches with a running commentary of the sexual prowess of some (okay, a lot) or how cute, mean, ugly, scary, nice, or whatever she knew or thought each one was.

“What about Luis?”

“Teddy bear.”

“Huh?”

“He’s big, could be scary, but most of the time he’s gentle and kind.”

“Yep. You ever hook up with him?”

“Nope. Unfortunately.”

“So, what about his friend Mike?”

“Not him, either.”

“Interested?”

“Ahhh... What? Trying to get rid of me?”

“Nope.”

“Welllll... Not now. Too much on my plate.”

“You know, I don’t think I’ve really seen you hang out with many people.”

“Oh, I don’t. I really don’t have any close friends. Girls are scared of me, so are a lot of guys. Those that do pay attention want to cut through the chase and go straight to the main course, so to speak.”

“That sucks.”

“In a way,” Rosa smiled at me. It took me a few seconds, but I finally got it. “I’m in the same boat as you.”

“What! Oh, you mean friends. I guess. I do have Jason. He’s my best friend.”

“Can you talk to him about anything?”

“Most things.”

“What about girl things?”

“Until Monday, I didn’t even think about girl things.”

“Even once a month?”

“Mom talked to me about that before I went into hiding. So, no, I didn’t really think about girl things. Last night, after dinner, with my mom and Jason’s girlfriend, was the first time I’d ever done girl talk.”

“What did you think?”

“How much I’ve missed.”

“You need a bestest buddy.”

“What about you?”

“Yeah, I guess.” She looked around for a second. “Oh, look, the reporters are descending on the team.”

We watched the hunt from the sidelines as we worked our way over to the gym, we’d overheard from others that that’s where the media events were to occur.

“There’s Your Mountain and Mike now. Look, being hassled by those photographers and reporters.”

## Luis

I can't believe these jackals. Put. On. My. Happy. Face. Don't possibly consider where I'd like to insert that lens. No. Reporters good. Can't eat. Can't kill. Smile.

"Luis, who is going to win?" one of the vultures shouted out.

Before I could work up a good "Memo from the Department of Obvious" comment, Coach Ames stepped in. He saved me from calculating the diameter of the orifice that would have resulted in my shoving his microphone, arm, and the camera of the guy next to him into his rectum. Without lubrication.

"Save the questions for later," Coach Ames reminded them, again. Into my ear, he hissed, "Inside. Now. Shower. Relax. We need you later."

I pulled myself from considering how many joules of energy it would take to make my target edible and went into the locker room. Mike was right next to me.

"Shit!"

"About says it all."

"Fuck!"

"Well, there is that."

We stared at each for a minute and then started laughing. After hitting the showers, we headed into the gym for the press conference. Mike was smiling like he knew something I didn't, but he wouldn't twig.

"So," Mike said to me just before we went into the gym proper, "how do you feel about being naked in front of the reporters and cameras?"

"Shit! I hadn't even thought about it!"

"Too late!" He opened the door and bowed me through first.

Okay. I can do this. Just like school, right? Yeah! Sure. Right. Two steps into the gym and every eye was on me. It took only a few seconds for the cameras to find their way and the flashing frenzy began.

“Nice ass!” Becca’s and Rosalee’s voice rose over the din. Now I felt naked. Not nude. Not unclothed. Exposed. Vulnerable! I did notice that most of the cameras turned their way, though!

“Must be nice to have naked groupies,” Mike whispered just before he headed towards the coaches. The two half-familiar people were with them now along with a third man. A very portly man that I thought I recognized but dismissed. I shook it off and headed towards the rest of the team and took a seat. I felt every camera in the place on me and noticed for the first time the TV cameras. One had the ESPN logo. Not only am I naked, I’m naked on a national sports network. Great!

I settled in with my other team members while Paul, Michael, and Mike joined the coaches and the three- Shit! Now I know where I know them from! The big, portly gentleman was Ralph Frisson, head coach of the University of Maryland. Mack White, the head coach of UT-Austin and Bob Singer of USC. Shit! Some big guns here today.

Before I could work out a wager with myself as to who was signing with who, Coach Mc stepped up to the mic. “I’d like to welcome our fans, families, friends, and the media to our campus. I’m sure the rumors that have been spreading about three famous coaches being here might have had something to do with it.” He got a good laugh. “At least enough to attract the national media!” More laughter. “I am beyond proud to announce that three of my seniors are signing their letters-of-intent today.” Maybe not wild, but the response was highly enthusiastic. Mike, Michael, and Paul were hamming it up. Their parents, who had joined them, were over the moon. The team? We were surprised, a touch upset they hadn’t shared this with us, but proud as hell of our teammates.

