

A muscular man with a beard, wearing a red apron, stands with his arms crossed. The background is a warm, bokeh-lit setting, possibly a restaurant or bar. The text is overlaid on the image.

The

NAKED

Chef

A Curvy Girls Club Novel

Twyla Turner

The **NAKED** *Chef*

A Curvy Girls Club Novel

By Twyla Turner

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To:
The ladies who ooze sexual confidence. Who take their pleasure from
whomever, whenever, and wherever they choose.
And to those of us who want to be more like you.

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[Author's Note](#)

In Mia's story, *The Naked Chef*, there are themes that may trigger certain readers. Sexual assault and the trafficking of minors. Neither are described in great detail, made light of, nor glorified. They are just part of the plot to understand certain characters' motivations. If either are triggers for you, I advise to proceed with caution.

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Prologue

7 years ago...

Mia stretched out across her king size bed in nothing but her silk kimono style robe and a smile. It had been months since her husband, Alejandro had touched her. He'd been so busy at the church, when he got home, all he wanted to do was eat and crash. But now, Mia was tired of waiting and wanted... No! *Needed* to get laid. It was unfortunate that these days her sexual appetite was ten times that of her husband's.

Her ears perked up when the water shut off in the en suite bathroom, and she slipped her hand down her tummy and into the thatch of hair covering her mound. She preferred to wax everything, but Alex said he didn't like it. He said she looked like a little girl down there without hair. She stroked between her labia, coating her finger with her arousal, and then circled the digit around her hardened clit. She was so ready, she could taste it. The bathroom door opened and her handsome high school sweetheart stepped through in just his boxers.

His body was lean and muscular. He had a flop of adorable, messy curls that had made her fall for him back when they were just sixteen-years-old. He was average height for a man and she was tall for a woman, so they stood eye-to-eye. He hated if she ever wore heels around him. She'd learned to buy flats instead.

His dark eyes landed on her and she saw a look of irritation cross his face.

"Come on, Mia. Not right now. I'm exhausted," Alejandro grumbled.

"When then?" Mia pulled her hand away from her dwindling arousal and sat up in the middle of the bed.

"I don't know. When I'm not so tired." He shrugged his shoulders.

"You've been saying that for months. I need to be fucked, Alex!"

"Don't be crass, Mia."

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, FUCK! Stop being such a prude,” she sneered. “What happened to you? You were never like this when we were kids. You couldn’t keep your hands off of me back then.”

“I grew up and realized there is more to life than sex. And I’d rather wear myself out day after day serving the church than sinning with you.” He gestured to Mia and their bed in disgust.

“Are you serious?” She asked incredulously. “Sinning? With your *wife*?! Since when is screwing your wife a sin?”

“When she refuses to get off the pill. Sex is only supposed to be for procreation, not pleasure.” Alex turned up his nose. “Your sexual appetite has gotten out of hand. You want to use toys. You want to be tied up, spanked, and...and choked. You try to touch me inappropriately in public. Your behavior has become pretty slutty and quite frankly, troubling. You’re acting no better than a prostitute.

“And I bet I can guess where all this kinky stuff is coming from. You hanging out with all your freaky customers. You spend all day designing sex rooms and dungeons. It’s no wonder you’ve become so slutty. I wouldn’t doubt you’ve fucked them.”

“¡Ay, Dios mío! Are you fucking kidding me?!” Mia gripped the sides of her head. “You’ve lost your damn mind! You’re the only man I’ve ever been with and you damn well know that.

“And so, fucking what? I can’t help that I’m a sexual person. My sexual appetites have been this way as long as you’ve known me. And I find it funny how we were fornicating all over town as kids, but now that we’re married and you’re heavily into the church, all of a sudden, I’m acting like a slut. And this holier-than-thou act is so not you. You’re not a priest. You’re just a church administrator, you self-righteous prick! You forget that I *know* you. We’ve been best friends and lovers for years. There’s nothing more natural than for a husband and wife to play and experiment. We’re married for God’s sake!”

“Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain,” he scolded before continuing. “People can change. And I’ve changed for the better. So, maybe if you were willing to change and wanted to give me children, then I’d be more willing to sleep with you. Until then, I’m sleeping on the couch.” Alejandro stated before going into the closet to grab a spare blanket and pillow.

“You know I’m not a kid person. Never have been. You were fine with it before. In fact, you’ve been salty ever since I started making more money

than you. I wouldn't put it past you to push having kids because you want me barefoot and pregnant at home."

"We were teenagers, Mia." He shot back. "Of course, I wasn't thinking about having kids. But we're twenty-five now. It's time to start a family. And hell yeah, I'd prefer you barefoot and pregnant. That's how it's supposed to be. Instead, my family makes fun of me for not being the breadwinner and they're always asking me when we're going to start a family. It's embarrassing. So, let me know when you're ready."

With that, he strode from the room, leaving Mia furious and unsatisfied.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me?!" She threw a pillow across the room and it unsatisfyingly fell to the floor without a sound. "'How it's supposed to be,' my ass. Who the fuck cares what anyone has to say about *our* life."

She had never felt angrier in her entire life. The heat of it came off of her in waves. She loved Alex. Always had since they first laid eyes on each other freshman year of high school. And those feelings grew stronger when they finally started dating the next year.

It didn't hurt that he was the one boy in their majority Latino school who was willing to date the Afro-Latina girl who was a little too brown with hair just a little too curly and coarse. They'd become best friends, and then lovers. Even their families approved. Everything was perfect...until it wasn't.

Mia knew something was up. *There's no way in hell that this has to do with the church or his religious beliefs.* She thought to herself. She knew that if something smells like shit, it probably is shit. Adultery. Embezzlement. Secretly in the closet. Something! There was more to it than what he was saying and she had every intention of finding out what.

No matter how painful.

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Two months had past and Mia had yet to find anything incriminating on Alex. She'd browsed his internet history, checked his cell in the middle of the night, and even followed him several different times, and found nothing problematic.

Mia was in the kitchen fixing a reconciliatory breakfast, Saturday

morning, while Alex took a shower before heading to their church. Her way of saying 'I'm sorry' for believing he could be doing something underhanded. Even if he didn't know she was thinking that, she still felt guilty about it.

A buzzing sound reached her ears. She turned her head and stopped working on the eggs to listen better. The buzzing went off again and she curiously followed the sound, gripping the spatula as if it were a weapon, ready to smack a rat. The buzzing sound was coming from Alejandro's jacket hanging on the hook next to the door. Mia put the spatula in her mouth as she dug around for the source of the sound. In an inside pocket, her fingers wrapped around the smooth rectangle and she pulled out a cellphone. More specifically, a cellphone she didn't recognize.

Mia tapped the power button and the screen lit up. There was a text message from Pastor Rick. She would've ignored it, but the fact that Alex had a private cellphone that she didn't know about, raised her suspicions enough for her to swipe her finger across the screen, opening the phone. She tapped the message and read:

**Pastor Rick:  
Check your email. We got in a new batch. I sent you some pics  
because I know there's one you'd like to test run before we send them  
out.**

Mia heard the shower shut off upstairs. She quickly backed out of the text and found the email app. It was under an email address she didn't recognize or knew he had. She tapped it, found the new message, and opened it. She scrolled down to find the attached pictures. The images that stared back at her, made her hands shake uncontrollably and she almost dropped the phone. A gasp nearly choked her and the spatula fell from her mouth to clatter to the floor.

The pictures were a series of children in different stages of undress. Mostly girls, but a couple of boys too. They ranged in age, from what looked like 10-18. But the most frequent photos were of a girl about 15 or 16 years old, who looked strikingly similar to Mia at that age. She had a white gag in her mouth to keep her from crying out for help. Her clothes were ripped and tears stained her cheeks as the sick bastard who was taking the photos forced her to look into the camera.

The sound of heavy footsteps walking from the bathroom to the bedroom alerted Mia to her lack of time. Before she closed out of Alex's phone, she noticed that in the background of the disturbing photos were familiar wood paneled walls. She almost put his phone back into his jacket pocket, but thought better of it. She was going to need proof if she was going to save those children's lives.

She grabbed her purse off the hook next to his jacket and ran from the house. The smell of burning eggs followed her out the door. She didn't care. She stumbled down the stairs and jumped into her old Toyota Celica. Mia pulled out her phone and called one of her three best friends, Royal, as she pulled out of the driveway.

"Hey, chica!" Royal answered brightly.

"R-Ro," Mia's voice trembled with barely restrained emotion.

"What's wrong?" Being one of her best friends, Royal could immediately tell something was wrong with her just by the sound of her voice.

"I-I think I just caught Alex involved in a human trafficking ring. They're taking b-babies, Ro." Mia's voice broke.

"Oh my God! Where are you?"

"On my way to the police station. I found his secret cellphone. I fucking *knew* something was wrong!" Mia slammed her hand against her steering wheel.

"Mia, sweetie." Royal soothed. "Just try not to think about it until you get to the station. I don't want you getting in a car accident because you're upset. I'll call the girls."

Mia swallowed hard. "O-Okay."

She ended the call and drove blindly the rest of the way. If someone had asked how she got to the station, she wouldn't even be able to tell them. Muscle memory drove the car there, since her brain was busy going over every detail of their lives, ever since Alex started working for the church a few years ago. How he became distant. How he used "church activities" to stay out all day and practically all night. How he didn't want her to wax anymore, probably because he preferred the bare skin of a prepubescent girl over that of his wife. Or a reminder of his shame. The thought almost made her puke.

Her body moved on autopilot as she got out of the car and ran into the station. She didn't even realize that she was still dressed in a slinky silk

nightie with a matching silk robe and fuzzy slippers. She honestly didn't care as she got curious and lustful looks from cuffed criminals, officers, and others milling about. She quickly walked up to the main desk. The woman manning the desk looked her up and down slowly, ready to judge her by her skimpy attire before she even knew why she was there. But once her eyes reached Mia's face, her expression changed as she took in Mia's forlorn and tear-streaked face.

"How can I help you?"

"I-I'd like to report a crime." Mia took a deep breath and blew it out harshly. "I have reason to believe that my husband is involved with the human trafficking of children. And he and the pastor of Mary Magdalene are using the church as a front. I believe, if you send out someone to look, you'll find a group of children being held in the basement of the church." The familiar wood paneled wall in the photo was burned into her mind.

That was all it took. The words 'human trafficking' plus 'children' were the magic combination to send nearly the entire building into a frenzy of activity. Well, that, and Mia showing them the text and email with attached photos.

The moment they realized that the crazy lady in her sexy pajamas wasn't a complete lunatic, everything became a blur. Squad cars out on patrol were radioed, more men and women in navy blue ran out to their awaiting squad cars, one set of detectives left with the uniformed cops, and another set pulled Mia into an interview room.

They directed her to sit on a hard metal chair, behind a metal table. The ice-cold seat easily penetrated the thin material of her negligée. Mia shivered, but didn't pay it much attention. She nervously watched as the detectives closed the door and then turned to her with grim expressions.

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A couple hours later, after being grilled within an inch of her life about her husband and her life with him, after they opened his phone and searched through it and grilled her some more, and after being left alone in the dark room with that single light shining harshly down in her eyes, Mia was finally free to go.

“We’ll be in contact.” One of the detectives informed her kindly, now that it appeared she had nothing to do with her husband’s criminal activities.

Mia walked to the front of the building and sitting on one of the hard waiting room couches were her three best friends. Royal, Kennedy, and Payton. At the sight of their worried faces, she was no longer able to hold it together. She broke. Her heart, her mind, her life, felt like they shattered into a million pieces.

The girls caught her before she crumpled to the floor. They held onto her tightly as she sobbed in their arms. The glue that would keep her together, when she wanted nothing more than to fall apart.

A commotion at the entrance to the station pulled their attention. Mia looked up and her eyes collided with her husband’s as he and the pastor were led into the building in handcuffs. Hatred burned in his eyes as he took her in, knowing with certainty that she was the one who’d turned him in. And for the first time, she saw pure evil in his eyes. Something that he must have hidden from her for years. She didn’t know this person.

He was a stranger.

Her hurt and rage boiled to the surface. All she saw was red. One minute she was standing there next to the girls, and the next her fists, nails, and feet connected with his face, neck, and groin. The police let her get in several blows before pulling her away from him. She was positive that they let her attack him because of the heinous crime he had committed. He broke the worst of Cardinal Rules... Children are untouchable.

“You sick fucking asshole!” She screamed and strained against the hands holding her back, feeling the pressure in her face until it felt like her head would pop. “You call me a slut and you’re fucking and selling *children*?!?! Is that why you wanted kids so bad? To molest them, you sick fuck?! Or did you just want to sell them off to the highest bidder? I hate you! I FUCKING HATE YOU!”

They shoved his bloody, bruised, and scratched body away from her. The girls pulled her back into the circle of their arms to calm her.

“Breathe, Mia. Breathe.” Kennedy soothed as she wiped the tears from her face. “Look at me. Just calm down. We’re here. We’ve got you.”

“What am I supposed to do now?” Mia brushed at her wet cheeks. “I’m humiliated.”

“Survive. It’s all you can do.” Royal clutched her hand and squeezed tightly.

“And we’re here for you any time you need us. You know that.” Payton added.

“Yeah, you don’t need him. You’ve got us. Come stay with us until we all can get on our feet. Payton is about to move out, and Royal not far behind her, since they have actual jobs at companies. Come move in with me and we can be starving artists together. You can work on building your clientele as an interior designer and I can work on my writing.” Kennedy suggested.

Mia nodded her head solemnly. No matter what happened, she’d get through it. Mainly because of the three amazing women who lifted the burden of pain and heartache from her chest, giving her room to breathe.

Everything is going to be okay... Eventually.

Chapter One

Present day...

“So...how long has it been, Mia?” Royal teased.

Mia looked up from the waiting room magazine she was flipping through to glare at her edgy AfroPunk chic best friend. “How long has what been?”

“Since you’ve gotten laid?” Royal smiled sweetly, her huge dimples adding to the innocent look she gave Mia.

Payton and Kennedy snickered at the question.

After a string of bad or boring sex with several guys, Mia had almost given up. The last one was the straw that permanently put her on a sexual hiatus.

The guy was handsome and seemed normal. Then as they were undressing each other, Mia got a good look at his drawers and saw a brown streak.

“Bruh, are you fucking serious?!?” Mia pulled a disgusted face.

“What?” The guy looked around as if he didn’t see the shit stain staring him in the face.

“You have a shit stain in your underwear! The fuck!”

“What’s the big deal?” He shrugged.

Mia looked at him as if he had lost his mind.

“The big deal is you either don’t know how to wipe your ass or wash it.”

“A man touching his asshole is gay.”

“Oh my God! You’re a fucking dumbass. Do you fuck anally?”

“Yeah, but only with women.”

*“So, if fucking a woman anally isn’t gay, then neither is **YOU** wiping and cleaning your own ass! If you’re trying that fucking hard not to be gay, I think you might want to reevaluate your sexuality. Because straight men who are secure in their sexuality... **WIPE THEIR FUCKING ASSES!!!**”*

Mia gathered up her clothes she’d just discarded and angrily started

putting them back on as she grumbled to herself.

“Wasting my goddamn time. My pussy is too good for this shit.”

“Baby, wait.” He reached out to touch her.

“Don’t even think about touching me. It’s too late. This pussy is closed for business.”

And with that, she stormed out of his place and headed home.

“It’s been about three months.” Mia tried to say nonchalantly as she continued to flip through the magazine. “Why do you think I need this massage? Every time a man smiles at me, I think about shitty draws.”

Choked giggles came from her three friends as they tried to stifle their laughter.

Mia had gladly set up their appointment for after their weekly Saturday lunch, in desperate need of a massage to relieve the tension lack of sex was causing. She was not used to going such long stretches without some quality D.

After Alejandro was convicted and sentenced to twenty years for the human trafficking of minors and child pornography, and she divorced him, Mia made a list of vows for herself that she still lived by four years later.

Mia’s Ten Commandments

1. I will wear heels whenever I want.
2. I will get a Brazilian wax whenever I want.
3. I will never let a man stifle the woman I am and diminish my shine.
4. I will **never** remarry.
5. In fact, I will never be in a serious/committed relationship ever again.
6. I will fuck whoever, however, and whenever I want.
7. My pleasure will always be of the utmost importance and will come first.
8. I will never let someone’s judgment of my lifestyle bother me (who knows what they’re doing behind closed doors).
9. I will do my best to look out for and protect those who can’t protect themselves.
10. Lastly, I WILL NEVER LET ANOTHER MAN IN MY HEART!!!

Her commandments had been working perfectly the last four years. Mia couldn't have been happier, living her truth. She did find herself lonely every now and again, at night when she didn't have anyone to share dinner with or cuddle up with after a long stressful day. But even when she'd had someone, it wasn't guaranteed that he would be there to cuddle with her anyway. And the alternative was *way* worse than not having someone to come home to.

How could she possibly trust any man with her heart again after what Alex did? He wasn't just her husband. He had also been her best friend for *years*. She'd thought she knew him better than anyone else in the world, and he played her. Betrayed her. Nearly destroyed her.

If it wasn't for her real best friends, Mia had no doubt that she wouldn't have made it. She peeked over at the women and smiled happily.

Her girls. The Curvy Girls Club. Payton Bailey was their geeky-chic, dark-chocolate voluptuous friend. Royal King was their short, plump rocker chick friend with a partially shaved head on one side and peekaboo purple on the other. And Kennedy Callaghan was their fanciful, bohemian pale biracial counterpart with a mass of springy red curls and lush body that turned heads.