First up was Coach Frisson from Maryland. All three hundred plus pounds of Coach Ralph approached the microphone and did his spiel. To my delightful surprise, Mike stepped up to sign his letter. A great fit for my closest friend and a true student of the game with one of the most innovative coaches with a penchant for creating complex offenses and defenses. Plus, Maryland is an emerging superpower in a strong conference. How could I not stand and cheer him on?

Coach Mack was next and he surprised me by announcing Michael was signing. I

would have bet he'd have gone with a quarterback, not a linebacker. Yet, Michael would be a force in their defensive system. If I remember, their key linebacker this year is a senior, so I doubt he's going to red shirt. He'll be playing as a freshman. Kewl.

Well, that removed all doubts about Paul. When I thought about it, it made perfect sense. Coach Singer is known for his balls-to-the-wall style of play, easily incorporating trick plays and gutsy moves. Paul thrives under that kind of pressure. USC's long history of conference championships, Heisman Trophy winners, and National Championships means Paul is going to be high profile.

I liked Coach Singer's attitude about defense. "Bend, don't break" is his theory. A strong defense that will allow short yardage, but not give up big plays. It would be interesting playing in that kind of a system. Given how fast paced the offense is, the defense spends a lot of time on the field, meaning that a freshman might get a lot of playing time. That's a real plus in my book.

The whole team stood and cheered our three teammates at the end of the signing. I kept thinking of how I might end up playing with one of them and probably against the other two at some point in my career.

Shit! They decided. What is wrong with me? And... why am I naked? I could see the cameras move between the stage, me, and the girls. Lovely.

Before my mind could get out of control, again, the press conference started. So much for the easy stuff! The big three walked off the stage and I went up to join the other captains and face the vultures. Paul, Mike, and Michael all looked great in the colors of their new schools. And me? Naked. Damn.

"Luis, man... I'm sorry I couldn't tell you. They asked me to keep it quiet," Mike whispered to me. Michael and Paul echoing him.

"It's okay, guys. I'm really happy for all of you."

"So, when are you going to decide?"

"Soon. Very soon."

Then the questions started. Naturally, the first was for me. The naked, indecisive one. "Have you chosen a school yet?"

“Trojans!” Paul, echoed by Coach Singer, shouted.

“Longhorns!” With the same stereo effect.

“Terrapins!” Mike’s voice was particularly loud, given his face was right by my ear.

I had to join the laughter. “As you can see, it’s a tough choice. It would be fun to play with any of these three guys and for any of these great coaches. The tougher choice is which two I might play against in a National Championship game. So, in answer to your question, nope. No decision yet. This week, I’m only focused on one thing-”

“Being naked?” someone shouted.

“Well, there is that.” Good way to break the tension, I wonder who I should thank. “My focus this week has been and will be the game against East.”

Coach Mc kept the rest of the press conference focused on the East game, with only the occasional comment about my nudity, my college choice, or such. His goal was to walk a fine line between firing up our fans and not giving East any ammunition they could use against us. I think he did a good job, but then again, I was naked. I hadn’t thought about it all day and suddenly I was so exposed. I sure hope the cameras had filters to block my blush. Coach summed it up perfectly at the end. “We expect a tough game. We’ve prepared and are in top shape. We’re headed across town to play a tough opponent. I know how we want it to turn out. We’ll see if I’m right on Friday.”

The flashing frenzy started again as they had the whole team pose. They had me on one knee with the other linemen in front of everyone. It seemed to me there was way too much attention paid to what was between my legs.

As we broke up, I found myself with a naked girl firmly attached to my chest. “I’m so proud of you. You look so good.” All while smothering me in kisses.

“We’re proud of you too, son,” my father said. I was surprised to see mom there. “Well, it seems his harem is growing.”

Between Becca’s flying assault and the surprise of seeing my parents, I finally noticed Rosalee. She was sandwiching Becca to me. I smiled at her over Becca’s shoulder as my sweetie hugged me tight. “Ah, yeah, well...”

“I’m sure it is an interesting story. Something you can share with us later. Right now, we have some business to attend to. Ladies, if you will pardon us?”

“What business?”

“We don’t mind. We’ll wait here for you. I’ve got some news for you too. The phone calls. Later, though.”

“Yeah. We’ll wait here. Lots of cameras!”

“Later!” I managed as my parents dragged the suddenly Becca-free me to the football offices.

“Momma, I didn’t expect to see you today.”

“I wouldn’t miss this!”

“Miss what? What’s going on?”

“We’re meeting with the three coaches you just saw.”

“Oh!” Boy, could this day get any stranger?

A couple of minutes later, we were in the main conference room with Coach Frisson, call me Ralph. He made his pitch to the parental units and me. The key being with Mike and I on the same team, he’d have no worries about either line for four years. He stressed the desire to build as strong a legacy as USC and UT. I believed him, but Maryland, as a school, wasn’t in my top choices. A good school. Just not my school. He left with hope, but no promises from us. Hell, I hadn’t scheduled a visit.

Next was Coach White. His reputation as a master of recruiting is well deserved. Slick is the word I would use. He did the full Carney show and a promise of a great career if I came to Austin. At the end, he pushed a bit on accepting the offer they had previously made for me to attend on a full ride.

“Luis, I don’t know about that one,” my father said when Coach White left.

“I agree. I can’t put my finger on it, but he’s just not my style.”

When the door opened for the third time, we were surprised to see Coach Singer come in with Will Farrel, the actor. I knew this was going to be a different show! Coach kept it light, yet handled the serious business efficiently and very effectively. The rumors of his pranks during practices really rang true. I already had a full ride offer from them, so that part of the show was easy. What he really stressed was the desire to win at least one more Outland or Lombardi Trophy for the team, awards given to the best linemen or linebackers in college football.

Will provided some entertainment, but I also discovered he was an avid football fan and no slouch about the game. He stayed away from the business end of the discussion, but his insights and humor made it a fun time.

“Luis,” Coach Singer said as our time was coming to a close, “I would really like to have you with us next year. Not only for what I know you can add to our defense, but I think I can help develop you as a future coach as well.”

“Coach, I’d love to say yes right now. This week has been insane, though.”

“I can imagine what it would be like going naked for a week.”

“That’s part of it. I guess it is the catalyst for many of the things that have happened this week. Given how crazy it is, I’d like to wait a week before telling you yes or no.”

“That’s fair. And smart. Here are my private numbers. Call me anytime if you have questions.”

“Or if I decide I really like Austin?”

“That too,” he said laughing. “Some how, though, I see you in California.”

After he and Will left, my parents turned to me.

“I know. It sounds like I’ve made my decision. I think I have, but want to wait until after East until I decide.”

“And you have clothes on again?”

“Well... that might be a while.” So, I explained to them the bet, although we still hadn’t



addressed it. Mentally I noted that as a to-do for tomorrow's lunch.

With hugs and kisses from the folks, I headed back out into the gym. Dad was headed off to a business dinner and mom back to work. My sweetie and Rosa were still there talking with Mike.

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## Rebecca

“That was awesome!”

“Rosalee!”

“Well, it was. All those cameras and national TV exposure.”

“Oh my god! You're kidding, right?” I looked around and noticed that a few cameras were still tracking us. Damn!

“Nope.”

“I'm naked on TV?!?”

“National TV.”

“NO!!!” I can still hide, can't I?

“Oh, there's Mike. Introduce me, please?” She pointed towards Mike and his family. They were still celebrating Mike's decision. Good, I didn't need this distraction while I was trying to figure out how to fade into the floor.

No sooner than I began feeling safe, Mike broke away from his family and came towards us.

“Becky!” He shouted as he approached. His arms engulfed me in a huge. Damn! I'm a slut for muscles. It didn't feel like my cave at all, but it was a damn nice feeling being surrounded by someone so large and strong. “Please, please let your boyfriend know

that I couldn't tell him. I feel so bad about that," he whispered to me.

"Tell him about what?"

"My signing. I feel horrible about not sharing that with him."

"I'll pass it along."

"Great. Thanks. Now, who is this?" he nodded towards a suddenly shy Rosalee.

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

## Chapter 25 – Wednesday Evening

### *“Don Sanche, ou Le château de l'amour”*

#### Rebecca

I sat in wonder as My Mountain bent and folded himself into the driver's seat. I'd already experienced it, yet the sight continued to transfix me. Each time, I saw more and more of the subtle movements of his muscles. The hardness turning soft to bend, fit. How could someone well over a foot taller than me fit into this little box? I could, barely.

“Why don't you get a bigger car?”

“Hmm? Oh. Well, this works.” He started it and headed towards his house. No music.

“Do you want some music?”

“Hmm? Yeah. Sure.”

I waited for him to turn it on. Instead, he stared out at the road and propelled the car through traffic, both hands firmly attached to the wheel. I waited a bit more. Then, I looked down at where radios normally are on cars I've been in, only to be met with the sight of hundreds of buttons and such. Well, it seemed like it. Space Shuttle came to mind.

Which one? I pressed randomly. A few seconds later, my feet started getting hot and a little display said “80/27”.

Well, that didn't work. Now, how do I turn off the heat and turn on the music? That one looks good.

My feet ceased being toasted, but cold air started freezing my nipples.

I pressed another button and all that happened was a little light came on on the button. I wonder if that means the shuttle bay doors are open? I just knew if I pressed another

button, the ejection seat on my side would be activated.