They were Mia's heart and soul. All she needed a man for was to satisfy her sexually. The rest of her emotional and intellectual needs, she got from her friends.

A spa employee wearing all black approached them with a clipboard, pulling their attention.

"I'm so sorry, ladies. I forgot to ask your preferences. Would you rather have a male or female massage therapist?" She asked with her pen at the ready.

"Male!" Mia blurted out. "Under, Mia. Or over. Whichever," she ended with a smirk.

The woman flapped her mouth open and closed, unable to speak.

"That was a joke. I meant that my preference for a man is under the name Mia," she explained.

"Ooooh!" The woman breathed a bit easier and chuckled. "I was about to say. We're not *that* kind of massage parlor. No happy endings here."

Mia just smiled as the woman turned her attention to the other ladies. *We shall see about that.*

"Hmm..." Royal hummed in thought. "I'll take whoever is available. But preferably a woman. I doubt McKinnon will care, but you never know."

Royal cringed slightly, thinking about her husband.

“Girl, he’s probably pulling someone out of a burning building right now. He won’t know unless you tell him,” Mia said.

“I’ll take a man.” Kennedy said with a sigh that blew a couple of her tight, red curls off her face. “It’s been a while since male hands have touched this skin.”

“Oookay... And you, Miss?” The woman moved on to Payton quickly.

“I’ll take a woman.”

The woman wrote down their preferences and walked away. On the end of the plush waiting room couch, Payton leaned forward and looked over at all of them.

“I doubt Bradyn would like it if I had some strange man touching all over me,” Payton whispered to them.

“Not you too. Don’t let a man dictate your life and what you want. If you prefer a firmer massage from a man, then go for it.” Mia advised. “That’s not cheating.”

“Oh, I don’t mind. I’ll get a hot stone massage from a lady here and then get my hot man massage later tonight,” she winked and grinned happily.

“Eh...you suck!” Kennedy grumbled.

“Niiiiice!” Royal high-fived her as Payton pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose.

“Must be nice,” Mia frowned comically, but couldn’t hold it. She couldn’t help but smile at her smitten friend.

Payton had found the man of her dreams. Well, technically, he started out as the stuff of nightmares for her, but with his gentle and persistent ways, he eventually showed her that they were perfect for each other. After two years together, they were now engaged. Their wedding only a little over a month away. She’d officially moved in with him and now renting out her condo. And for someone who’d lost their virginity at nearly thirty, their shy friend had certainly let her sexuality emerge like a butterfly from a cocoon the last two years.

Mia was woman enough to admit that every now and then she felt a twinge of envy when she saw them, as well as Royal and McKinnon together. It wasn’t so much that two of her besties were in loving relationships that got to her. It was more like she envied the way Payton was able to open up to the big, redheaded Scotsman after being closed off for so many years. Just the thought of letting someone in sent Mia into a cold sweat.

“Ladies.” The spa employee came to take them back. “We’re ready for you.”

They followed the woman and dwindled down one by one as she guided them to their individual rooms. Last, she led Mia to a room further down the hall.

“You can get undressed, lie face down on the table, and drape the towel there over your hips. Jai will be in, in a moment.” The woman explained pleasantly.

“Thank you,” Mia nodded.

The room was medium-sized and cozy. A large, cream-colored padded table was center stage. Some shelving with rolled, fluffy white towels lined one wall. A long table, against the wall that ran parallel to the massage table held oils, and a very Zen little fountain that made soothing water sounds. A cute, little incense holder that looked like a fountain, held a burning cone at its top. Its smoke drifted slowly and hypnotically down each step of the fountain. And the soft sounds of meditative music filled the room from hidden speakers. Mia took a deep, relaxing breath as she absorbed the atmosphere.

Mia grabbed her blonde-tipped curls and tied them up into a loose pineapple on top of her head. She stripped out of her skin tight yellow dress that complimented her toasted caramel complexion, and pulled off her matching yellow thong. She didn’t need a bra. Her breasts were still a perky size B, and she loved the feel of the material of her dresses and shirts against her nipples. They always made them hard. Which, of course, men couldn’t help staring at. That was the point, of course. She used to hate her smallish breasts because they didn’t match the rest of her body. Her top half was slender, while her bottom half seemed to belong to someone else’s body. Wide hips, thick thighs, and an ass that bounced as she walked. But these days, she’d learned to appreciate her bottom-heavy body. It was made for what she loved best. Sex. And probably for birthing children. Though she preferred the sex part of procreation, not the actual pregnancy part.

She laid on the soft massage table and draped the towel that had awaited her on the table over her ample ass. In fact, the towel came up a bit short because of her overly round backside. She could feel cool air hitting her lady bits. Mia shrugged and placed her face in the padded hole in the table and waited.

A few minutes later, the door opened. Mia’s eyes opened and she

watched as a pair of large masculine white shoes appeared in her line of sight. She breathed in deeply, anticipating large firm hands on her body.

“Hello, my name is Jai. Just relax your body. I’ll take care of you.” A smooth deep voice reached her ears.

“I’m sure you will, Jai.” Mia practically purred. “I’m Mia, by the way.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mia.”

“Likewise, I’m sure.”

She heard him move around a bit over the sounds of the trickling fountain and soft Zen-like music. The smell of oils reached her nose. Orange blossoms and jasmine. Mia flinched when the feel of warm oil suddenly hit her spine. He drizzled the soothing liquid across her back and she melted into the soft table, her eyes closed languidly.

His large hands finally touched her skin and she sighed. He firmly worked the kinks out of her back, her spine cracking here and there along the way. The heels of his hands pressed down across her back, his fingertips just grazing her sides and dancing over the sides of her breasts. Little sounds of pleasure escaped from Mia’s lips.

Jai’s hands glided up the center of her spine and curved around her shoulders. He kneaded the muscles there and Mia turned into mush. His thumbs firmly stroked up the column of her neck. He gently lifted her head, swiftly turning it from side to side. A series of satisfying pops echoed in the room.

Mia took that opportunity to sneak a glance at her massage therapist. It just so happened that the crotch of his pristine white pants landed right above the table, right at eye level. It was obvious to Mia’s practiced eye that he was aroused by her body or the sounds she had been making or maybe both. There was a clear dick print pressed against the front of his pants. Her eyes traveled higher, over a muscular physique to a very handsome face. A beautiful brown-skinned Indian man with thick black hair and golden eyes surrounded by a fringe of long lashes. A hint of fear flashed behind his eyes. She knew what he was thinking. She’d fucked enough employees at their places of work to recognize the look.

Will she report me for being turned on by her?

Mia put his mind at ease as she gave him a knowing look and smiled seductively. Then she laid her head back into position and waited.

Jai paused for a moment and then continued. His hands smoothed down her back and worked her most problematic spot. Her lower back. The sounds

escaping her throat grew louder as he soothed the pain with his magic hands. His fingers stroked a little higher under the towel, caressing the rise of the two globes of her backside.

Mia smiled.

Next, he moved to her legs, starting at her ankles and making his way up. This is what she'd been waiting for. Wondering if he would be brave enough or bold enough to do what he truly wanted to do. Mia certainly hoped so. Her sopping wet sweet spot hoped so. She had been wet from the moment she saw his masculine feet. And it had only gotten more intense as the massage carried on.

He took both hands and placed them on the back of her right knee. Slowly, he kneaded up her thigh, working her hamstring. His fingertips inched closer to her most sensitive place and then retreated. Mia wasn't sure if he was nervous to go further or if he was teasing her. Just in case he was nervous, Mia let out a soft gasp that couldn't be mistaken for anything but arousal. She then added a roll to her hips, as if she was seeking out more.

A cough/grunt reached her ears and she knew she had him. Jai moved to her left leg and repeated the same massages. But this time his fingers reached further and grazed her wet lips. Mia lifted her hips slightly to add to the caress. The feel of his fingertips just barely touching her made her hiss through her teeth. Jai's other hand squeezed her outer leg in response to her reaction.

Seconds later, he whipped the towel away completely, baring her lush *assets*. She felt more oil being drizzled down her body. He started at her lower back, let it stream down the seam of her ass, and then down each leg. He rubbed the oils into her legs, gliding up to her slit. His fingers lightly stroked over her dripping labia, and continued on to the round globes of her behind. He firmly massaged her glutes, starting from the outside and working inward towards her nether regions once more. With each upward stroke his thumbs moved closer to her cleft. When his thumbs finally passed over her wet heat, she felt teeth nip at her bottom.

"So beautiful," he whispered.

Finally, he dipped his fingers within her depths and her muscles clenched around him and she moaned loudly. His fingers slick with her arousal and the massage oils stroked through her lips to the hood of her clit. Mia lifted her hips and pressed herself firmly against his hand.

"Turn over," he commanded breathlessly. "Let me take care of your

front.”

Mia gladly turned around. Their faces finally in full view of each other. Jai’s jaw ticking rhythmically as he restrained himself from jumping her. His nostrils flared as he breathed in her arousal. His eyes swept from her face to her toes.

“Fuck! You’re gorgeous!”

“As are you,” Mia said thankfully.

Jai grabbed the glass of oils and poured more down her sternum, stomach, and hairless mound. Jai ran a fingertip through the oil between her breasts, and drew a path to her nipple. He slowly circled the dusky brown peak and it tightened into a little pebble. Mia’s lips popped open and she arched her back, trying to press her breasts towards him, wanting more.

She had to give it to him. Jai was turning out to be the master of drawing out a sensual moment. As he moved to the next nipple, he bent over to flick his tongue against the peak he had already brought to attention. At the feel of his tongue against her, Mia’s lower half began to move restlessly, seeking attention. Jai didn’t disappoint.

His hand followed the path of oil down her tummy to where it stopped at her mons. His talented hands began an erotic massage of mound and lips, careful to avoid her slick entrance and clit. But the way his fingers kneaded and rubbed her lady bits, he reached a deeper level of pleasure for her, massaging the nerve-endings that connected her clit. Mia felt one of the strongest orgasms of her life inching forward.

“Ahhh! Jai, that is fucking incredible. Please, don’t stop!” She gasped.

One of her hands gripped the table in a vice grip, the other found his rock-solid cock pressing painfully against his pants. Mia rolled her hips up as she panted harshly. Her climax gained momentum and just before it hit, Jai bent down and latched his mouth onto her engorged clit. He tongued her sensitive nub with tiny flicks as stars burst behind Mia’s eyelids.

“Unhhhhh!!! Mia cried out as her back came off the table.

Jai quickly covered her mouth with his hand to try to stifle her cries. Mia moved her head to the side and maneuvered his fingers into her mouth. She moaned as she lapped up her cream from his fingers.

Mia’s new favorite massage therapist lifted his head from her still flexing pussy and smiled. He quickly began to unclasp his pants. She pointed to her purse hanging near the door.

“Can you grab my purse please?”

Jai quickly walked to the hook, grabbed her purse, and brought it over to her. Mia reached in and withdrew a condom. She looked up at her new lover and his eyes lit up.

“I-I could get fired for this.” He said shakily as she made quick work of his pants, and pulled out his thick cock.

“I won’t tell, if you won’t.” She smirked.

He wasn’t exceptionally long, but what he lacked in length, he certainly made up for in girth. Mia ripped the condom and rolled it down his length with her mouth. A quiet moan escaped his lips.

Mia pulled him down to her, their lips meeting for the first time. His tongue stroked hers unhurriedly. His expertise rapidly revved her engines once more. Jai released her lips, spun her around sideways until her ass was on the edge of the table, and slammed into her before she had time to blink, much less think. Her head fell back on a silent gasp. His thickness stretched her walls and hit delicious spots that made her legs shake.

Jai lifted her legs to lie against his chest. He wrapped one corded arm around her thighs and the other gripped her shoulder, pulling her down forcefully to meet his every thrust. Mia’s eyes rolled to the back of her skull and she couldn’t help but smile at finally breaking her dry spell in the most exquisite of ways.

“Damn, your pussy is so tight!” Jai grunted as he powered into her.

Mia smiled. She did extensive Kegel exercises and used heavy Ben Wa balls to strengthen her pelvic floor. At this point she could probably lift weights with her internal muscles. Which always paid off. Men always raved about how tight she was, her orgasms were more intense as well, and she was able to control them more. Like now, as he stroked into her. She squeezed him tightly and they both gasped.

“Shit!” He cried as his head fell back.

With every squeeze, her orgasm built.

“Wait. Wait. Wait. You’re gonna make me come.” He confessed as he tried to slow down.

“That’s the point. Now fuck me harder.” Mia commanded and squeezed him again.

Jai released her legs and shoulder, gripped her hips, and pounded into her. His hips like powerful pistons. Mia detonated and her strong muscles fluttered and milked him. Jai’s entire body tensed and his face turned beet red as he exploded into the condom. His fingers bit into the flesh of her hips.

Several breathless expletives fell from his lips as he slowed his strokes, drawing out their orgasms.

“You. Are. Fucking. Incredible!” He exclaimed before falling over her body.

“Ditto.”

Mia took a moment to stroke her fingers through his thick silky hair as his head laid on her chest. She didn’t mind snatching a few minutes to bask in the afterglow of a couple of orgasms. Just enough affection outside of sex to satisfy her, but not enough to catch feelings.

Once she was done cuddling, she patted his back like a buddy.

“Alrighty, Jai. That was amazing, but I’m sure my friends are waiting for me.” She stated, dismissing him.

She slid off of the table as he adjusted himself and zipped up his pants.

“Oh, yeah. Sorry.”

“No need to apologize. You did an incredible job. The tension is completely gone from my body.” Mia complimented him while she wiped the excess oil from her skin with a fluffy white towel.

She turned her back to him, pulling on her panties and dress. She sensed his eyes on her body the whole time. As she straightened her clothing, she felt his body heat close behind her. Jai planted a soft kiss on the back of her neck. She smiled, but pulled away.

“Do you have a card? I just might schedule an appointment with you in a couple of weeks.”

“Sure. I’d love to work out any kinks you have in the future. I mean, if you’d like we can even set up a standing appointment for every Saturday. I even do house calls with a portable table and everything.” Jai tried to suggest nonchalantly, but could barely disguise his eagerness.

Mia knew better.

She grabbed her purse and placed the card he gave her inside, before pulling out two twenty-dollar bills.

“No, I think it would be best if I just set something up as needed. But thank you for offering.” Mia smiled sweetly to soften the blow as she handed him the forty-dollar tip. “Until then...”

“Bye, Mia.”

“Bye, Jai.”

She strutted out the door, leaving him staring longingly after her. His eyes already conveyed that he was smitten. She was used to it. But she’d yet

to find a man who could handle her appetite. Or one who was okay with her sexual openness. They thought they wanted someone sexually confident. But in the long run, they always ended up being insecure in their ability to keep her satisfied. She knew most men secretly wanted a virgin with the skill of a porn star.

That ship had sailed long ago, but the latter, Mia could work with.

She walked out into the waiting area and found the girls waiting for her. She smiled slyly. Royal squinted at her suspiciously. Kennedy's mouth dropped open in shock. And Payton was too busy grinning at a text that Bradyn must have sent her to notice Mia's shit eating grin.

"I know that look in your eyes," Royal said perceptively.

"You didn't!" Kennedy gasped in shock, scaring Payton out of her daydreams of Gentle Giants.

"I did," Mia smiled and nodded in satisfaction.

"Hot damn! How do you pull this shit off?!" Royal smacked her leg gleefully.

Mia shrugged like it was no big deal.

"Ugh! I hate you!" Kennedy grumbled, not meaning a word of it. "My guy didn't even attempt to go anywhere near my neglected lady parts. He was totally professional," her tone hinting that professionalism was clearly not what she was looking for.

Kennedy pouted as she stood up with Payton and Royal. Mia wrapped an arm around her shoulders and gave her a good squeeze.

"That's probably because *you* were being uptight. All you have to do is moan a little here, roll your hips a little there, and voila, he's knuckles deep in your honey pot." Mia offered up her infinite sexual wisdom.

"Thanks for telling me *now*." Kennedy rolled her eyes. "But that's not why. It's probably because I...I may have broke wind."

They all stopped, looked at each other, and collapsed on one another laughing hysterically as they walked out into the cool spring afternoon.

"You farted?!?" Payton exclaimed.

"Shh!" Kennedy tried to silence them. "Someone will hear you guys."

"That's just classic!" Royal choked on her laughter.

"I couldn't help it! I got so relaxed that *everything* relaxed." Kennedy buried her face in her hands.

"Do you know what the difference is between us, Ken?" Mia asked as she slid on her giant sunglasses.

“What? I eat foods that make me gassy and you don’t?” Kennedy asked with a comical frown as Royal and Payton snorted with laughter.

“No, silly. You fantasize about men making the moves on you, and I make the moves on them. *I* am the aggressor. There’s nothing wrong with either approach, especially because where as you want a relationship, I just want a quick roll in the hay. But if you want some good pipe laid without strings attached, you’re gonna have to take a more proactive approach, hermana. Don’t let life happen to you. How about *you* happen to life?” Mia finished with a playful pull to Kennedy’s red curls.

“I know I should be more aggressive. But it’s just not me. I wouldn’t even know where to start. And besides, I *want* to be swept off my feet. I *want* some alpha male, that I’m attracted to of course, to come and lift me over his shoulder and carry me away like a caveman. You know I’m a little old school like that,” Kennedy admitted.

“And there’s nothing wrong with that. You’ll find your guy.” Mia said as she patted her friend on the back.

“Yes, you will,” Royal added. “But in the meantime, we’ll just live vicariously through Mia. Now start talking. What did your therapist look like and what did he do?”