“Help!” I squeaked.

“Huh?” He looked down at the controls, grunted, and his fingers began dancing over the buttons. Such big fingers and they moved so nimbly. Within seconds, the freezing ceased, the little light went off, and the music started. Classical. No. Opera. Opera?

My Mountain's hand found its way to my thigh and his attention returned to staring at the road.

“Are you okay?”

“Hmm? Yeah. Just fine.” His eyes never left the road.

“Are you mad at me?”

“What? No. Just thinking.”

Maybe he needs his cave time too. I hope that's what it is. I know I need my down time away from others. Hey! That's what's been missing this week! Before, when I was hiding, I always had alone time. The only alone time I've had this week is when I've been asleep. Of course, I've disappeared into his cave a few times. Maybe he just needs his alone time too. But, tonight? This night?

Right now, I needed to talk. How strange is that? Me, needing to talk. Perhaps I should be on the lookout for lightning bolts or meteors falling from the sky?

How can I work my professional, digital camera, but not use the controls in Luis's car? Okay, it did take me nearly five forevers to figure out all the features of the camera, or at least the ones I've figured out so far in two years. Still, it was a lot of buttons and knobs and menus...

I looked over at My Mountain. Wedged. How could he be comfortable? He had to bend his head down, his knees were almost chest level, but splayed to fit the steering wheel. I couldn't reach Junior if I tried.

Junior. Hmm... Tonight. My Mountain over me, ready to possess me. My legs spread, my ankles hooked on his legs. My hands around his massive neck. Junior's head

coming closer and closer, touching me-

“Sweets? We're here.”

“Yeah, almost there!”

“No Becca. We're here.”

“Oh, sorry.” I blushed to my toes. Somehow, we made it into the house where I led Luis into the kitchen. I sat him down on a chair and straddled his lap. “Do you need some alone time or do you want to make-out with your girlfriend?”

His eyes looked at me, but he wasn't there.

“Go into the living room. Find some good music and let me fix dinner, okay?” I started to get up.

“Nope,” he said as his eyes cleared. Suddenly, his lips were on mine and my body just melted into him. His tongue searched, mine responded. We probed each other's mouths, looking and finding the soul inside. My hands found their way as far around his neck as they could go. His rubbing, caressing, fondling my back, shoulders, down... Oh, so deliciously down, cupping my ass and sending shocks, shivers, warmth, delight through my whole system. I felt him moan and that stranger, that sounded like me, moaned in response.

When one of his mighty paws gently lifted my left boob, I almost came. Those massive, rough fingers rolled my nipple with such care and precision. So deliciously gentle and yet the power, barely contained, behind them. Junior was poking his head up and rubbing across my mound, tickling my clit delightfully. I started to reach down and...

THE PHONE RANG!

I tried to ignore it. It will go away. Before I could get a good grip on the monster between my legs and aim him where I wanted him to be, Luis REACHED OVER FOR THE PHONE!

“It's Momma,” was all he said. As if that excused his behavior?

“Pronto!” he said before I could speak my displeasure and frustration.

“No Momma. Not yet.” At least he was panting.

I tried wiggling back over Junior, but he had deflated in my hand. I guess no Mommy fantasies there.

“For you,” he said as he handed me the phone. “Momma wants to talk to you about dinner.”

“What? NOW?” I half screamed and half groaned. I reached for the phone, trying to figure out if eyes could turn into death rays or something.

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## Luis

Oh. My. God! I can't believe that Becca was about to drop down on Junior! I can't believe Momma called and interrupted that. I can't decide which one is upsetting me. Or, is it just this whole, strange day?

Becca crawled off my lap, yacking away into the phone, and headed to the fridge. Damn, she has a fine ass. Perfect handfuls for me. Okay, Luis, get your mind straight. Too much hit you today. You need music. Meditation. Yes, all of the above.

As I got up, I watched Becca moving about the kitchen, the phone plastered to her ear. There was no way I'd get her attention away from girl talk and what other plans they had. My downfall, no doubt. I'd awaken in the morning with a ring through my nose and being led on a leash. Right!

I waved to the kitchen as I headed to the living room. I found the Native American drums and chants I liked to use to think to, put them on at a gentle volume, and found a comfortable spot on the floor.

Settling into a lotus position, something others have seen and still express disbelief that I can do it, I closed my eyes and deepened my breathing.

The steady, deep drumming of the music combined with the sparse, Zen-like, soft, almost flight-like quality of the flutes helped settle me. The dream-like chants just added layers of complexity and peace. I focused on pulling my breath in through my

nose, up to my crown point, then down my spine past my energy points. I noted which ones needed attention. When the air made it to my center, I began to “spin the ball” deep in my core.