“You have a man, though.” Kennedy rolled her eyes at Royal.

“Yeah, but that means I’m officially off the market. God willing, I’ll never have new dick again. So, I still want to hear all of Mia’s dirty stories.” Royal grinned deviously.

Mia smiled before telling them the details as they all piled into Bradyn’s Expedition that Payton borrowed for the day, since his vehicle was much better equipped for all of them to fit comfortably. Mia winked at Kennedy as the redhead pulled out her cellphone to record the details as she usually did when any of them had juicy stories to tell. She liked to use them for her novels.

God, I love these women.

Chapter Two

Mia closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. Her attempt to give her failing patience some CPR, as the couple across from her bickered back and forth with each other. It was Friday, and she was so over dealing with people for the week. The muscle in her jaw was beginning to tick and her head had started throbbing with a killer headache. All induced by the severe pains in the ass across from her. The Thorntons.

From the moment they hired Mia, she thought that their name was rather fitting. Because they'd been a thorn in her side ever since.

"Ms. Ayala--"

"Mia," she corrected Mr. Thornton. She felt like people were addressing her mother when they called her that.

"Mia, isn't there a way to incorporate my modern-industrial aesthetic with Gwyneth's country/French Provincial/shabby chic style?" Jim Thornton asked, looking up from the digital design on Mia's laptop that she had worked on for hours.

"Not unless you want your house to look like it was designed by a blind man." Mia blurted out honestly.

They blinked at her in surprise.

Time for some tough love.

"Look, Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, you have to pick a preference and stick to it. Jim, last week you wanted rustic and the week before that mid-century modern. Gwyneth, you originally wanted English country, then Coastal, and now a combination of country, French, and shabby chic? I've been working on digital mockups as well as collecting samples and swatches for your renovation for three weeks and neither of you have been satisfied with what I've come up with because you keep changing your mind." Mia leaned forward and snapped her laptop shut with enough force for them to jump slightly and flutter Gwyneth's hair.

"By this point on any project I've worked on in the past, we'd be past

demolition day and well into the contractors framing, putting up walls, and laying down floors. Yet here we are, as I listen to you both continue to bicker.”

The couple looked at each other guiltily. Mia smiled internally and sat back in her chair as if she had all the time in the world. *Now, I've got their attention.*

“Now, I can work with rustic and country, modern and French, or even industrial and shabby. But you better pick and you better pick today. All Eyez On Me, Interior Designs by Mia Ayala is not struggling for clientele and I have no problem with firing *you*. Time is money. You've paid me the first half of my commission, but I'd like to get paid the final half sometime in this century.” Mia finished looking back and forth between the two of them, not backing down for one second.

She'd been working on building her interior design career for ten years. The last three years she'd reached a level of success where she had to turn away clients. Some still insisted that she be the one to design their homes, so she'd had to start a wait list. There was no way in hell that she was going to continue to let this entitled couple waste her time with their antics while she wasn't getting paid in full. Not when she had plenty of clients who were waiting with bated breath to move forward with their projects and renovations.

“Maybe we should just take our business to someone with a little more patience,” Gwyneth said indignantly.

“That works for me. I have several clients waiting to move forward with me.” Mia nodded happily, surprising the woman with her eagerness to kick them to the curb. “But I would be remiss if I didn't warn you. Many of the designers in the area know each other, and the word about...*difficult* clients can spread rather quickly. So, if I were you, I'd think long and hard about what I want before going to another designer. Because if you waste the time of one more designer, no one in the area will touch you. Got it?”

Mia purposely made it part warning and part threat. She didn't want to unleash this couple on another poor, unsuspecting designer. One was enough.

“Fine.” Gwyneth said in a clipped tone.

“If you stop to speak to my assistant, she'll issue you a refund of seventy-five percent of your initial payment to me. You did take up three weeks of my time, so a full refund is impossible.” Mia raised an eyebrow, waiting for any rebuttal.

“That will be fine.” Jim stated.

Mrs. Thornton lifted her nose up so high in the air, if it started raining, Mia was sure she’d drown. Mr. Thornton looked away sheepishly, knowing in his heart they’d been a pain in the ass. They needed a therapist more than an interior designer. After getting a check from Mia’s assistant, he nodded briskly and escorted his wife out the door of Mia’s quaint little office on Fillmore Street.

“Fuuuuuck!” Mia let out her frustration as the door closed behind them. “Isabel?” Mia called over to her efficient associate.

“Yes, Mia?” The tiny Latina answered immediately, looking up from her computer.

“See who’s next on the waiting list. Give them a call and let them know that my schedule just opened up. And if their project is small, call the next after that on the list to let them know I can work with them as well. I have to make up for being three weeks behind schedule.” Mia grumbled as she headed into her smaller private office.

“Will do,” Isabel called back to her.

“Thank you, Isabel. You’re the best, mija.”

Mia closed her door and collapsed in her chair.

I hate people.

But she was so happy that she had Isabel. The nineteen-year-old was loyal and efficient. All while attending online college to get her design degree. They’d met through the Open Arms Foundation. A mentor/surrogate mother or father program for troubled children growing up in single parent homes, who needed that mother or father figure that they were missing in their life.

Mia had been assigned to Isabel four years ago, and they’d hit it off immediately. So much so that they didn’t want to let each other go when Isabel aged out of the program at nineteen.

It was Mia’s way of righting past wrongs. The guilt for not realizing what Alex had been doing early on, and all the children who were trafficked because she was blind and didn’t save them, ate at her like a cancer. Signing up to be a mentor for someone, eased the guilt little by little. Knowing that there was a chance she was possibly saving a life.

Now that Isabel was doing well and in college, it was time for Mia to be assigned to a new girl who needed guidance. She had been notified a week ago that she’d get to meet her new girl next month.

She was anxious and nervous all at once. Anxious to finally meet her new girl, and nervous that she wouldn't be able to make a difference in the girl's life. Only time would tell.

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Mia turned onto her street later than usual that evening. After her and the girls were finished with their workout, they had all decided to go grab a bite to eat. No one wanted to cook on a Friday night. McKinnon, Royal's husband, had started working out at The Red Scot's Ultimate Gym, that was owned by Payton's fiancé, Bradyn. The two men had become the best of friends. So, the guys came with for dinner, and had lightheartedly argued over who was paying.

Mia grinned thinking about how devoted the two men were to her friends. Her grin slowly faded as she noticed her street looked abnormally full with cars. Which meant that she'd have to park God knows where and she was not in the mood.

She circled the neighborhood, all the while seriously thinking about moving to a place that had private parking or a garage. A spot finally became free about a block and half away from her place. She parked and locked her Audi TT, a gift to herself after her first successful year, and headed towards her building.

As she rounded the corner, she heard voices and music and knew that the cause of the jam-packed street was because someone was having a party. The closer she got to her condo, the louder the sound became. When Mia reached the path that led to the building's front door, she could tell that the party was raging in her building.

"Great," she said to herself sarcastically.

All she wanted to do was drink a glass of wine or two and pass out. But she feared that the thumping and raised voices coming from below would probably keep her up all night.

When she pushed open the main door and walked inside, pulsing beats and raised voices filled the whole first floor. The party was raging in her newest neighbor, Evan's condo. He was a nice enough man. Divorced a couple years ago and starting over. Though Mia had been more interested in

his friend Luke. Luke was a sexy as hell silver fox, who she'd already bumped uglies with twice. It had been several months since she'd seen him last. She'd hurt his feelings after she'd told him never to contact her again after they had a quickie in the hallway. It had become obvious to her that he was developing an attachment to her. After that, she hadn't seen him in at least a year. And even then, it was in passing.

No one could run faster than Mia from a man with commitment in his eyes. She'd rather do the backstroke through a river of male tears than cry her own.

Mia wearily made her way up the flight of stairs that lead to her second story condo. She had a bottle of red wine waiting for her to pop open. She unlocked her door, and reached inside to flip the lights on. A strong arm wrapped around her waist, and soft lips and warm breath caressed her neck as she was practically lifted off of her feet and walked forward into her condo. She nearly died a thousand deaths. Mia whipped around quickly to find that it was Luke.

He grabbed for her again and pulled her into his arms. The smell of alcohol was on his breath as he kissed at her jawline.

*He must be drunk.*

"Mia, I'm sorry. I know you told me to stay away. And I tried. I stopped coming to see Evan and told him to hang out at my place instead. But when he decided to have this party, I knew I wouldn't be able to stay away from you." He said between kisses as his lips trailed down her neck.

Mia didn't know what she felt more of, fury or arousal. He kicked the door closed and walked her backwards, further into her home. She didn't initiate or resist as they stumbled into the kitchen. Luke lifted her up onto the counter. He pulled down the strap of her sports bra and wrapped his lips around her hardened nipple.

Her head fell back and she gasped. Luke worked at undoing his pants and pushing them and his boxers down his hips. Mia reached back and found what she was looking for. Her fingers wrapped around the smooth handle of the butcher's knife in her cutting block. She brought it around and placed the sharp tip against the base of Luke's rock-hard cock.

"Sss!!!" Luke hissed and tried to step back.

Mia grabbed his silky silver hair and pulled, making his head fall back. She nipped at his chin, her porcelain teeth scraping across the stubble there, as she applied a tiny bit of pressure against his balls.



“Mia, don’t,” Luke begged breathlessly.

His voice and hands trembled, but his dick got harder and a little pre-cum dripped from the tip. He was afraid and turned on at the same time.

Mia smiled.

“Don’t what?” Mia asked. “You basically assault me at my own doorstep on a particularly shitty day and now you’re begging me not to make you a eunuch?”

“I-I’m s-sorry,” he stuttered.

“But are you really?” She pressed a little harder.

“Oh God! Yes. Yes. Yes!”

“I swear to the Lord above, if you *ever* darken my doorstep again, I’ll cut your balls off, stuff them in your mouth, and watch you bleed out on the hardwood floor. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, I understand.”

“Good,” she said as she kissed his lips.

She removed the knife from his skin and placed it on the counter next to her. She reached for her purse that she dropped on the counter. She pulled out a condom and Luke’s eyes widened in surprise that she’d still want to fuck.

She may have been pissed, but Mia was not one to waste an erection as pretty as his. Besides, his reaction to her threatening him made her even hotter. So, she handed him the condom as she shimmied out of her yoga pants.

The moment her legs were free and his cock was sheathed, she wrapped her legs around his waist and he plunged in deep. It didn’t take long for their tense exchange to reach its peak. The violence somehow made them hornier than normal.

They exploded within a few rough thrusts. Mia let Luke rest his forehead against the crook of her neck and shoulder as he caught his breath. Once his breathing calmed, she stroked his hair, kissed the side of his face, and spoke just two words.

“Get out.”

They were spoken softly, but there was no mistaking her tone.

Luke pulled up his boxers and jeans, not even taking the time to remove the condom. Opting to remove it later, since he wasn’t willing to risk staying her in presence for a second longer. The knife, a silent warning, still glinting in the light of the kitchen on the counter next to her hip.

He walked out of her apartment without another word.

“Now, where’s that damn bottle.” Mia said to herself as she hopped down from the counter bare-assed.

She wiped down the counter with antiseptic wipes, poured herself a glass of wine, and walked to her bathroom to run herself a nice hot bath.

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## Chapter Three

Mia made her way downstairs the next afternoon, on her way out to meet up with the girls for their regularly scheduled Saturday lunch. Just as she reached the first floor landing, her neighbor's door opened. She prayed that it wasn't Luke. She didn't want to have to see his sad face in the light of day.

Luckily, it was her neighbor's sister that she'd met at his housewarming party. Mia had seen her a few times in passing over the last two years. His sister always seemed like a cool chick, but Mia had her circle and didn't need to add more.

"Hey, Mia!" She said, easily remembering her name.

"Hey, Hannah. How are you? It sounds like you guys partied hard last night. I would know. It took me forever to get to sleep over the music." Mia grinned good-naturedly.

Hannah cringed, "I'm so sorry!"

"Don't worry about it. I put in some earbuds and listened to the soothing sounds of the ocean to drown you guys out." She winked.

"Good." She placed a hand on Mia's arm. "Oh, by the way, I have a message for you from some of my friends."

Hannah backed up and started bowing with her hands out.

"We're not worthy. We're not worthy."

Mia scrunched up her face in confusion.

"You've done a number on Luke and my friends are loving every minute of it. Some of the ones he's screwed over in the past were here last night and they saw how pitiful he looked when he came down from your place. It was glorious!" Hannah finished with a happy sigh.

"Uh...glad I could help." Mia said awkwardly.

Mia vaguely remembered Hannah saying something about how much of an ass he was to her friends when they'd met a couple of months ago.

"Sorry, I'm not trying to make you feel weird. You just have no idea how arrogant he is when it comes to women and how much of a player he is.

For him to have found someone who is his match or quite honestly so far out of his league that even Rico Suave himself couldn't tell his dick from his asshole is the most amazing thing to behold." Hannah looked up at Mia as if she'd hung the moon.

"Well, there will always be someone who can play the game better than you. Plus, it's always fun to knock these arrogant men down a peg or two." Mia winked conspiratorially.

"You're our hero. Let us know if you ever hold classes. We'd sign up in a heartbeat. Anyway, I didn't mean to hold you up. I just thought you should know."

"Don't worry about it."

They both walked outside. Hannah waved goodbye as she headed to her car parked out front, where Mia normally parked. Mia nodded and started the trek to her car.

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"Okay, ladies." Kennedy set down her dirty martini as they all focused on her. "So, we all decided that we'd be open to new possibilities when it comes to men. That plan worked out great for Payton and Royal. Two down, two more to go."

"Meh." Mia rolled her eyes and took a sip of her rum and coke. "More like, 'Two down, one more to go.'"

"Come on, Mia. Don't be a party-pooper." Kennedy scolded. "I need to be a little more proactive, if I'm gonna find myself a man. And that goes for you too."

"Who said I need or want a man? Surely not me."

"But you did say you'd be open to the possibilities." Payton reminded her.

"Or at the very least be the supportive wingwoman. So, even if you aren't looking for a man, *I* am. And I don't want to go alone."

"What is your idea, Kennedy? I will go, even though I have Bradyn." Payton chimed in agreeably.

"Ditto!" Royal added.

"Thank you, *Payton and Royal*." Kennedy emphasized their names as

she gave Mia the stink eye. “So, I heard that there’s this popular cooking class that everyone in the city has been going to. I found it online, saw that there were only a few spots left, and took the initiative to sign us up. It could definitely be an opportunity to meet men.

“*Plus,*” Kennedy said quickly before they could come up with excuses. “Apparently the chef, Dante Bianchi, who teaches the class is the best chef in the city, if not all of California. *And* I hear he’s really hot. How can we go wrong? Learn some new recipes, have eye candy to look at as we learn, and possibly meet some cuties who are trying to learn how to cook.”

“Hey!” Payton said brightly. “I know him! Bradyn wants no expense spared for the wedding, so he hired Dante to cater the wedding. I’d heard he does cooking classes too. Maybe, I can learn some things to cook for Bradyn!” Payton clapped her hands together. “I’m not much of a cook, so he cooks for me all the time. I’d love to surprise him. That man can seriously eat. Given his size and the intensity of his workouts, his caloric intake is much higher than most. He may have given up fighting for a living, but he has yet to cut down his exercise routine. Habits.”

Payton finished her rambling and looked away bashfully as they all smiled at her knowingly. Payton in love was the cutest thing they’d seen in a long time.

“Don’t look at me like that,” she waved them away.

“But you’re just so damn cute,” Kennedy teased.

“Do you see that look?” Mia reached over to clutch Payton’s chin and turned her face to the other two across the table. “I don’t believe I have it in me to have this face again. This face died a long time ago.”

Mia was referring to the look of love written all over Payton. She knew she would’ve been a hell of a lot better off if Alex had just cheated on her with some random woman. She would’ve possibly been able to come back from that. To love again. But she could remember the look of pure evil and hatred on his face at the police station, and when she gave her testimony in court when he was on trial. A look that was so different from the looks of love and adoration he’d given her when they were kids. A real-life Jekyll and Hyde. To know she’d lain next to a pedophile, a rapist, a man who sold children for all those years.

How would she ever be able to believe anything a man said again? No. For her, men were only good for fucking. That’s it.

“You’ll find it again, Mia. Not all men lead double lives. There are some

good ones out there. Somewhere.” Kennedy reached across the table and clasped Mia’s hand.

Mia wasn’t sure if Kennedy was trying to convince her or herself. Either way, she didn’t feel comfortable with the pity she saw in her friend’s eyes.

“Yeah, Bradyn and McKinnon.” Mia smiled at Payton and then at Royal, pulling the attention away from herself. “You two may have found the last good ones, chicas.”

“Hey, McKinnon had his own double life issues, remember?” Royal said. “Pretending to be someone he wasn’t. No man is going to be perfect, because none of us are. But there are still some rad guys out there, my friend.”

“I’m sure. I just don’t believe I’m ready for them. I like my life. It’s uncomplicated. Peaceful. I’d like to keep it that way,” Mia said.

She shook off her morose mood and turned to Kennedy.

“So, when do these classes start and for how long? I may not be able to find love, but I really do enjoy helping you ladies find yours.” *It will have to be enough for me.*

“Thursday nights, from 6 to 8. And it’s a 4-week course.” Kennedy read them the information from her phone.

“That means, no Thursday night workouts?” Payton asked.

They tried not to laugh at Payton’s sad face. They had been working out at Bradyn’s gym for the past two years, which is where Payton had met the big Scotsman. After a day at work, she enjoyed watching Bradyn from across the room as they worked out. They basically eye-fucked each other until they were able to go home for the night and actually do it.