When my body was full of air, my stomach distended with it, I let the spinning ball push it slowly up through the front of my body, moving out the toxins and tensions. Letting it turn the energy centers into pure light.

One breath.

Two.

Wow! USC! Need... to clear my mind. Just let the thought go.

Three.

Becca. In my lap. Positioning Junior... Let it go.

Four.

East... Let it go.

Five...

The world faded, yet became everything. Everything had meaning, a story. Yet, there was nothing. I ceased and became nothing. Nothing floated in nothing, being nothing and everything.

Slowly, the slow beating became drums. The sounds became flutes. The smells became something wonderful drifting in from the kitchen. I stopped being nothing/everything and became Luis again.

I felt Becca before I opened my eyes. “Hi, sweets.”

“You're back!” She crawled into my lap, snuggling up to me.

As soon as I opened my eyes, I closed them again when her lips met mine. This was a tender, loving, caring kiss. None of the manic energy from earlier. Sweet. Loving. Just let it go and be...

The light pressure on my face became her hands. The energy running through me became love. Becca became the center of my focus. She looked deeply into my newly opened eyes.

“I love you.”

Her words exploded through me. Every part of me agreed. Every cell. Every fiber.  
“And, I love you.”

We sealed it with another kiss. Just as sweet. Just as loving. Okay, maybe a bit more passion. Just as my hand was being pulled towards those magnificent orbs on her chest, she pulled back. “Dinner's almost ready. I need your help.”

My hands moved up the lower slope, carefully measuring the changing angles and complex curves that make the female breast a perfect example of a fifth order differential equation. “Can it wait for a minute?”

“Uhm...”

“Just a couple of minutes,” I said as I pushed her back and lowered my lips to the hard peak. I love how it was poking out, beckoning me forward. Enticing me to suckle.

“Uhm...”

Her hands moved through my hair, pulling me into firmer contact. I traced the little bumps that turned to crinkles that turned to...

Her hands pushed me away. “Oh no, Mister. Dinner is too special tonight for you to distract me.”

I watched, transfixed, as she just rose. She didn't stand. She didn't make discreet moves as in a) push back, b) unfold from my lap, c) move balance to stand... She just was in my lap and in a beautiful, graceful dance with gravity, she was standing.

And reaching down for my hand to help me up. Fortunately, my knees still work and I was able to stand without pull her off balance. I let her think she was helping. Well, she was. Really. The smile on her face, the joy in her eyes really helped.



Towering above her, my arms moving to hug her to me, and...

“Oh! The pasta!” And she ran into the kitchen. “Open the wine,” she threw back at me over her shoulder. “And stay OUT of the dining room.”

My arms closed on empty air. From the kitchen I heard pots rattling, a few choice words that I didn't think Becca knew, and her yelling to me, “Wine! Now!”

Three days and she's running my life. Maybe they've already surgically implanted the ring in my nose and I hadn't noticed.

And, this is a bad thing?

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## Rebecca

Damn! Damn! Damn!

Okay, I don't know if I'm cursing the pasta, the interruption, or how easily I fall into My Mountain's eyes. And lips. And like his kisses. And his hands on my boobs. And wish that the damned phone hadn't rung. And. And. And.

The pasta was fine. To me. I drained it like Carmella had told me. Then poured cold water from the tap on it. Why? I don't know. She said something about stopping it from cooking so it wouldn't turn to mush. But, wouldn't it cool it as well? Apparently not.

The texture of pasta is very appealing visually. And really amazing when you run your hands through it. Silky. There, but not. And, no it didn't cool. Ouch!

He's just standing there by the open wine bottles. Waiting for me. I hope. What if he's mad? Is he frustrated? I would be. I am. Tonight. After dinner. After all, this is the plan. The script. Feed him. Seduce him.

Now, where is the girl that was with me Monday morning? You know, the one that had perfected being invisible. The one that was practiced at avoiding interactions with others, except the views I formed in my artists mind, saving them to write about, draw,

or paint.

Here I am... Not being her. Cooking a meal. Well, not really, but sort of. Warming this. Boiling that. Instructions from Carmella. A perfectly planned meal to feed My Mountain. To handle his needs during the football season and still leave him functional for my plans for the evening. And... Naked.

My Mountain. Luis. Boyfriend. Did that ever run around my mouth and mind leaving a funny taste. Boyfriend. Yep. Did it again. Feels strange. Feels good, actually. Feels... scary. Yet, feels... right. And... I'm naked. So is he!

From my perfect world I had built to... this! Crying while happy. Laughing out loud in crowds. So suddenly empty I'm yearning for something I've never had. So full I'm bursting at the seams. So complete. So confused. And... So naked.

What is with the phone? And, what is with him answering it?

“Hello.” So calm.