“Dude. You do realize you live with him, right?” Royal teased her. “It’s only two hours.”

“I know.” Payton smiled dreamily.

“She’s no good to us anymore,” Kennedy said.

“Yeah, he’s officially ruined her,” Mia added. “Our friend is broken.”

“Oh, whatever. You guys suck!”

“Why, yes. Yes, I do. And muy bien, I might add.” Mia smirked.

They all rolled their eyes and giggled like girls.

“I know. You taught me well, Yoda. Bradyn thanks you.” Payton bowed her head respectfully.

Their giggles turned into full blown hysterics. Their antics also turned the heads of quite a few patrons in the restaurant, but they ignored them.

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Chapter Four

“What the hell do you wear to a cooking class?” Mia asked into her phone.

She had Royal on speaker phone as she stood in front of her closet, wrapped in her silk robe.

“I wouldn’t know. I’m just dressing casually.” Royal said.

“You mean, like you always dress?”

“Exactly. I will be my normal kickass self. Besides, you don’t want to get food all over your good clothes if it gets messy.”

“Not that I really have anything *that* casual to wear. But I’ll figure something out.”

“Alright. See you in a little bit.”

“Later.”

Mia tapped the red ‘End’ button and tossed her phone on the bed. She cocked her head to the side as she stared into her closet. She rarely ever went casual, so she barely had any casual clothes. Her staples were dresses and skirts with heels. She smiled to herself. *Easy access.*

For someone who enjoyed an impromptu romp in the hay or a quickie, dresses and skirts made life a lot easier. But she figured she’d probably be on her best behavior tonight.

Mia snapped her fingers, remembering that she’d bought some form-fitting red overalls with gold details a while ago that accentuated her lush hips and round ass. She grabbed them and shimmied them on. She pulled a fitted white crop top on and latched the straps of the overalls. She slipped her feet into a pair of white wedge heel sneakers with gold metal accents.

In her spa inspired bathroom, Mia pulled her curls up into a strategically messy bun. She left out a couple of curling tendrils to lay against her neck and temples. She finished her “casual” look with light natural makeup, a glossy nude lip, and large, gold hoop earrings with a gold choker on her long neck that looked a lot like a submissive collar.

Ha! I wish.

Mia often fantasized about finding a man who was dominant enough to lead in the bedroom. She'd screwed plenty of men and absolutely none of them were even close to being more alpha than she was. They pretended to be, but in the end, she always crushed them under the pointed toe of her stiletto heels.

In her everyday life, running her own business in a competitive market, she had to be a boss. An alpha female. Always slaying. It would be nice if she had a man who took the lead to give her a needed break. But when most men realized that she was sexually open and aggressive, they'd go from tiger to kitten in record speed.

“Can't I get a Dom/sub friends with benefits relationship with no mushy feelings involved, where the man has a big wang, can break my headboard, and give me multiple orgasms without me having to ask? Is that too much to ask?” Mia asked her reflection.

She raised her eyes heavenward and let out a frustrated breath. Her phone chimed that she had a text. She rushed into her bedroom to grab it.

**Kennedy:
We're outside.**

“Betty Crocker, here we come.” Mia said to the room as she grabbed her purse and headed for the door.

Chapter Five

**Shailee:
I'm sorry. I can't see u anymore.**

Dante's stomach dropped as he read the all too familiar text, staring back at him. He sighed and collapsed back in his buttery soft leather office chair. He stared at the ceiling for a few minutes. Feelings of anger started to override the overwhelming disappointment he felt. He sat up straight, pulled up her number, and pressed the call button.

The phone rang several times and he thought that she'd let it go to voicemail. But then he heard her voice laced with annoyance. "Hey, Dante."

"Shailee, what is going on? I thought we were having a good time. I do not understand, mia cara." Dante said softly into the phone. His Italian accent more pronounced in his agitation.

"Don't call me that. Don't try to butter me up with Italian."

"We were having fun, no?"

"Yes, but-"

"But what?!"

"I can't deal with your past. It makes me uncomfortable." Shailee admitted, echoing the sentiment he'd heard over and over again in the past five or so years.

"You weren't uncomfortable last night and the night before and the night before that." Dante growled.

"You're great to screw around with. But anything more than that isn't realistic, Dante."

"So, you were just going to break up with me through a text? I do not deserve the courtesy of a call or face to face?"

"At least I didn't ghost you. I could've not said anything at all and just blocked you."

He had experienced that before too. She was right. A text was preferable

to nothing.

“Fine, Shailee. Have a nice life.”

“You-”

Dante angrily swiped the end button, cutting off the rest of her sentence, and then threw his phone on his desk in disgust. He didn't know why he was so upset or even surprised. This was his life. Attracting women was no problem. His looks and accent drew them like flies to honey. But keeping them past a couple of weeks was next to impossible. Once they found out about his past, it was over between them shortly thereafter. Hell, sometimes they already knew about his past. In fact, that's what drew a lot of them to him. Moths to flames, and all that. They only wanted to use him until he was ready to get serious.

But no matter how many times he was dumped, it still stung. Dante loved love. He loved that connection between two people. Unfortunately, he hadn't been in a serious relationship for at least ten years. And he was beginning to feel that it was hopeless.

He got up from his chair and strode out of his office and towards the kitchen of his restaurant, *Bianchi*. It had been his dream for most of his life. He'd finally saved up enough money five years ago, at the age of thirty-five, to leave his old life behind and start the one he'd always imagined for himself. And now, finally, he was receiving the recognition he'd been dreaming of since he was a ten-year-old boy living in a small town in Italy. With a lot of hard work, *Bianchi* had finally become a Michelin-star restaurant and was the hottest restaurant in the Bay area.

Bianchi may have been his dream, but he'd be lying if he said that he didn't work his ass off to make it successful for CeCe. She'd come into his life two years ago, and changed everything. Too bad his success went ignored by her as well. She, too, opted to focus on his past life and hated him for it.

Dante walked through the swinging doors into the kitchen. His sous chef and a pretty waitress were flirting with each other. She threw a mushroom at him and they laughed. An imaginary fist squeezed at Dante's heart witnessing their playful exchange.

“Do neither of you have anything better to do than play around?” Dante barked and the two jumped apart guiltily.

“Sorry, Sir.” She said looking away.

“Sorry, Dante.” Antonio, his assistant and right hand said with a frown.

“The evening rush will begin in another hour or so and the food hasn't

been prepped. The silverware and napkins haven't been rolled. And this kitchen should be gleaming before the chaos begins. Yet here you two are playing footsie like schoolchildren. And where is everyone else?" Dante let his loneliness and jealousy take over his mood.

He was normally a very laid-back boss. Well, until the place became busy. Then he became a drill sergeant. But that was to be expected in a high-end, Michelin-star restaurant.

"A couple of the guys are out back taking a smoke break. And a few others should be coming in in a few minutes." Antonio said.

"Then I suggest you get everyone in here. I have to head to my class, and I need to know that you've got it under control here while I am gone."

"Yes, sir. I've got you covered. I promise."

"Good. I'll be back later this evening." Dante clipped before turning on his heel and heading out to his class.

He was tempted to cancel the class for the evening. He wasn't exactly in the mood to teach or to deal with his "students" who always fought for extra attention from him. Who tried to hit on him, vying for a date.