“Nope. Not even considering the University of Maryland. Nope. Not going to change my mind, you know that.” Maybe his friend Mike?

“Look Hollow Dick, we've talked about this!” Yep, Mike.

“Yep, full ride offers from UT and USC.” Scholarship offers. For him and me. This is different than I imagined my Senior year being.

“Not a word, okay? Right. Well... USC.” California here we come... WHAT!?! Did I just say that? It wouldn't be a bad choice. There are some teachers out there that really might push my art. Better still, the exposure. I might even get a chance at a gallery showing my sophomore year. Wouldn't that be... Showing? Me? Miss Invisible?

“Sweets? Anything else you need me to do?”

“Uhm... I think I've got everything in hand. Keep me company while I finish?”

“Always, my Becca.”

And that damned thing rang again. And, of course, he answered it again. Well, I do

have a couple more things to get ready. Might as well carry the dishes into the dining room. Oh, Carmella did a wonderful job. Wait, it looks like this normally. No. Something is different. The candles. Ah! I need to light them.

“Carmella, I love this room,” I said to the candles. Thankfully, the absent woman didn't respond. I've studied Italian art, what artist hasn't? Yet, this room was... well, the roll-up of all of Italian history. The really good parts. The warmth. The deepness of history and family. The sheer joy of living life at a speed most people didn't appreciate. The Italians – the original slow food society.

I finished lighting all the candles, paying more attention to the room than I had the first night. For some reason, I wasn't as distracted. The room has definite feeling of warmth, comfort. Yet was still quite large. It could easily seat a family of four and maintain a casual closeness. Just as easily, the room could be reconfigured and sit a very large dinner party. Formal and still welcoming. Tonight, it set for a very intimate dinner for two. Sensuous. Inviting. Close. Seductive. Speaking of victims...

I finished putting the appetizers on the table, with fresh bread, and a wonderful bottle of Italian wine. Carmella had told me that they had one or two glasses of wine with dinner each night. Even Luis, even during the football season. The exception, for him, was game day. No wine. No booze. And, the night before was one glass of wine. Tonight, she had said, we could push that some.

“Men become more amorous with a bit of wine. Not too much, with too much, they will want to do things they can no longer do!” She had then winked at me, “Things we want them to do!”

I'm sure my face had explored the many shades of crimson, ruby, and maybe even achieved vermillion. But, I was nodding my head. Then laughing with her.

Maybe not vermillion. Well... Chinese-Red for sure.

Okay, back to here and now and all our plans coming to fruition. First course on the table. Check.

Candles. Check.

Wine. Check.

Victim. Nope.

I went back into the kitchen to find him still on the phone.

“Yes, Coach... Thank you for all you've done... No, I'm sorry I've made this process so hard... Well... It's just that everything seems to be coming together this week... No kidding, going naked does that to you, I guess!” He tried to suppress a laugh, but finally let it go. He hadn't seen me yet, so I just watched him talk to, I assume, his current Coach. “I think USC. I still need to talk it over with some people, but that's what feels right to me.”

“And me!” Did I just yell that out?

“You're right, Coach. That is one less person I need to talk to!” He turned, chuckling, and pulled me into a hug with his free arm. “I need to go. The Boss is calling. Thanks for your call.”

He hung up the phone and totally wrapped me up. “So, you'd be okay if I went to USC?”

“I got a full scholarship offer from them today. And UT-Austin.”

“Really?”

“Seems another Italian Pixy has been working on my behalf this week.”

“Francesca?”

“It would seem. They had my portfolio and a quote-Serious Recommendation-unquote.” I hated it when other people did air quotes and here I was doing it.

“So, you might go West?”

“With you...” I couldn't help it. My eyes dropped. My invisibility cloak started slipping on.

It slid off as I found myself being lifted off the ground and spun in the air. My face being attacked with kisses. I felt tears and heard joyous laughter as our mouths found each other. Whose laughter and whose tears? When his tongue entered my mouth, I

didn't care anymore.

While being propelled through a universe of bliss and joy, my stomach reminded me that there was good food going to waste in the other room. Beating back the attacking horde... Okay, ending the kiss. And ending it again. And... ending again. Oh, one more time. Two more times.

Third time is a charm, right?

Fourth...

“Ahm... My Sweet Mountain. Dinner's ready.”

“Yes, you are.” His hand under my ass was checking the moisture content while the timers on my chest were definitely letting him know the turkeys were done. Oh, God! I've been reading entirely too much erotica online. That Skip Nickio like comment is just too much.

Pushing on his chest, I managed a feeble protest, “You brute. You, you... cad!”

With a chuckle and gleam in his eyes, he twirled a non-existent mustache, “Come upstairs and I'll show you my etchings, little girl.”

Attempting Mae West, I said, “Why don't you come up and see me sometime.”