I don't know why they even try. They never stay.

~~~

"What's this guy's name again?" Royal turned around to ask Payton.

Payton shared a long metal table with Mia, directly behind Royal and Kennedy.

"Dante Bianchi," Payton answered back.

"I hope he really is hot for your sake, Ken. Because that's all the eye candy you're gonna get tonight." Mia thought out loud.

"Right?!?" Kennedy grumbled and looked around the packed room with a frown.

Mia's eyes also scanned the room. The class had room for twenty people. All of which were women. All the ladies tittered excitedly as they waited for their teacher.

"Not exactly what you were hoping for, was it?" Mia asked Kennedy.

"Not. At. All." Kennedy pouted.

There was a commotion in the doorway in front of the large kitchen that

drew everyone's eye. Mia could've sworn that the other women in the room held their collective breaths. A man walked through the door in relaxed fit jeans and a nice button up shirt that was untucked and the sleeves rolled up his veiny forearms.

The room filled with the sound of soft sighs, while the four friends had varying expressions. Payton blinked several times and pushed her glasses higher up on her nose to see better. Kennedy's mouth practically hit the stainless steel table. Royal started coughing uncontrollably, as if she'd choked on her spit. Mia had to admit she was feeling a little parched herself.

"Buonasera, ladies," he said with a soft and smooth Italian accent to the room at large.

"Oh my..." Payton breathed.

"Fuck. Me!" Mia groaned quietly.

"Dude!" Royal nudged Mia with her elbow.

"Whoa!" Kennedy shook her head as if she was trying to clear the cobwebs.

"That's one fine ass man!" Royal hissed softly.

"No shit!" Kennedy agreed.

"So...I really do love Bradyn. But is it wrong that my mouth just became exceedingly dry?" Payton swallowed hard.

"Sweetie, live a little longer. You're human and will always find other men attractive. There's nothing wrong with it, as long as you don't act on it." Mia explained.

"No, I'm not interested in going that far. I just want to look at him for a while."

"You and everyone else, honey." Mia turned back to face forward.

Her well-practiced eye took him in. She'd thought that Luke was a hot silver fox. Well, he had nothing on this man. Dante Bianchi's hair was quite distinguished with streaks of silver through his dark, loose curls. Long enough to have that sexy tousled look, like a woman had run her hands through his hair during a passionate session of lovemaking. But short enough to comb back, throw on a suit or tux, and fit right in with the elite.

His light-brown eyes were outlined with a fringe of long dark lashes and stood out even from Mia's vantage point in the back of the room. So thick that it almost looked like he had on eyeliner. And they were smoldering and sexy. Like if he looked at her just right, her clothes would surely burst into flames and disintegrate at her feet.

The Italian had matching salt and pepper facial hair. Not a full beard, but not a five o'clock shadow. It was somewhere in between. Mia could imagine its sting against her face and between her thighs. And it surrounded the most luscious of lips.

*Hot damn!!!*

His lips were sinful. Unusually full and incredibly shapely. And deliciously pink.

*Those lips know how to pleasure a woman.* Mia had a sixth sense about those kinds of things. And it was telling her that those lips had plenty of practice.

“Alright, everyone. My name is Dante Bianchi and over the next four weeks, I will be teaching you some meals and cooking techniques that will leave your friends and family green with envy at your skills. Or, at the very least, believing you hired a caterer and tried to pass off the meal as your own.” He announced with a mischievous smirk.

The class cackled like hens in a henhouse when a cock comes home to roost. Many probably laughed harder than they usually would, in the quest to gain a few extra brownie points. Mia just smiled and assessed her competition.

“Before we begin, I have printed out name tags for you all to wear and keep over the next month. Even though the class is not very long, I do not want to call all of you ‘hey, you’ every Thursday evening. I will hand them out to each of you so that we can have a small introduction and I can put a name with a face.” Dante said pulling out a bag of nametags. “When I call your name, please come forward.”

The room began to chatter excitedly at the thought of being able to make an individual first impression on the sexy Italian. He began to call out each person’s name. Mia almost laughed out loud as women strutted down the aisle, one at a time, like it was the catwalk at Paris Fashion Week.

Her friends, never able to pretend they were something they were not, each walked up with their usual flare. Payton tried not to stumble, but tripped on an imaginary crack in the floor anyway. Dante reached out to catch her and smiled kindly at her as she flushed. Royal, with her tomboyish ways, walked up, said ‘Sup,’ and walked away. And Kennedy quickly walked up, grabbed her tag, squeaked out a ‘hello,’ and rushed back to her spot. Her face was as red as a tomato, to match her hair.

“Oh Lord, I’d *never* be able to talk to him. He’s too...too...something.”

Kennedy fanned herself as another woman was called forward.

“Agreed,” Royal nodded. “Even if I was single, I could never approach him.”

Mia grinned. “Don’t worry, ladies. I got this.”

“And last, but not least... Is there a Mia here?” Dante called out looking around the room to find the last face he hadn’t seen yet.

Mia stepped out from behind her table into the aisle. For the first time, since he walked in the room, Dante’s eyes found her. As she walked forward, she didn’t need to fake strut. The breadth of her hips and the fullness of her ass did the work for her. And his eyes traveled up her body slowly, savoring her form like a feast before him.

When his eyes reached hers, she saw the desire there, right before he squashed it seconds later as she stood before him with her hand out. Her four-inch wedge sneakers put her at eye level with him, and she immediately noticed his eyes were a little more hazel than brown. Almost golden. He dropped the tag in her left hand, trying to avoid touching her. But Mia held out her right hand, forcing him to shake it or appear rude. The instant his hand touched hers, flames licked up her arm and radiated all over her body. Her glossy lips popped open. His pupils dilated and his nostrils flared. His tongue peeked out to wet his full lips. Mia could’ve sworn she felt that lick on her lady bits.

Dante cleared his throat and then spoke thickly, “It is a pleasure to meet you, Mia.”

“The pleasure is all mine, I’m sure, Mr. Bianchi.” Mia practically purred.

“Please, call me, Dante. No need to be so formal. Mr. Bianchi sounds like my father.” Dante said warmly, although he stepped back to put some distance between them.

Mia smiled, since that was exactly how she felt when people called her Ms. Ayala.

“Dante,” she let the name roll off her tongue.

She lowered her head slightly, looked up at him from under her lashes, and gave him a small, sexy side smile. Then she turned and headed back to the table she shared with Royal. The women she passed on her way, cut their eyes at her. The daggers their eyes threw would have surely killed her if they could. She smiled even more.

“Game. Set. Match.” Royal whispered as Mia pinned her nametag to the strap of her overalls.

“Girl!!! The look in his eyes when he first looked at you was book worthy,” Kennedy hissed under her breath as she clapped her hands together.

“I’m quite certain the other women in the class were ready to fight you to the death.” Payton added.

“Hellz yeah, they were. The sexual tension between you two was fire. No one could deny that.” Royal winked at Mia.

“We shall see. He seemed a little standoffish.” Mia shrugged.

“Yeah,” Kennedy scoffed. “About as standoffish as me if I was on a sugar-free diet for two weeks and someone waved a caramel cake in my face.”

“Alright, everyone.” Dante clapped his hands together to draw everyone’s attention. “Now that introductions are all taken care of, let’s cook.”

His eyes scanned the room as he talked, but when his eyes landed on Mia, they lingered a bit longer before moving on. Mia felt tingles in her tummy. A feeling she hadn’t experienced since she was in high school staring across the classroom at Alejandro. A chill ran down her spine and she pushed the warm fuzzies away.

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“Today, we will start off easy. Something that sounds difficult and fancy, yet only takes thirty minutes or so to prepare and cook. Feta and herb crusted salmon, paired with braised potatoes with garlic, shallots, and herbs. In front of you should be everything that you will need, including your aprons. I will bring around your salmon.” Dante informed his class.

He tried to focus on the room at large, but his eyes couldn’t help but go back to the beautiful woman in the red overalls. He wasn’t sure if she was African American, Latina, or both. But she was the most striking woman he’d seen in a long time, if ever. And he’d been around some beauties in his lifetime.

Many of the women in the class had approached him with forced bravado or bashfulness. Not, Mia. She had walked towards him with purpose and direct eye contact. She knew who she was and didn’t make apologies for it. It was obvious that she embraced her lush body, if her formfitting

ensemble had anything to say about it. And she was definitely the type that when she saw something she wanted, she was going to go get it. By the look in her eyes, she wanted him.

That was what Dante was afraid of. He knew a sexually confident woman when he saw one. He'd dealt with many. But he'd been crushed way too many times in the last several years. He wasn't sure he could handle another. So, he tried to rein in his interest. Though it was not easy.

He turned away from the class and opened the industrial sized refrigerator. He reached in and grabbed the tray of fresh salmon fillets. He closed the door and headed to each table to pass out the fillets to his students.

He interacted briefly with each student as he passed out the salmon. Dante's eyes surreptitiously wandered over to Mia. Hers was the only name he could remember by heart. Maybe it was because it was as if someone was whispering it in his ear over and over again. He found his way to her table. Her friends smiled brightly at him, but it was Mia that his body was attuned to. She gazed at him through knowing, pretty brown eyes and gave him a half smile. The look was sexy and spoke volumes. It held a promise of intense pleasure.

Dante looked away.

She more than likely just wanted sex from him. Like every other woman in the room. He was starting to feel like a joke. A freak show. He felt weary. Tired of being some woman's plaything or conquest.

Dante wanted something serious and nothing was going to stop him from getting that. Not even an exceptionally beautiful woman who appeared to be a master at eye-fucking from a distance.

He concentrated on the woman next to her. His face lit with recognition.

"Aren't I catering your wedding in a few weeks?"

The pretty dark-skinned woman smiled shyly.

"Yes, you are."

"I cannot believe I did not recognize you right away. Glad you could bring your friends to my class." He smiled at her and continued to avoid eye contact with Mia.

He quickly made his way to the other side of the class. He never considered himself a coward or shy. His former career wouldn't have allowed it. But something about that woman put him on edge.

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Chapter Six

The following week wasn't much better for Dante. He was beginning to think that his classes were less about cooking delicious foods, and more about his students wanting to put him on a platter and eat him instead.

If he wanted to, he could report nearly the whole damn class for sexual harassment. The two-hour class consisted of him trying to avoid direct eye contact for longer than a few seconds, dodging grabby hands, and ignoring sexual innuendos.

Surprisingly, Mia and her three friends were the few women who didn't step out of line as he made his way around the class to check on everyone's progress. The dark-skinned shy one, he was catering for, barely made eye contact or spoke to him. And if she did, she'd just flush and look away. The one with the punk rock vibe, would joke around playfully. And the redhead would smile at him dreamily.

Mia, on the other hand, was a diabolical genius in her seduction. The other women in the class tried to pinch his ass when he wasn't paying attention. Others who were bolder, would actually cup his crotch when they thought no one was paying attention. Not Mia.

The tall, bombshell was one of the few who would give him direct eye contact. She was engaged and open. When he made his rounds to each table, she'd subtly place a hand on his forearm or bicep. The move made him instinctively flex, in a show of manliness. Peacocking.

She played with her hair, making him want to touch its curly strands. She looked up at him from under her long lashes, forcing him to imagine her looking up at him as she gave him oral. She played with the neckline of her plunging dresses as she spoke, drawing his eye to her perfect perky breasts and the hardened nipples that pressed against the fabric. Letting him know that she wasn't wearing a bra.

And her acting was stellar. If she dropped things on purpose, it certainly didn't seem like it. If he wasn't anywhere near her to help pick up the item,

she'd bend over just right, putting her gloriously round ass on display. If he was nearby, she'd kneel with him to grab what she'd dropped. Her hand would reach out to take it, and her fingertips would softly brush his skin. Goosebumps would rise across his flesh at the contact. She'd even find a way to get flour on her face in just the right place to make him desperately want to reach out and brush it away.

Everything about her was sexy. And Dante was slowly dying inside.

The third week cooking session, her friends got involved. Dante found himself heading over to their tables more often than not. Each one needing assistance with something. Although, Mia looked more annoyed with their interference than appreciative.

He was beginning to dread going to class. He was seriously considering canceling his popular cooking class because of all of the unwanted attention. Well, unwanted from the majority of the class. His body and wandering mind weren't as averse to Mia as he'd like them to be.

He thought about her more often than not. Even his issues with CeCe didn't stop his mind from going to the confident woman in his class. And the last thing he needed at the moment was to try to make two females love him. He couldn't get one to, so there was no use in trying to bring in a second. He'd been trying that for years. It was finally time to focus on his home life. His business was doing well and he had good people working for him so that he could spend more time away, and focus on the one person who mattered most in his life. He just hoped that CeCe was responsive.

He also hoped that he could stop thinking about the statuesque woman with the seductive eyes and killer body.

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"Buonasera, ladies." Dante said as he walked into the class. "This is our last night together. So, let's make it a good one, yes?"

Mia sighed in frustration. It was her last opportunity. Her last-ditch effort to make him come to heel. To break down his walls.

For three weeks they had been eying each other, and exchanging seemingly innocent touches. Now, it was the fourth and final class, and Mia felt like she hadn't gotten any further than she had from day one.

So tonight, she had dressed to maim, kill, and destroy. She wore a yellow sweater dress that complemented her honey-colored complexion and acted as a second skin. She'd foregone any undergarments. The fabric brushed against her nipples hardening them, pushing them forward. She had already been somewhat aroused at the thought of seeing Dante again, so when her thighs rubbed together, the friction at the apex of her legs, sans panties, caused her to get wetter.

She'd straightened her hair, parted it down the middle and smoothed it down and back behind her ears. Black eyeliner defined her sienna-colored eyes, and deep red accentuated her full lips. And she finished the look with four-inch yellow pumps on her feet.

Mia didn't care that she looked like she was ready for a night on the town. This was her last chance and she meant to take it.

Before she put her apron on, she caught Dante's eyes as they tracked down her frame. The desire there was barely banked fire as his eyes rose up to connect with hers. She cocked her head to the side slightly, and raised her eyebrows. *Are you going to make a move or not, because this is it?*

The Italian swallowed and looked away.

"Alright, everyone." He began huskily and then cleared his throat. He quickly glanced at Mia to see if she'd heard it. She had. "For reasons unknown to me, most people think that lamb is a particularly difficult and fancy dish. Believe me, there are harder meals to cook than this. But for the sake of impressing friends and family, for our last class you'll be learning how to prepare rack of lamb in a white wine reduction with mustard-shallot sauce. Something that will wow your dinner guests without being too much of a hassle."

He began the class, turning his focus to the food. Mia sighed before putting on her apron and getting down to business with the girls. As usual, as she watched his strong hands move over the delicate food, her body tingled. His touch was feather light and it was so sensual the way he handled the food. The muscles and tendons in his forearms moved seductively under his skin and thick veins. Mia had no idea how sexy food could be until Dante.

As the class wound down, their meals almost done, Mia began to worry that this was really it. After tonight, that would be all. She wouldn't continue

to chase him. She normally didn't have to and didn't want to start now. She wasn't the type to show up at a man's job, trying to get his attention.

Once their meals were finished, they all pulled out the stools under their tables to eat their creations.

"Are you going to make a final move tonight?" Kennedy asked quietly.

"Yeah, I think I'll give it one last try."

"You can do it, girl." Royal gave her a high-five down low, so that no one would see.

"We shall see. He's avoided me all night. He usually comes over to see how we're doing. Didn't you notice how he skirted around us?" Mia asked as she watched him chat with another table.

"Yeah, but that's just because he's being a chicken shit." Royal waved away her concerns.

"You're the most confident person I know, Mia." Payton placed her hand on Mia's arm. "Don't let this guy make you question yourself. Even if he's not interested, you know a ton of men who are."

"You could always go back and get a massage from the hot massage therapist." Kennedy teased her.

"This is true." Mia grinned thinking about the handsome man with great hands, among other things.

They finished up their meals and cleaned up their work spaces. When they were ready to leave. Mia hung back.

"Hey, give me ten minutes. If I'm not down by then, leave without me." Mia told the girls.

"Got it."

"Good luck."

"Get your man!"

Mia waited for the room to clear out as Dante straightened up his table at the front of the room. The other women in the class looked at her and gave cutting stares. She raised an eyebrow and they left without a word.

Dante hadn't looked up yet, and he took a deep breath as he thought the last person walked out the door. Mia stood up and her heels slowly tapping against the floor made his eyes shoot up in surprise. The minute his eyes reached hers they widened with excitement and then shuttered a split second later. His walls were solidly up.

"Dante, it was a pleasure to be a part of your class the past four weeks. I had a lot of fun." Mia said as she reached his table.

“I’m glad you enjoyed the class, Mia. You did really well.” He looked at anything other than her.

“So...” Mia walked around the table, running her fingertips over the cool steel. She reached the side of the table where he was standing. She turned and leaned her backside against the table, her hip slightly brushing against his. “I was thinking that we could go for an end-of-class celebratory drink somewhere nearby.”

Dante turned and looked at her. Their faces only a few inches from each other. She could feel his breath against her face. She could smell his cologne. Something completely masculine, expensive, and panty melting. Heat radiated off of him in waves.

“I’m sorry, Mia. I think maybe you have mistaken my attentions. I’m just a very...hands on instructor.” Dante tried to reason.

“Dante, please. Don’t play coy. We’re too old for games. It’s obvious there is an attraction between us. I’d like to explore it.” Mia lifted her chin, raising her lips only centimeters from his.

A few silver strands of hair that had fallen loose from him running his hands through his hair, trembled and tickled her nose as his face inched closer.

“This doesn’t have to be anything serious. Just two consenting adults who enjoy pleasure.” Mia offered.

Dante’s eyes completely shut down before he closed them and turned his face away from her. He took a few steps back to put distance between them. Mia was dumbfounded. Usually approaching men with the “casual sex” option worked like a charm.

“Mia, you are exquisite. Truly. But I’m not interested in you like that. Please respect my wishes and just go.” The muscles in his jaw worked as if he was holding himself back.

Mia didn’t know what demons were forcing him to not take what he wanted, but she wasn’t going to beg.

“Goodbye, Dante.”

She got up and quickly walked to the door. Her heels clicked sharply, signaling her displeasure.

Her body shivered with the feel of his eyes eating her up as she walked away. She didn’t look back.

## Chapter Seven

Mia tossed and turned in bed that night. She couldn't get the chef out of her head. It was probably because he was the first man in a long time, if ever, to ignore her advances.

*Four weeks straight!*

She knew that there was an attraction there. She'd felt it and noticed it in his eyes in every class. In the way they kept wandering over to her no matter how hard he tried not to. But he would quickly look away if she gave him her signature sexy smile. It was the smile she used as an invitation. Most men rarely ever let that look slip their notice. They jumped on it like a kid into a ball pit. So, Dante's resistance was new to her. Mia had no idea how to even process the rejection. She normally got what she wanted.

"Ugh!" She turned again and smacked her pillow angrily.

She'd been turned on during the whole damn cooking class. Especially, when he'd started demonstrating what to do with the food items in front of them. The way his hands moved. How he handled the delicate meat. It was all so erotic that Mia could hardly concentrate on preparing her own dish. Those hands. Strong, capable, and elegant. She could picture those fingers touching her. Manipulating her pleasure, the way he manipulated the food.

Any other time, any other situation, and any other man, Mia would be sleeping like a baby right now because she'd be sexually sated. She would have stayed as her friends and the rest of the class left, he would have fucked her on one of the stainless-steel tables, and then she would have gotten an Uber home.

Instead, she came home unsatisfied and restless. She could've called any number of the men saved in her contacts to come over and get her off, but she just wasn't feeling it. She wanted the Italian or no one else. It was like having the taste for a chocolate truffle and getting a plain piece of chocolate.

Mia rolled over and reached for the handle of the drawer to her nightstand. She opened the drawer and blindly searched for what she was



looking for in the dark. Her hands wrapped around her faithful vibrator, King Tut. It was large with a clit stimulator. He got her through any dry patches she may encounter. Which weren't many, but it was always good to have a backup.

The sound of buzzing filled the room as Mia turned on her toy. She tried to relax and let the sensations take over. But she felt nothing.

She tried to conjure up images of the men she'd been with in the past, and of her favorite porn scenes. Nothing helped.

Mia pulled the toy from her unresponsive body and flopped back. "What the fuck?!"

King Tut clattered in her drawer as she threw it inside. Feeling betrayed even by her faithful inanimate object, Mia stared up at the dark ceiling, pouting until she drifted off into a fitful sleep.

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The next night wasn't any better. Mia had been a grouch all day, and had probably been unnecessarily short with her assistant, Isabel, and some of her clients.

She'd ran to the flooring store to purchase more tile for the bathroom of a house she was working on, and had seen an incredibly gorgeous man who was also shopping for flooring. His left hand had been absent of a ring. His eyes roaming over her had been a clear indication of his interest. But once again, Mia felt nothing. Nada. Not one flutter of excitement.

How can one man make me lose interest in other men after being in the same room with him only four times?

She was bored. That had to be it. None of the men she came across since her divorce had posed much of a challenge. She'd fallen into beds, bathroom stalls, kitchen counters, etc., enough times to know. Dante was interested but wasn't biting. It intrigued her. He was an enigma that she had to solve.

But she was not going to solve it now, and she desperately needed some sleep. She rolled over and grabbed the clit sucker toy out of her drawer to give it another shot. If King Tut couldn't get the job done, her clit sucker was a guaranteed orgasm.

This time though, she grabbed her phone off the nightstand and pulled up

her favorite porn site. Watching a video always brought her to her climax quicker. And since she'd already lost too much sleep the night before and already behind a few precious hours of beauty sleep tonight, she didn't want to waste time searching for an orgasm.

She decided to search for videos by male porn stars. She wanted to find someone who came close to Dante Bianchi in looks, to complete her fantasy. She was only the fourth page in when she scrolled past a photo and had to double back. Mia shot up in bed, mouth hanging open, and just stared at the screen for a moment. The blue light of the phone on her face only enhanced the shock that registered there.

There, staring back at her with a now familiar smile, was Chef Dante Bianchi. Although the name below his picture read, Beau LeBlaze.

"I know you lying. You've got to be fucking shitting me!" Mia exclaimed to the darkness.

She tapped his photo and scrolled through some of the videos featuring him. She took a deep breath and tapped on a video that looked promising. He played a teacher who was at home when a student arrived on his doorstep asking for extra credit. As the camera focused on him, there was absolutely no doubt that it was Dante. All his mannerisms and movements were exactly the same. The only difference was that he was a few years younger.

Mia almost felt bad for continuing to watch the video. *Almost*. Like she was glimpsing behind the curtain he probably didn't want anyone to see. But her curiosity won out over discretion.

She watched as he kissed the young actress pretending to be a student. How he passionately licked and suckled her nipples. Mia crossed her fingers as his co-star pulled down his pants. She collapsed back against her headboard as his cock swung free. *Holy Shit!*

His dick was beautiful. Thick as fuck. Long enough to be a challenge, but not so long she'd risk hospitalization. But the part that intrigued her the most was the Prince Albert piercing. In all her years and many lovers, Mia had never come across a man who'd had one. The ring was a thick, heavy titanium with a ball to close it off. His went through the bottom of his mushroom head and came out his urethra. She almost drooled a little as she watched the girl's tongue playfully flick the ring and then dipped her mouth down his length.

Mia held her breath as he laid the girl down on a couch, pulled off her panties and knelt on the ground before her. His next move made Mia expel

her pent-up breath on a whimper. He gleefully licked the girl from opening to clit. Mia squeezed her eyes closed and let her head fall back.

“Dammit all to hell and back,” she groaned.

Her head rolled forward, she breathed in deeply, and then cracked her eyes open to continue watching against her better judgment. Mia’s heart pounded between her legs as she watched Dante tongue the girl’s clit. He loved what he was doing. There was no doubt. He did not hesitate or shy away from her pussy. It was clear that he worshipped pussy. Especially, if the girl’s face and moans had anything to do with it. Her face registered pure bliss.

Mia waited for him to stop before the actress crossed the finish line, like many male porn stars and men in general often did. But he kept going. He continued until her legs shook, her hips bucked wildly, and her cries bounced off the walls.

“No fucking wonder the class had been so full of women lusting after him.” Mia said.

Mia was so captivated that her vibrator laid forgotten next to her on the bed. She quickly grabbed it before the video reached its climax. As Dante slowly entered the woman onscreen, Mia slowly let her vibrator penetrate her. It didn’t take long for her to come hard as she watched her new conquest pound into his co-star.

As Mia finally drifted off into a sated sleep, her thoughts swirled around how she could break down this man’s walls. She had to have him.

Chapter Eight

“I’m still mad at you, Payton, for not going with a stripper or something for your bachelorette party.” Mia pretended to pout.

They were back in the waiting room of the lovely spa in downtown San Francisco, after having an amazing brunch with bottomless mimosas for their bestie’s bachelorette party. After that they planned to head to Payton and Bradyn’s for a pajama party filled with games, snacks, movies, and drinking. Bradyn and his friends were gone camping in the wilderness for the weekend.

“You know that’s not my thing. Bradyn’s is the only man meat I want anywhere near my face.” Payton smirked.

They all shouted with laughter.

Mia only pretended to care about strippers. In reality, she wasn’t ready to admit to the girls that the thought of seducing any other man besides one former porn star-turned-chef, was out of the question.

“Hello, ladies.” The spa hostess greeted them. “I see you’re here for a bachelorette party.”

“That is correct,” Payton said with a bright smile.

“Fantastic! Congratulations on your upcoming wedding.”

“Thank you!” Her smile spread even further.

“So, we’ll start you all off with massages separately. Then all together, you’ll get facials with mud masks. After which, you’ll take a steam in our steam room. All with complimentary champagne, of course. How does that all sound?”

“Perfect!” They all said in unison.

“So, what are your preferences for our massage therapists?”

They each went down the line. Then she got to Mia.

“A woman, please.”

Three heads turned so hard to stare at her, she was surprised they didn’t get whiplash. The spa hostess walked back to her desk, leaving them in private.

“What?” Mia frowned.

“A woman? Royal asked incredulously.

“Yeah, so?” Mia shrugged.

“So, you *always* choose a man. I figured since there would be no strippers, that you’d at least get a little something-something again from that guy that works here,” Kennedy said.

“I’m not really in the mood today.” Mia said as she examined her nails nonchalantly.

“Not in the mood?!?” Her three friends said in unison.

“Sometimes I can be not in the mood.”

“Since when?!” Kennedy almost shouted.

“Since now, heifas! So, leave me alone.” Mia said with enough playfulness for them to know she wasn’t trying to hurt their feelings, but sternly enough for them to know to back off.

All three of them lifted their hands up in a silent, ‘Alright, alright. Not touching that with a ten-foot pole.’

“Thank you.” Mia rolled her eyes.

Their hostess came and took them to their respective rooms for their massages.

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“Okay, ladies, you know I can’t keep anything from you all.” Mia announced as they settled onto the white tiled benches of the steam room.

Mia had immediately dropped her towel and spread it across the tiles to sit on. She proudly sat naked, as if she hadn’t a care in the world. Royal sat and opened hers with a little less flare, but still confident in her thick body. Kennedy let her towel fall to her waist. The towel still covered her most intimate parts, but let her breasts hang free. Payton, even after her sexual awakening after finding Bradyn, wasn’t ready for all that. Her towel was tucked under her arms and tightly wrapped around her breasts. Bradyn being the only person allowed to see her at her most vulnerable.

“I don’t think any of us can,” Kennedy grinned.

“Oh, this is gonna be good.” Royal rubbed her hands together with glee.

“Oh, dear.” Payton took in a deep fortifying breath.

Mia loved the fact that she could tell her girls anything. There were a lot of women who wouldn't share this kind of information with their friends, thinking that their friends would try to use it to their advantage or judge them. But not her girls. They didn't play those games. They all trusted each other implicitly and could tell each other absolutely anything.

"Take a few sips of your champagne first. You're gonna need it." Mia held up her champagne flute.

"Okay, woman. Spill it." Kennedy said impatiently.

"Alright, so earlier this week, I needed something to take the edge off my wounded ego and unsatisfied libido. So, I went to find some inspiration in the form of porn. I went in search of a male porn star that kind of favors our chef extraordinaire. I had no idea how spot on my search would be." Mia smirked.

The girls leaned forward. They waited with bated breath for the bomb they knew she would drop. She knew her little secret would shock the shit out of them. She opened her phone, tapped play, and turned the screen towards them. The sounds of lovemaking filled the room.

Champagne shot out from Payton's mouth in fine spray of shock. Kennedy jumped up and ripped Mia's phone from her hand with a "No fucking way!" And Royal choked on the last sip she'd taken. Payton wiped her mouth and she patted Royal's back as they all leaned in closer to Kennedy as she watched intently. Their lack of clothing forgotten.

"I guess I should've told you to swallow first." Mia grinned.

"It can't be." Royal wheezed.

"Oh, I assure you... It is." Mia nodded.

"No fucking wonder the class was filled with chicks!" Royal smacked her leg as the epiphany hit her.

"That's what I said!" Mia agreed.

"*And* why they were totally inappropriate throughout the whole class." Kennedy tapped her finger against her chin.

"But it doesn't explain why he was so standoffish with me. I felt his attraction for me. So why hold back? He is, or was, a fucking porn star for God's sake!"

"Maybe he has a lady?" Payton suggested. "Which is why he's now a chef? I mean, I assume he's not doing both."

"Maybe..."

"Look it up." Kennedy threw in. "Half of what I do all day is research stuff for my books. I'm sure if you run a search on 'Dante Bianchi's

girlfriend,' something will come up if he's attached.

Mia snatched her phone out of Kennedy's hand. Her thumbs flew across the keys and hit search. She scrolled through the articles and images.

Nothing.

"There's nothing." Mia looked up at her friends.

"Nothing?" Payton asked.

"Not even anything on past girlfriends or wives? Because at the youngest he's got to be at least in his mid-thirties. And at the oldest, forty-five."

Kennedy reasoned.

"Nope. Nada." Mia shook her head. "They even have pictures of him attending events on the red carpet and he has no one on his arm in any of them."

"That seems highly unusual for a man as attractive and successful as he is." Payton frowned.

"Exactly."

"Maybe he's gay."

"No way!" Mia burst out. "For one, I have no doubt that he is attracted to me. I can sense that shit from a mile away. I'm like the damn Cock Whisperer."

"This is true," Royal conceded.

"And two, no offense to gay men, but I highly doubt a man eats pussy like that if he's gay. Nope. Sorry. Ain't possible." Mia shook her head as she pulled back up the video, took it to the scene in question and turned the phone back around for the girls to see.

"Yeah, no."

"Nope."

"Definitely not gay."

They all said in unison as they watched almost hypnotized, like Mia had a few nights before.

"He could be Bi, though." Royal shrugged.

"That's true." Mia thought for a moment. "But that still doesn't answer the question of why he's avoiding having sex with me, when he's obviously attracted to me."

"Alright. I think it's time to call Bradyn and ask him to come back from his time in the wilderness." Payton said as she fanned her while watching Dante continue to suck on his co-star's clit.

"You wanna go home to get a crotch full of red beard, don't you?"

Kennedy teased.

“Hell, I’m thinking about texting McKinnon myself! Tell his ass to come home and clap these cheeks.” Royal said as she swallowed hard at Dante lapping up the actress’ slit.

“Ugh! It’s been so long.” Kennedy let her head fall back in exasperation. “Why me, God?! Why can’t I find a man to quench this need?”

Payton patted Kennedy’s knee. “My poor, overdramatic friend.”

“*YOU?!?* You need your thirst quenched? How about getting subtly eye-fucked by the same man who can do all that,” Mia holds up the phone, “and then he turns down your advances.”

“Yeah, that’s a special kind of torture.” Kennedy conceded.

“If there was still a thing as the ‘little black book’ isn’t yours full of men waiting to please you as soon as you send out the Dick Signal?” Royal asked.

“Dick Signal?” Mia scoffed.

“You know, like the Bat Signal. The Dick Signal is the call you put out when you need the D. A little cock and balls shining in the night sky.” Royal explained logically.

Payton and Kennedy snorted in their effort to keep from laughing.

“I think my signal is broken,” Mia frowned. “It is only shining for one dick. And he did *not* answer the call.”

“*You*, Mia Ayala, only wants *one* D?!” Kennedy placed a hand on her chest as if she was startled.

“Girl! There was a fine ass man in the flooring store yesterday. He was eying me up like a damn hot tamale. And I wasn’t even interested.” Mia admitted.

They all stared at her in stunned silence.

“But don’t get it twisted. It’s just that he presented me with a challenge and I tried to win it. I’m sure if I had, I would’ve gotten bored and moved on like usual.” Mia waved away their shock. “We need more champagne.”

Mia wrapped the towel around herself and left the room in search of the spa staff. The other three women looked at each other knowingly.

Kennedy leaned in to whisper to Royal and Payton. “Let the record show, Mia does not and *never* has deprived herself of dick because of future dick she may not even get.”

“All signs point to smitten, if you ask me.” Payton nodded her agreement.

“Does that mean it’s time for a little CGC intervention?” Royal asked,



referring to their unwritten Curvy Girls Club handbook.

“It’s possible. Let’s keep an eye out for prime matchmaking opportunities.” Kennedy suggested.

“Done.” Payton said. “He will be at my wedding.”

“Oh, yeah! Perfect.” Kennedy excitedly clapped her hands rapidly in front of her.

“I’m *all* over this. I honestly think Mia has finally met her match.” Royal grinned.

They all high-fived each other just as Mia walked back in.

“What are you guys up to?” Mia asked suspiciously.

“Nothing.”

They all said in unison.

“It is obvious that you all are up to no good.” Mia squinted at them.

“Don’t even get your little brains working on some crazy ass scheme. I love you all, but I will kill you if I have to.”

“Aww... Don’t be mad, Mia!” Kennedy grinned at her as she scooted closer to her.

Royal and Payton did the same, surrounding Mia.

“You know you love us,” Royal said.

“And can’t live without us,” Kennedy stated.

“Besides, who would you have to impart all of your knowledge on?”

Payton asked.

They all gave her an awkward partially naked group hug.

“You’re all a bunch of weirdos.” Mia pouted. “And I still love you. But please, don’t try to do some clumsy ass intervention. I got this.”

They squeezed her a little tighter and then released her.

“Fine.” They all said in unison.

She didn’t believe them.

## Chapter Nine

As the *Imperial March* began to play, the doors swung open. Mia gripped her counterpart's arm and they walked into the massive and elegant reception hall to claps from the wedding guests. They marched over to the long table where the wedding party would be seated for the night.

The groomsman she was paired with had been on purpose. He was single, gorgeous, and had great legs on display with his kilt on. Any other time, he would've already been fucked after the rehearsal dinner. But again, last night and tonight, Mia just couldn't find it in her to be interested. Even though he'd been flirting with her shamelessly. She kinda felt bad. It was obvious he'd been told he'd have a good time with her.

The rest of the girls and their groomsman counterparts walked in to the music only Payton could've chosen, considering her love of *Star Wars*. To continue the theme, the bride had chosen that the girls would wear champagne-colored dresses. Since they all were shaped differently, she had wanted them to get whatever dress silhouette that complemented their body type. Just so long as it was champagne. Of course, Mia had chosen a slinky, formfitting shimmery dress. It had a slit up one side to reveal one lush leg and swept the floor when she walked.

Royal's was a gorgeous two-piece dress with a peek of tummy in the middle. Her mahogany skin glowed against the pale gold. Or maybe it was her groomsman partner that made her glow, since he was her husband and gazed down at her as if she'd hung the moon.

Of course, Kennedy's dress had a romantic vibe to it. Very vintage, old Hollywood. Her pale, freckled cheeks were rosy and her full shimmery lips spread wide as she smiled brightly. Mainly because her groomsman was also single and very flirty. It didn't hurt that he was the one groomsman that had made his way from Scotland for the occasion. His accent had her drooling since they met last night at the rehearsal.

And finally, Payton's little sister, Micah, in a very Jane Austen-esque

champagne dress was led to the table by Bradyn's best friend and former trainer, Mitch. All the men were in classic Scottish wedding attire. Their ensembles were all black. Even their kilts and sporrans. The only color was their ties in shimmering champagne. Of course, they were the Dark Side.

Once they were all seated, the lights switched off and drenched the room in darkness. The *Imperial March* began to reach its crescendo. The doors flung open again. A bright, bluish white strobe light lit the entrance. Thick, white smoke filled the opening, and all anyone could see were the silhouettes of two hooded figures holding two glowing sticks. One in blue and one in red. Lightsabers.

The two sabers began to clash together dramatically. It was obvious the fight had been well choreographed. The bride's clumsiness forgotten being in her element. Their sabers clashed in a giant X. The lights slowly came back up. Payton wore a white cape with the hood up over her princess-style wedding dress. And Bradyn wore a black cape with a hood over his traditional Scottish wedding garb. His suit was also all black. The only difference was that he wore his family tartan for his kilt. A soft blue was the main background. Thick black and white lines plus thin red lines formed the plaid pattern. It didn't exactly match, but he'd wanted to wear the MacTavish family dress tartan colors. And since he was giving Payton her dream *Star Wars* themed wedding, she gladly gave him that one small request.

As the lights slowly came back up, the music changed to the more lighthearted main theme music to the movie franchise. Their lightsabers were still held together in a giant X. Bradyn swiped Payton's blue saber out of the way. He quickly pulled her in for a deep kiss that bowed her back. Then he scooped her up in his arms, cradled her to his chest as they kissed some more, and then he strode over to the main table. All of this to massive applause and a standing ovation for their adorable performance.

"Cutest nerds ever." Mia said to the table at large.

They all laughed and clapped happily. Payton stuck her tongue out to Mia and then smiled so hard it looked as if she'd burst into a thousand pieces.

That smile hit Mia right in the feels. One of her best friends was the happiest she'd ever been. Especially after so many years of letting trauma weigh her down. Mia's eyes welled with tears of happiness for her friend. Her sister by choice.

Mia used her napkin to dab at her eyes. Kennedy's eyes widened as she dabbed at her own.

“You’re crying?!”

“Yes. Is that a problem?” Mia said slightly indignant.

“Nope. Not at all. It just took me off guard.”

“I’m happy for our friend. I am allowed to have sappy emotions too.”

Mia fake sneered at Kennedy.

“Honestly, I thought sappy emotions were only reserved for me in this group.” Kennedy said with a chuckle.

“She’s got a point.” Royal interjected. “Kennedy’s weepy. You’re tough. I’m chill. And Payton’s... Payton is... Well, Payton is Payton.”

They all giggled.

Although it was funny, Royal’s words stuck with Mia.

*Am I really that tough? Do I really show no softness at all? Did I lose all semblance of softness after Alejandro or have I always been hard? I know I built a wall around my heart in regards to men. But with my friends too?*

Mia was pulled out of her reverie as the catering staff came out with their plates. Their presence brought back thoughts of Dante. Her eyes looked up and scanned the large reception hall. She didn’t see him anywhere. She hoped to see him at some point. Even if she had to track him down.

*Why am I so thirsty?!*

His rejection really had her spinning.

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Dante told himself he was only checking to make sure everyone was enjoying their dinners as he stood in a side doorway to the reception hall. In reality, he knew he was lying to himself. Especially the way his eyes continually swept back to the wedding party table. To one person in particular. Mia.

She was stunning. Her hair had been straightened and then styled into big, bouncy curls that were pulled around to lay on one shoulder and pinned back to stay there. Her makeup, like the other women, was simple and fresh. Shimmery and soft.

As each woman stood to say their part of a collaborative speech, he took in her body when she stood. Her pear-shaped lush body looked as if gold had been poured over her ochre skin.

Yes. She's beautiful. I've been with beautiful women before, so what makes her so special? What draws me to her?

Just then, as they ended their speech and held up their champagne glasses, Mia's eyes found his. He felt a swift punch to the gut. Suddenly, he felt winded as his heart pounded.

Oh...right. That's why.

Dante quickly turned on the heel of his black dress sneakers. He made a beeline for the kitchen and far away from the object of his desire.

"If you want more, stay away from her." He said under his breath.

"What was that, sir?" One of his staff members asked.

"Nothing." Dante waved them away. "Let's work on getting the cake ready to be brought out. The dances are coming up soon. After that, they'll be ready to cut the cake."

"Yes, sir." She said and headed for the large walk-in refrigerated room.

He'd already sent half the staff home for the night once dinner was nearly completed and they were no longer needed. Once the kitchen was cleaned, he'd send a few more home. He'd leave enough staff to help serve the cupcakes to the guests, and clean up any last messes from dessert.

Two of his staff wheeled out the four-tiered cake. The top was an actual cake. Half white and half black. The wedding topper was a Black Princess Leia, hair buns and all, in a white gown and Darth Vader. His side of the cake was black and her side of the cake was white. Gold swirling details decorated both sides. The three tiers below held cupcakes. The white side had white cupcake holders. The cupcakes were alternating vanilla cake and chocolate cake, but they all had white frosting with edible gold confetti on each. The dark side also alternated cake flavors with black frosting on top with the gold confetti and black cupcake holders. A smart move to accommodate what guests would prefer.

Dante heard the music cycling through the first dance of the newlyweds, the father-daughter dance, and finally the mother-son dance.

"Mr. Bianchi?" He glanced up and saw Payton's mother in the doorway. "They're ready for the cake."

Her mother was a pretty dark-skinned woman. Dante could see where Payton got her looks from. He nodded to her. With the help of his staff, they opened the double doors, and he and another carefully wheeled it out. Several guests oohed and aahed at the sight of the cake.

Once it was in place. Bradyn and Payton came over to cut it. They were

all smiles as they held the cake cutting knife together and sliced through it. Not like Dante was paying that much attention. Not with Mia standing nearby to watch the cake cutting.

She looked at him and raised a curious brow. Dante swallowed and looked away.

She makes me feel like a nervous kid. Me! A successful former porn star. And because of that, I spent my twenties and half of my thirties fucking my way through SoCal before moving up north. So, how one confident woman can turn me into an awkward and shy grown man is beyond me.

Once Payton and Bradyn very sweetly fed each other cake without any cake smashing incidents, Dante beat a hasty retreat back to the kitchen and far away from Mia. He was about to call it and head home. The last of his staff knew what to do to finish up. They didn't need him anymore. He started walking towards the door of the kitchen that exited into the hallway of the reception hall.

"Headed home already?" A sultry voice said from behind him.

His back stiffened. So, did something in his pants.

Dante already knew who it was before he turned. Once he did, his breath caught. Mia, leaned against a pillar in the kitchen with a small smile on her lips. She pushed off and started walking towards him. His instinct was to back away from her. But instead, he raised his chin and stood his ground. He'd always been considered an alpha male by those around him. But it was a vulnerable time in his life. CeCe made him reevaluate everything in his life. So, coming up against this obvious alpha female, made him feel like he was on unsteady ground.

Once Mia reached him, she reached out a hand. Her fingers played with the buttons on his black dress shirt in the middle of his chest.

"So, tell me, Dante." She began. "When we're near each other, I always find you eye-fucking me. Yet you never make a move. In fact, you damn near run. What's the deal with that?"

She looked up at him from under long curling lashes. Her honey-colored eyes beckoned him. This woman was pure temptation.

"I'm just very busy." Dante looked away and pretended to organize the cleaned flatware.

"That's perfect. So am I." Mia stepped closer.

This time Dante stepped back.

Damnit!

It was too late. He'd fallen right into her trap. This time he did back up as she stalked him. His back came up against a wall. There was nowhere to go. Mia smiled slightly. Then she looked down. Dante followed the path of her eyes. He inwardly groaned. It was obvious to anyone who had eyes that he was incredibly aroused. She looked back up at him and her smile widened.

"Like I thought."

Mia's fingers lightly stroked over the ridge in his pants. He hissed through his teeth. Then a growl began deep in his chest. Mia's eyes shot up to his and her eyes widened in shock.

"Fuck it!" Dante said huskily.

His hand slid behind Mia's neck. He gripped it, forcing her head back. He spun her around until her back was to the wall. Then he captured her full lips. Her hands immediately slid into his thick, dark hair.

Dante devoured her mouth. His long tongue, that he'd been complimented on a hundred times for its talent, drove into her mouth and dominated hers. He could tell she was used to being the aggressor when kissing. But she was no match for his skill. And her gasp was proof.

Mia's whole body trembled. As he kissed her, his hand moved to her throat. He squeezed slightly in warning. In warning of what he could do to her. Then he moved his hand down to her breasts. They weren't huge. Just a handful. He gripped one and stroked his thumb around the hardened nipple protruding through the golden fabric. She gasped in his mouth. He moved from her breast down her stomach and found the high slit on the dress. The skin of her thigh was ridiculously soft and smooth. Mia widened her stance to give him better access. Against his better judgment, Dante let his fingers slip under the fabric. His fingertips teased the crease of her thigh and pussy lips. They played with the edge of her panties. His fingers finally slipped underneath. His eyes rolled to the back of his head at the feel of how entirely soaking wet she was. His fingers were instantly coated.

Mia's hand found his straining erection once more. She caressed him with urgency. Dante released her mouth on a gasp.

"Let's fuck right here and now. Get it out of our system. And then we can go our separate ways." Mia whispered against his lips.

Little did she know, she just said the magic words to make him shut down completely.

Dante pulled away. A little cry of frustration escaped her lips before she could catch it. He turned away from her. She looked too thoroughly fuckable

to look at her. He'd lose his resolve and fuck her on the steel table if he looked at her again.

"I can't." Dante said.

Without a backward glance, he strode quickly from the kitchen.

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"You've got to be fucking kidding me!" Mia gritted out as she watched the kitchen doors swing.

The other set of doors that connected the reception hall opened. Two of his staff walked in.

"Is there anything we can get for you, ma'am?" One asked.

"Uh...no."

Mia straightened and pushed off the wall. She hobbled out of the kitchen and to the bathroom to clean up.

She'd never been more aroused in her entire life. And that was saying something for her.

She did her best to wipe away her slick arousal in the stall of the bathroom. She hissed as the toilet paper slid over her swollen clit. She was grateful she'd brought a toy with her in her hotel room upstairs. She'd hoped that she wouldn't have to use it.

"Never again." She muttered under her breath. "Fuck him. I don't beg and that motherfucker practically had me on my knees. Absolutely not!"

"Mia? Is that you?" Royal said on the other side of the stall.

"Yes," she grumbled.

"What happened?" Kennedy asked.

"What the hell? Is everybody in here?"

"No, just us." Payton responded.

"Then that's everybody." Mia rolled her eyes before flushing the toilet and stepping out the stall.

"What's up? You sound pissed." Kennedy said.

"That motherfucker got me so damn turned on my eyes were crossed. Then suddenly he says he can't and then leaves. *LEAVES!* Leaves me hanging more turned on than I've ever been in my entire life."

"That's saying a lot for you," Royal said.



“That’s *exactly* what I was thinking!” Mia said.

“So, what are you gonna do?” Kennedy asked.

“Nothing. I think I’m gonna go up to my room, rub one out, and then come back. I’ll be good to no one in this tense, grumpy mood I’m in. And then when I get back, we’re getting turned up. I need a few to several drinks.” Mia informed them.

“Oh boy.” Payton said nervously.

“Don’t you worry about a thing.” Kennedy patted Payton’s arm. “You enjoy the rest of your celebration. We’ll make sure she doesn’t go ham.”

“Yes, don’t worry, my sweet little Payton.” Mia reached out to stroke her friend’s arm. “I just want to drink, dance, and forget. The minute I’m too lit, I’m sure these two will escort me to my room.”

“Yeah, we got her.” Royal agreed.

“Maybe I will fuck my groomsman.” Mia rubbed her chin. “Nah, let me just go to my room and handle the business. I’ll be back in a few, ladies.”

With that, she washed her hands and left them looking at each other knowingly.

“She’d never turn down available dick if she was that horny,” Royal said.

“Right?!?” Kennedy said.

“I think Mr. Bianchi may have gotten under our friend’s skin.” Payton said knowingly.

“Word.” Royal nodded.

“Yep.” Kennedy agreed. “And I have no idea how it’s all going to turn out. But I know I have my notebook app ready to jot it all down. Because Mia being sprung is book worthy stuff.”

## Chapter Ten

The following weekend, it was a cool spring Saturday afternoon, so Mia opted to dress for the weather and kept it relatively conservative to meet the young impressionable girl she'd be mentoring. She chose her blush pink, body-hugging joggers, white wedge sneakers, and fitted white tank top. She threw a light-washed denim jacket over it. She pulled her still straightened hair back into a mid-high ponytail with big rose gold hoops on her ears. She kept her eye makeup fairly subtle with a shimmery rose gold lip.

She wanted to look like the young, hip professional that a young girl would aspire to be. Looking in the mirror, Mia felt like she'd accomplished that.

Along with the information on when they'd hold the meet and greet, the Open Arms Foundation also sent over information on Mia's new charge. Her name was Celeste Davis and she was fifteen-years-old. Her mother had died of breast cancer a little over two years ago. Her parents hadn't been together at the time, and she'd been given to her father shortly after her mother died. Apparently, Celeste had been giving her father hell ever since. She was doing poorly in school, she refused to listen to her father, and coming and going from home at all hours of the night.

Basically, she sounded a lot like Mia before she met Alejandro. Although it wasn't because she lacked a parent. Her behavior had more to do with how strict her parents were. She had resented it and rebelled. But Alejandro had come into her life and he'd been studious, pious (outside of the bedroom), and gorgeous. How he'd fooled her. The mask he wore to hide the devil behind it. But as much as she hated him now, he'd saved her life then. He'd made her want to be better. Do better.

It was her turn to change lives. So, she pressed a hand to her nervous stomach, took a deep breath, grabbed her gray clutch purse and headed out of her condo.

~\*~\*~

The Meet-n-Greet luncheon was being held in an arcade-type place, so that the children would feel more at ease. The schedule consisted of the mentors and children getting to know each other one-on-one over games for an hour and then lunch with the kids and their parents. Most of the single parents wanted to know who their children were going to be spending their Saturday or Sunday afternoons with almost every week. So, it was just as important to meet them as it was to meet the kids.

Mia walked inside the bright and colorful arcade. A hostess walked forward to greet her.

“Hi, I’m here for the Open Arms luncheon.”

“Follow me.”

Mia trailed behind the girl as she led her into the banquet room where the lunch would take place in an hour. The foundation coordinator smiled brightly as the hostess handed Mia off.

“Mia, it’s great to see you.” Candice said as she turned and waved over a young girl. “Mia, I’d like you to meet Celeste Davis. Celeste, this is Mia Ayala, your mentor.”

Mia was struck by how much the girl reminded her of herself when she was that age. She was obviously of mixed heritage. Her skin a warm tan color. Her hair a wild arrangement of dark curls. And features that hinted at her Black ancestry. She was stunning and awkward and unsure of herself and completely lovely. Although she didn’t know it yet.

“Hey, Celeste. It’s nice to meet you.” Mia held out her hand to the girl.

Celeste took it reluctantly. It was obvious that the girl was not a willing participant.

“Hey,” she said quietly.

“Come on, let’s go play some games.”

Mia walked out of the banquet room as Celeste followed sullenly. She got a game card with a twenty-dollar credit, courtesy of Open Arms.

“What would you like to play first?” She asked Celeste.

“I don’t know. Whatever.” Celeste responded without looking at her.

“I’ve always loved racecar games. Let’s play one of those.”

“This is so stupid. Why do you even care?” The girl grumbled.

Mia wasn't one to sugarcoat things and she wasn't about to start now. She didn't care how old the girl was. Sometimes kids needed to hear hard truths. Mia dropped her professional voice, and spoke to the teen on her level.

"Because there are young girls like you with no one to look up to. Girls who run the streets with God knows who, trying to act grown and getting snatched up, sold into sex slavery by men who will use and abuse you and leave you in the gutter for dead. I've seen it firsthand and could've saved girls just like you if I had paid attention sooner. Society rarely cares if little Black and Brown girls go missing and never come home. But I do.

"No one else may tell you the truth but I will. And what you're doing ain't nothing new, mija. Been there, done that." Mia gave her a pointed look before changing subjects. "Now, do you want to play or nah?"

The teen blinked up at her in surprise with a healthy dose of respect. She nodded.

"Good. I'll try not to kick your ass too badly," Mia winked.

"You cursed." Celeste said.

"I sure did."

"Adults aren't supposed to curse in front of kids."

"I think you're old enough to handle it. Let's make a deal. If you don't go repeating everything I say outside of us hanging out together, you can say whatever you want in front of me. Just be yourself, be honest and I'll do the same. Deal?" Mia held out her hand again.

This time Celeste took it gladly.

"Deal!"

They played the racecar game and Mia let Celeste beat her a couple times, just to keep the camaraderie going. They moved on to Skee-ball and won enough tickets for Celeste to get a prize. She decided on a little makeup kit.

"I can always teach you how to wear makeup properly if it's okay with your father. Hell, I can even teach you to wear makeup that looks so natural he wouldn't even know, but boosts your confidence a little." Mia winked at her.

"Cool." Celeste smiled happily.

She was smiling more freely with each minute that passed.

"So...what are you anyway? Mexican or Black or what?" Celeste asked as she snuck a look up at Mia.

"What are *you*?" Mia cocked her head to the side, giving the rude

question right back.

“Black and white.” Celeste shrugged like it didn’t matter, though Mia knew better. “My mom was Black and my dad is white.”

“Well, I’m Puerto Rican. There’s a lot of African blood that runs through my family, like many Puerto Ricans, even if they don’t want to admit it. So, I’m also classified as Afro-Latina. I’m the darkest one in my family with the curliest hair.”

“Do you ever feel out of place? Like you don’t belong?” Celeste looked down at her feet.

“Yeah, I used to. My family used to tease me, and my classmates ignored or bullied me. The boy I dated in high school made me feel wanted for who I was. He turned out to be a terrible person in the end, but he was the first to accept me for me.” Mia took a deep breath and then smiled. “But it wasn’t until I met my best friends that I really felt like I could be completely me. It may take some time, but once you find your tribe, nothing matters.”

“My tribe?”

“Yeah, the people who understand you. Who get you, and don’t make you feel bad for it. They accept you for who you are. I found three of them when I was in college.”

“You went to college?”

“Yep. Depending on what you want to do when you grow up, you don’t necessarily have to go to college. You could always go to a trade school. I’d never push college on anyone who doesn’t truly want to go or doesn’t fit their dreams because it can be expensive. But with that being said, college was an experience I’ll never forget. I had the time of my life. I know adults are always saying stuff like this, but you really should start thinking about your future now. Good grades now will get you into a good college or trade school later. Just saying.”

“I know.” Celeste picked at imaginary lint on her sweater. “What do you do?”

“I’m an interior designer. If you want, you can always help me design a house I’m working on to see if you like it.”

“Really?!”

“Absolutely! The last girl I mentored is now working for me and going to school to become an interior designer too.”

“That’s awesome!”

“Hey, you two.” Candice called out as she approached them. “Lunch is

starting and the parents are showing up. So, when you finish up here, come to the banquet room.”

“We’re ready,” Mia said.

Mia gestured towards the direction of the room. She noticed Celeste’s face fall into a sullen mask. She didn’t know what the relationship was between the teen and her father, but she figured it wasn’t good as the teen dragged her feet to the banquet room.

They were assigned to table 12. As they sat, Mia noticed how fidgety and quiet the teen was. Mia prayed that Celeste’s father wasn’t some abusive asshole. She didn’t want to start off her relationship with the teen on the wrong foot by cussing out her father.

Celeste’s eyes glanced up and then looked away in unveiled disgust. Someone spoke from behind Mia right as she took a sip of water from her glass.

“Forgive me for being a few minutes late.” The voice said.

She nearly choked on the water and coughed slightly as the man walked around the table to greet his daughter and kiss her forehead.

He looked up with a smile and hazel eyes that bordered on green collided with hers.

“Mia?!”

“Dante,” She’d already had a second longer to get over her shock than he had.

“Wh-what are you doing here?” he stammered.

“I could ask you the same thing.”

“You *know* each other?” Celeste glanced back and forth between the two of them, suspiciously.

“I...uh...met Mia during my last cooking course.” He looked back at Mia, still waiting for her to answer his question.

“I’m Celeste’s new mentor.” Mia looked around the room. “Or are we here for something else?”

“Uh...yes. I’m...uh...I’m CeCe’s father.” He continued to stumble over his words as he took a seat next to his daughter.

“Don’t call me that.” Celeste grumbled under her breath. “Only my mom called me that.”

“Please forgive me, Celeste. I meant no harm.” Dante apologized.

Mia glanced between the father and daughter and instantly recognized the dynamic between them. The formerly estranged father was trying his

damnedest to bend over backwards to please his teenage daughter and gain her love and respect. And the daughter was still mourning her mother, resented her father for her mother's absence, and was making him jump through hoops and using it to get away with murder.

Mia knew it was time for Dante to put his foot down, but also knew it wasn't her place to tell him.

She was trying to play it cool, but Mia didn't know which emotion was stronger. The excitement that wanted to make her jump up and do a little happy dance, like she was Kennedy or something. Ecstatic that she would get multiple opportunities to run into the handsome Italian man. Or intense frustration that she'd have to see him. A reminder of his rejection and a hunger that only seemed to come when he was around, yet couldn't be sated because he refused to fuck her senseless.

After the reception, she'd thought that she'd never see him again unless by chance. Who knew her chance would be quite so soon. If she were a romantic like Kennedy, she'd even say that maybe it was fate pushing them together. But nah. Mia gave up on fate and romance a long time ago. This was strictly about sex. Two healthy adults sharing their passion for one another a couple of times and then moving on. That's all.

At least that's what she kept trying to convince herself as she gazed at him across the table.

He was still acting just as shy as before.

*How can a man who at one point, fucked on camera for a living, be **this damn shy**?!*