“When you're bad...”

“I'm very, very good.”

Laughing together, he carried me into the dining room. When we got inside the door, he stopped. “Wow!”

“Thank your mom,” I said, looking down.

“No. She did this because of how she feels about you. She's never done anything like this for anyone, other than Poppa.” He carefully set me down. “I... I feel like I need to escort you to the table, milady.”

“It would be my esteemed pleasure, kind sir.”

He offered his elbow, I gently placed my hand into it. He led me to the small table at the nexus of the candles and pulled out my chair. The towel had been draped over the chair in honor of our nakedness, fell as he tipped it.

I reached for it.

He reached for it.

The immovable object met the resistible force.

My ass hit the floor, with me attached. Thankfully, Carmella had wonderfully thick carpeting in this room.

“I’m sorry. Are you okay? Damn, I didn’t mean to do that. Damn. Shit. I’m so sorry!”

A small giggle escaped while I tried to look mad. Then another. His eyes got wide, confusion replacing concern. I grabbed his hand and tried to pull him down with me. Ooo-Kay. Plan B. I grabbed both his hands to pull him down. And... I found myself standing up.

As soon as he released my hands, I began beating his chest. “No! No! No! You’re supposed to fall down with me! No!”

The tears were forming when something inside, fueled by his eyes, pushed a snort out. And another one. Then I snorkeled.

His fingers attacked my sides at the same time I went after him. In seconds/minutes/years, we were both on the floor, rolling, tickling, laughing, and... yes, snorting by one of us. Okay, snorkeling. Loudly.

At about the same time my bladder made a major, critical, and very important announcement to the rest of me, My Mountain had me pinned on top of him. Yes, on top of him.

“I... I-I... DAMN IT! I HAVE TO PEE!”

One more tickle, in almost the right place, and suddenly I was standing. No time to think. I just ran for where I thought I remembered the downstairs bathroom was.

I pulled the door open... to a closet.

I ran to the next door. The trickle beginning. Shit! Shit! Shit! Damn! Damn! Damn!

It was the bathroom. Thankfully the seat was down and relief flowed, rapidly.

They have this brass jockey in full racing silks standing in front of the toilet. He was smiling at me. It took me a minute to realize he was holding the toilet paper and it wasn't attached to the wall in some way.

After I finish the cleanup, then I noticed the rest of the room. Tile. Marble. Is that real gold?

Given the dining room and the kitchen, shouldn't the "powder room" be as... Italian? Well, as Italian as the rest of the house?

Not Mafia kitch. No zebra prints and bad taste. Everything fit and flowed. Grand and accessible. Italian!

I moved slower back to the dining room, taking time to see all that I had missed in my mad dash. The house flowed. And, exclaimed. And, welcomed. And, impressed. And, reflected the family. And, the love.

The love.

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## Luis

A vision came down the hall into the dining room. Venus in all her glory, Turan as my Etruscan ancestors would call her. Except Botticelli never saw something as beautiful as this.

It hit me, as she came into the room, she's naked. I've been seeing her without clothes for three days. Yet, I'm seeing her. The not hidden one. I have seen the gorgeous, sexy body, but I've more seen the real her. The person that she's been hiding from the world and herself.

“Wow!” Smooth, Contadino. Smooth.

“It is a beautiful table, isn't it?” She sat, gracefully, as I held the chair for her.

“You... And the table.”

“You think so?”

“Tonight is the first time, this whole crazy week, I've had the opportunity to admire you. That is, without something else taking away from you. Like school. Or the police. Or the couch in Art. So, what's the occasion?”

“Uhm...” She looked down and blushed. Pulling herself together, she looked up and into my eyes. “I wanted to do something nice for you. Something... well, romantic.”

“Are you trying to seduce me?” I asked, jokingly.

“Yes.”

“Ahm...” Such a glib, articulate fellow you are, Luis. Pull yourself together. “Thank you.”

“Is it working?”

“Even without the candles, the excellent smelling food...”

“Or the nudity?”

“Or that.”

She showed me the appetizers, which were all my favorites. We ate. Talked. Ate more. Laughed. Ate more. Fed each other. Sipped the delicious wine. Talked of California. When there was nothing more to eat, she quickly cleaned the table and delivered the main course. And, a new wine. I carefully recorked the first and put it in a wine cooler in the dining room. She asked me about and it. I told her my mother had insisted. I was glad she did. I didn't have to leave my Becca's presence.

Pasta and proteins were the order of the day. She told me she knew from Jason what the



need was, and Momma had helped her as well. It was critical to build up my strength and reserves going into Friday night, and recover from the extra exercise this week, not to mention the beating my body had already taken this early in the season. Momma's influence was everywhere. Rich, quality proteins. Sauces that were thick and flavorful without being loaded with fats. Lots and lots of pasta made from whole grains, some infused with spinach and other veggies. A technique she had learned to retain all the flavor and nutrients. Not like that crap you buy on the grocery shelves.

'This is amazing,' my Becca said. "So many layers. So many textures. Yet... Everything is blended, but unique..."

"Like what I've seen of your art."

She thought about it. "I guess."

"I know."

I do love it when she blushes.

Talk flowed again. The present. The future. Dreams. Desires. Love. Jokes about Southern Cal smog, La-La Land. The Rose Bowl and the PAC-10 football. Painting. Love. Photography. Life on campus. The Italians. I taught her what I could of our way of life, our attitude.

"There is another thing I'd like to learn about the Italians," she said, as she moved into my lap after clearing the table. "If you're looking for desert..."

She pulled my head down and Mr. Einstein did his thing with time again. Her tongue was hitting the depths of my soul. We joined. Eyes closed, sometimes opening. When it happened, seeing into each other so far, we both shuddered.

My hands discovered every inch of her skin. The silk of her back. The complex muscles under her shoulders covered in soft, delicious skin that responded so well to kisses, sucks, and nibbles. The wonderful noises she made when I suckled her. The heat, wetness, and... The movement—I can't explain it otherwise—when my fingers, then my tongue found pussy.

Oh, the taste.

What she was doing to me was distracting. I wanted to see her eyes, watch her face when she climaxed. Instead, she was doing everything to ensure I came first. My nipples. Oh! My! God! Could she do things to them. Tongue. Lips. Fingers. I don't really know what other body parts she was using. We were everywhere. Chair, table, and floor.

Finally, I got my head between her legs. My lips on her lips. My tongue pushing inside her. My nose rubbing her clit. Her legs thrashing. Her hands grinding me into her.

I think we found that point that Feynman talked about—the moment that the Universe goes totally insane, but finds a new way to be. Our particles split. New particles came into being. The world changed.

My poor, abused ears got the worst of it from her thighs. My mouth got the best.

My mother is a grand cook. Recognized far and wide as a master of her craft. Innovative. Praised for her abilities to blend, create, and combine into new, exotic tastes. Yet, maintaining the essence. The power.

I tasted, once again, from the source, the nectar of the gods. Venus. The best desert I'd ever had. And, so much. Too much. It ran down my chin, dripped onto the floor, my chest, the table, the chair... Wherever we were.

Her thighs relaxed. I pulled her ass closer. The taste too good. The feeling too powerful. I continued my assault. Tongue, hands, lips, chin, nose. Looking up over the small forest, I caught the occasional flash of her eyes. Pleading. More or less? I didn't care. Her hands pulled me into her. Then tried to push me away. More fluids flooded my mouth. I tried drinking every bit of it. Then she pulled again. Pushed. More.

She went limp.

I swallowed the last of the buckets that had come from her. Savoring it. A better wine has never been made. And, oh so Italian in the making. Slow. Building.

I kissed my way up her stomach. She wasn't moving.

“Sweetie?”

“Becca?”

I nipped her nipple.

“Honey?”

Holding myself on my elbows and knees, I finally got to her face.

Her eyes we partly opened. Nothing but white.

Her mouth was slack. A line of drool going down the right side towards her ear.

Was I too greedy? Did I taste too much? Did I...

“Thank you,” a weak voice said in a whisper.

“Are you okay?”

“Better than. Take me to bed. Now!..” she managed in labored breath.

I scooped her up and took her down into my lair. Junior was more than willing to commit debauchery. I was more than willing to make love. I pushed open the door to my rooms and discovered more candles lighting the way. Soft pillows and new sheets on the bed.

Rose petals! There were rose petals!

DAMN!

I gently put my Becca down on the bed, on the rose petals, the new sheets. The flickering lights of the candles playing wonderful games with her curves and delicious bumps. Her head flopped to the side, she pulled herself into a little ball. “Covers,” a weak voice said.

I pulled the sheets over her and slid in behind her. Her breath was now soft. Regular. She was in a ball. I put my arm over her, gently, realizing the weight of my arm alone might wake her.

She did all this for me!

She looks so good. So sweet. So beautiful...

And... She's asleep.

I...

Hmm...

Yeah, I...

Alarm! I need to set it.

Done.

Yeah. I think.

She's so soft. So wonderful. So...

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

“Don Sanche, ou Le château de l'amour” (S.1) (English: “Don Sanche, or The Castle of Love”) is Franz Liszt's only opera (there is controversy if he actually wrote it, though) and first published work. He wrote it when he was 14. It is a story of the “Love Castle”, a tragic comedy I would highly recommend seeing if it ever comes back into production.