~~~

Dante tried not to stare across the table at Mia, but his eyes kept finding a reason to wander over. She was stunning as usual. He couldn't remember a time he was more attracted and drawn to a woman. She was sexy, for sure. But there was something else. Something that made his soul move towards her, like the pull of a magnet.

It was the look in her eyes as they connected with his that made him pull back. Made him run from that magnetic pull. It was the look of pure lust. She wanted to fuck him. And she seemed to be the type of woman who would eat

a man up and spit him out when she was done, moving on to her next victim. A Praying Mantis.

Dante couldn't take one more failed attempt. No matter how badly he wanted her.

But fate seemed like it had stepped in to fuck with him further. One, how was he supposed to avoid her and stay strong if he saw her every weekend? And two, learning that the sexy siren was more than meets the eye didn't help. He was already intensely attracted to her. Physically and sexually. Now, seeing her with his daughter. Acting as a mentor, or even when needed, a stand-in mother to CeCe, he feared would draw him even closer to her.

An uncomfortable silence had fallen over their table. CeCe was back to pouting. Mia looked at him surreptitiously with a raised brow. Dante tried to look at everything but his daughter or Mia.

"Alright, everyone!" Candice, the Open Arms coordinator called out. "You all can come up and get your food. We've laid it out buffet style. Enjoy!"

"I'm not really all that hungry. Can I go play some more games?" CeCe asked without looking at him. Her face a picture of the sullen teen who was 'over it.'

Dante nodded in response. Mia handed CeCe the game card, and his daughter got up and disappeared into the arcade.

And then there were two.

"So..." Dante said and blew out a breath.

He hated to admit that he couldn't relax when his daughter was in his presence. What kind of father did that make him?

"So... You have a daughter."

"Yeah. And she hates me." He looked down at his hands.

"What's the story there?"

"Uh...her mom was new at my...um...former job. And--"

"Dante," Mia cut him off, "Let's start by getting this out of the way. I know what your former job was. You don't need to pretend. We're both adults here. And there's nothing to be ashamed of. I don't judge."

Dante's shoulders drooped in relief. He never knew how people saw him when they knew about his background. He'd had enough people turn their noses up in disgust to know it was best to keep his past on the downlow.

"Thank you." He said sincerely.

"Go on." Mia encouraged.

“Well...she was new to the scene. And she was gorgeous. There was an industry party. Everyone was having...fun.” He smiled wryly. “And one thing led to another and she ended up pregnant. She told me and said I didn’t have to be a part of the child’s life. Mainly, because after getting pregnant, she decided that life path was not for her. She wanted to raise our daughter far from it.

“So, I stayed out of CeC– I mean Celeste’s life. But I did send them money monthly. Her mom never asked for it, but I sent it anyway. Then Sara was diagnosed with cancer. I had no idea until right before she died. She sent me a long letter detailing what was happening and that she needed me to take Celeste. Two years later, and Celeste still hates me. I am at my wits end.” Dante said heavily. “Which is why we’re here.”

“Can I give you a little advice?”

“Uh...sure.”

“I know I don’t have any children. But I remember being a moody teenager and this isn’t my first rodeo with mentoring. Anyway, I think it’s time to stop trying to be the nice dad, letting her get away with murder to make up for her mom dying and not being there in her younger years. It’s not your fault. Her mom wanted her away from the adult film industry.

“Put your foot down. Be the asshole if you need to be. Don’t always be the pushover dad. Sometimes you have to be the stern dad. You’re letting her call the shots. Who’s the head of the house?”

“I am.”

“Then act like it.”

“It’s just...” Dante ran his fingers through his hair and looked up at her. There was sympathy in her eyes as well as attraction. “I don’t know. She’s shaken up my world. I don’t know whether I’m coming or going with her. I just want to be a good father.”

“From what I can tell, you are. You want the best for her. It’s obvious just by you signing her up for Open Arms. You took her in when you could’ve given her away, you care, and you’re trying. That’s a damn good start to being a good dad.” Mia reached across the table and laid a hand over his.

The innocent touch sent a charge of electricity up his arm. It must’ve done the same to her because they both flinched back quickly.

Dante could still taste her on his tongue and feel the hot, wetness between her thighs. And just by the look in her eyes, she was remembering

too.

“Plus, being a good parent doesn’t mean you’re nice all the time. Kids need discipline. But I’ll try to work on her as well. If I can gain her trust, I’ll tell her to ease up on you. How’s that?” Mia smiled.

“Sounds good. Thank you, Mia. Especially after...” He let the rest of the sentence trail off.

“Especially after getting me all hot and bothered and leaving me hanging.” Mia cocked her head to the side and gave him a sarcastically sweet fake smile.

“Yeah, that.”

“I’d ask why, but this probably isn’t the appropriate place for that particular conversation,” Mia said.

Dante glanced around to make sure no one was in earshot of them before speaking.

“I’m very attracted to you, Mia. You’re a gorgeous woman. But after Celeste came into my life, I’m not interested in casual sex anymore. And I can tell that’s all you want. I’ve left that lifestyle behind. I want...more. I won’t settle for less.” Dante said firmly.

“Hmm...” Mia hummed thoughtfully. “I understand. It’s unfortunate, but I understand. I, on the other hand, don’t want commitment. I’m not looking for a boyfriend or husband. I like my life just as it is. Virtually drama-free.”

“Who said a relationship equals drama?” Dante asked.

“In my experience, it somehow always ends up messy.” Mia shrugged.

“So, your friend that just got married.”

“Yes? What about her?”

“Is her relationship messy?”

“Once her stalker was arrested, it’s been beautiful, actually.”

“And are any of your other friends married or in a relationship?”

“One other one is.”

“And?”

“And their relationship is wonderful too. At least once they got it together.”

“Then you also have examples of how relationships aren’t filled with drama, no?”

“Yes, but—”

“But what?” He cut her off.

“But that can change in a split second. Your life could be just fine. And

then...BOOM! Your whole life can be blown up. There's no guarantee. Especially, when there's more than one person involved. You only have control over yourself. You can't control what your partner feels, says, or does. So, I will never relinquish control over my life again."

"Humans need companionship. Sometimes you just have to trust."

"Naw, I'm good." Mia shook her head. "My trust, when it comes to men, was irrevocably broken a while back. I've got my friends and that's all I need."

"What happens when they're all married with kids?"

"I become the rich aunt that catches flights, not feelings."

"Well, you seem to have it all figured out."

"I do."

"Hmm..." Dante hummed thoughtfully, like she had earlier.

Whoever hurt her, really fucked her up.

"It is a shame, though." Mia eye-fucked him from across the table. "It could've been fun."

"Indeed."

Just then Celeste walked back up to the table and plopped down as if she was so exhausted.

"I ran out of money on the card."

"How about we eat?" Mia suggested.

"I'm not that hungry." Celeste sulked.

"You're not that hungry or you don't want to gain weight?" Mia said knowingly.

Celeste remained quiet. It was all the answer both adults at the table needed.

"Lemme tell you something. There will always be someone hotter than you. Prettier than you. A better body. And you will spend your life trying to starve yourself to fit a standard that was not made for the body you were born with. And all you'll be is miserable and hungry with a banging body to attract dudes who aren't even worth your time.

"You have curves. Curves that people are currently paying a grip for. So, eat and enjoy your life. Just make sure you eat more good stuff than bad and move your body, and you should be fine. Now, let's get something to eat." Mia finished and stood up.

CeCe watched as the woman with the brickhouse body stood up and sashayed her way to the tables loaded with food. Her womanly hips swaying

from side to side. Her eyes darted to the other men in the room. Dante's eyes followed as well. Every man in the room was either blatantly or subtly staring at Mia. Or more accurately, staring at her generous ass.

Dante watched as his daughter did what she was told. She got up and went over to get a plate of food. And not just enough for a baby bird to eat, like she normally did. Tragic for a chef. But she grabbed quite a bit of her favorites and came back to the table with Mia. A rare smile on her face as Mia nudged her with a rounded hip.

Well, shit. Dante thought.

He looked at Mia as she sat. She gave him a conspiratorial wink. He smiled back. But secretly he was struck silent. In a matter of an hour or so, Mia had managed to get his daughter to listen and smile.

She was a magnificent woman.

Yeah, a magnificent woman who is broken, and wouldn't give you the time of day, unless it's to ride your cock.

"Hmm..." Dante hummed under his breath and mentally rubbed his chin in thought.

We shall see.

Chapter Eleven

“So, how’s the new girl?” Kennedy asked.

She didn’t waste any time after they’d settled in at their new favorite lunch spot. Now that Mia had a new girl she’d be spending time with on Saturdays and two of the four now had men, they’d decided to switch from Saturdays to Sundays. They found a restaurant that had a fantastic brunch menu and strong bottomless mimosas. So strong, they either got dropped off in an Uber or one of their men drove them all and picked them up.

Their dynamic was beginning to change. But they refused to let their friendship dwindle because their lives were starting to include men. They promised to adjust to make room for each other. No one mentioned what would happen once kids got involved. They’d cross that bridge when it came.

“The same as most teenage girls. Too cool for school, but deep down just wants to be understood. But that’s not the interesting part.” Mia said as she leaned in.

Her three besties sat forward too. Ready to hear whatever juicy deets she was about to impart.

“The interesting part is her father.”

“Oh, God. Please tell me you didn’t fuck her father or something?” Kennedy clenched her teeth together.

“No, Ken! Give me some credit. I do know how to exercise restraint.”

Her friends all gave her the skeptical duck lip face.

“I hate y’all.” Mia couldn’t contain her laughter.

“You love us.” Royal gave her a coy look and then blew her a kiss.

“Now, continue. What’s the deal with her father?”

“I hope you ladies are ready for this.” They leaned closer. “Her father is none other than our illustrious chef and former porn star, Dante Bianchi.”

“Shut the front door!” Payton shouted.

Other tables turned to look at her. Payton quickly shut her gaping mouth and sunk down in her chair.

“Are you for real?!” Kennedy whispered loudly.

“One hundred percent.”

“Who would’ve thunk?” Royal said equally shook.

“I know!” Mia agreed. “Her mother was a one-night stand. Someone from his old adult film industry days. He knew about her, but the mother didn’t want her daughter anywhere near the industry. He did send money every month, but that’s as far as his daddy duties went. But the mom passed away two years ago. And before she died, she told him that he needed to take care of their daughter. I guess she felt it was fine, since he was no longer in the industry and had already opened his restaurant.

“But his daughter has been giving him hell. She’s still healing. Still angry that she lost her mom and taking it out on him. And he’s letting her because of guilt. Which is where I step in.”

“Wow.” Kennedy collapsed back in her chair as if she was exhausted from it all.

“Yeah.” Royal agreed. “That’s heavy.”

“So...what does this mean for you and Dante?” Payton asked.

The question was surprisingly astute for Payton. She was usually the last one to think about the sexual side of anything. Being in a loving and very sexual relationship had helped her grow a lot.

“I don’t know.” Mia sighed heavily. “We talked a bit about why he’s rejected me so many times.”

“Ooh! Do tell.” Kennedy leaned forward again.

“His daughter changed everything. After she entered his life, he decided he only wants something serious.”

They all cringed.

“Yikes. Definitely the opposite of what you want,” Royal said.

“Exactly.” Mia frowned. “So, I’m just gonna do what I signed up to do. Mentor his daughter. Be the feminine example she needs and keep it moving. Who knows. Maybe Dante and I will end up as friends.”

Mia looked up to find their waiter to signal they were ready for a refill. So, she missed the girls’ looks of skepticism.

Chapter Twelve

“Hey, Celeste!” Mia greeted brightly.

The teen was sitting at the bar in her father’s restaurant. They’d decided that for their first girls’ day together it would be easier if she picked her up at the restaurant.

Celeste turned with a small smile. “Hey.”

Mia could tell that the girl liked her, but was still hesitant to trust her. Little did she know, Mia knew the exact thing that would immediately dissolve that unease. Retail therapy.

“So...what do you say we go do some shopping?”

Just as she’d predicted. Celeste’s eyes lit up like the 4th of July.

“Really?!”

“Absolutely.”

“Did I hear ‘shopping’?” Dante walked towards them.

He was in a pair of black dress sneakers with the white soles. He wore black slacks and one of those double-breasted chef jackets. The jacket was long-sleeved, but he’d rolled them up his forearms to rest on his generous biceps. So much so, that the fabric strained against them. And his forearms were decorated with thick veins.

Mia swallowed thickly before answering. “You sure did.”

“Thank God. I am horrible at shopping with her. I get bored *long* before she does.”

“Never fear. Mia is here.” Mia grinned and winked at Celeste.

She smiled brightly.

“Do you need any money?” Dante asked as he started to go into his pocket for his wallet.

“Don’t insult me.” Mia gave him a squinty eye.

Dante held up his hands in surrender. “Just wanted to make sure.”

“I appreciate it, but it’s not needed.”

“Thank you.” Dante said seriously.

Their eyes held for a few seconds too long. Dante shook it off and cleared his throat.

“Uh...how about after you’re done, you come back here for dinner? With us? On the house?”

“Yes, please!” Celeste looked at Mia hopefully.

“Sure. I’d like that.” Mia smiled at Dante, almost bashfully.

The fuck?! I don’t do bashful.

“Come on, Celeste. Let’s roll.”

Celeste hopped down from the barstool and started for the door.

“Hey, Mia.” Dante touched her arm and she stopped to look at him expectantly.

“Yeah?”

“Could you make sure she gets clothing that isn’t too revealing or makeup that’s not so...much? I’m not trying to be *that* dad. You know? Blaming her for the attention she’s getting, instead of blaming the boys for acting like assholes. But I know the way the world works. And she’s got a figure that boys and grown men desire. I just want her to hold off on all that until she’s older.”

“I get it. Trust me,” Mia looked down at her own curvy body, “I get it.”

“Yeah.” Dante nodded and rubbed a nervous hand at the back of his neck.

“I’ll find a way. But I can’t promise you that there won’t be a few crop tops and short shorts mixed in there. She’s still a teen. And she has a body that’s going to be noticed no matter what she wears. All you, and maybe me, can do is instill in her how to look out for herself.”

“Okay, I’ll try. Thanks again, Mia.”

“You’re welcome, Dante.”

She turned and headed for the door where Celeste was waiting. Mia felt eyes on her. She glanced back and caught Dante staring at her ass. When he realized he’d been caught, he quickly looked away. But not before she saw his face turn beet red.

Still not immune, I see. Something’s gotta give at some point. We can’t keep eye-fucking each other and not do anything about it.

Celeste came out of the dressing room in a skintight bodycon dress with a plunging neckline.

“Oh no.” Mia shook her head emphatically. “We are not trying to give your daddy a heart attack.”

“But I bet you wear stuff like this.” Celeste pouted.

“Absolutely. But...” Mia held up a finger. “I am thirty-two years old. You, my dear, are fifteen.”

“I’ll be sixteen in a couple months.”

“And...”

“And my dad said I could wear makeup then. I figured I could wear a dress like this too.”

“Makeup and a dress that leaves little to the imagination are two very different things. Boys barely even notice makeup. But they’ll notice that dress.” Mia gave her the side eye.

“Isn’t that a little misogynistic? Telling me, a girl, to dress appropriately, instead of telling the boys to act appropriately?” Celeste folded her arms over her chest.

“Sweetie, that’s what society needs to do as a whole. But I’m not society. And I’m not mentoring a boy. I’m mentoring **YOU**. Yes, it’s a complicated situation and it’s not fair to girls and women. But tell me this. Are you or are you not wanting to get that dress to impress the boys you like?”

Celeste unfolded her arms and looked down at the floor.

“Well...?”

“Yes.” She finally answered sullenly.

“As I thought.” Mia nodded. “You know that dress will get boys’ attention. And with that also comes bad attention. The boys you want might notice, but I can guarantee you who will notice *and* act on it. The boys or *men* you don’t like. It happens every freaking time.

“But let me say this. The boys who are worth it, won’t care what you’re wearing. You could wear a burlap sack and they’ll still adore you. Focus on boys like that.”

“Fine.” Celeste sighed.

“Now, go try on something cute that won’t get us both in trouble by your dad.” Mia grinned.

“He’s a fucking hypocrite.” Celeste said once inside the dressing room.

“Celeste!”

“You said I could curse in front of you.” Her voice was partially muffled as she changed.

“But I didn’t tell you that you could disrespect your dad.”

“But he *is!*”

“How so?”

“You know what he used to do for a living, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, he’s fucking gross. And then tells me to cover up. He wasn’t telling the women in the videos with him to cover up.”

“Please tell me you didn’t watch any of them?” Mia held a hand to her chest.

“Just the beginning of one, before anything really happened.”

“Oh, thank God.” Mia whispered to herself and then spoke louder for Celeste to hear. “Okay, good. But first, I want you to stop calling sex work gross. It’s the oldest profession and will probably be the last profession. So long as there are people on this earth, most of us are sexual beings and need the relief. Whether it’s stripping, prostitution, pornography, etc., people need a way to find a release. And there’s no shame in that.

“And two, I don’t know your dad’s story, but I bet he did it out of necessity. And even if he didn’t, that’s no one’s business or place to judge. Besides, he’s made a good life for himself as a Michelin-starred chef. Which he was probably able to do because he made good money from working in adult films. That’s freaking awesome.” Mia finished.

Celeste came out in cute little shorts and crop top. Mia sighed with relief.

“But you have no idea how embarrassing it is when kids at my school are the ones who told me what he used to do. They’ve seen my dad...*naked.*” She ended on a whisper.

Mia inwardly cringed. Outwardly, she could only nod.

“I won’t lie. That does suck. But let this also be a reminder that the internet is forever. So, make sure you don’t end up on it. **IF** you decide to take pics or video of yourself to send to someone, make damn sure your face or any identifying marks are not on camera.” Mia advised.

“Wow. You’re the only adult who didn’t tell me to not take pics or videos of myself at all.” Celeste’s eyes were wide and mouth hung open.

“Because I know teenagers. Y’all do the shit anyway, even after you’ve been told not to. So, I figured I might as well tell you the right way to do it instead.

“But aside from that. I’m sorry you have to hear about your dad from your friends or peers. You can’t change it. But hit ‘em back with something like, ‘Don’t hate because my dad’s hotter than your dad, and your mom watches his videos behind your dad’s back.’” Mia smirked at the look on Celeste’s face. “Hey, that’s probably highly inappropriate. But you can’t let ‘em get to you or try to shame you for something you have no control over. So, drag their parents too.”

“You’re my hero.”

Mia burst out with laughter.

“No, seriously. I’ve seen some of their dads.” Celeste ended on a cringe. That was all Mia needed to know.

“Have you noticed how the girls you hang around act when your dad is around?”

Celeste stopped and thought for a moment.

“They giggle a lot and stare at him. Especially, when he comes to pick me up after school. And some of them stopped being mean to me. They asked to come to the restaurant or to my house.” Celeste frowned.

“Just like I thought.” Mia nodded knowingly. “Girl, they have crushes on your dad. So yeah, if his former profession was so bad, they wouldn’t be fangirling him so hard. Don’t let them bother you.”

“Thanks, Mia.”

“You’re welcome, Celeste. Now...I think it’s time for some makeup shopping.”

“Seriously?!”

“Yep.”

“But I have to wait until my birthday.”

“Remember? I can teach you how to do makeup where men have no idea you’re even wearing it.” Mia winked.

Celeste squeaked and jumped up and down.

“Get changed so we can go.” Mia shook her head and smiled.

“You don’t have to tell me twice.”

Celeste ran into the dressing room.

Chapter Thirteen

Mia and Celeste walked into the restaurant, arms loaded with shopping bags. The place was jam-packed with customers. The hostess went to the back and a few moments later, Dante walked out wiping his hands with a white towel that he flipped over his shoulder as he came forward. Mia had no idea why that was so sexy.

“Buonasera, ladies.” Dante greeted them. “We have reserved a table in the back. Come on.”

As they followed him to the back, Mia could’ve sworn his accent was the best kind of foreplay. His voice alone was like a flick on her clit. It activated her whole body.

It didn’t help that she’d been celibate for a little over a month. She couldn’t seem to get it up for any man aside from the Italian stallion she was forced to be around. She’d even given up on masturbating. The only way she could orgasm was if she watched one of his videos. It still wasn’t enough. Besides, it started to feel...weird. She didn’t want to slip into some fantasy world, where the real world and the fantasy started to blend together. She wanted him off the screen and in her bed in real life.

They reached the table that Dante had reserved for them. It was tucked into a quiet little nook. A place where celebrities would sit for privacy. A rounded booth with a chair on the outside.

The whole restaurant was a vibe. As an interior designer, Mia could tell that a lot of care was put into decorating the establishment. The dimmed, romantic lighting. The brown brick walls. The exposed beams. The muted colors. It made you feel as if you were in an authentic Italian restaurant in Italy. But it also had modern touches in the furnishings to let you know that this place was also trendy and that there might be added flare to a classic Italian menu.

Celeste put down her bags and then did something that shocked both adults. She wrapped her arms around Dante’s waist.

“Thanks, Dad.”

Dante’s eyes shot up to Mia’s. She smiled but shrugged at the question in his eyes.

“You’re welcome, but for what?”

“For signing me up to Open Arms.” She pulled away and smiled up at him, before beaming at Mia. “She’s the best.”

Dante looked down at his daughter and then up at her new mentor. Mia looked down humbly.

“It’s been my pleasure, mija.”

Behind Celeste’s head, Dante mouthed ‘thank you’ to Mia. She inclined her head in the slightest of nods.

They slid their bags under the table and Mia and Celeste slid into the booth. Dante stood straight and formal.

“Ladies, look over the menu and I shall take your orders to the kitchen myself.”

They took a minute to look it over. Mia nearly drooled over almost every dish. It was the type of restaurant you come to and try something different every time.

“I’ll start with the caprese salad, and then the prosciutto-stuffed chicken breast roulades.”

“Fantastic choice, madame.” He turned to Celeste. “And for the young lady?”

Celeste giggled a bit before answering.

“The margherita pizza, please!”

A teenager will always be a teenager. Mia grinned to herself.

“Perfect. I will place your orders.” Dante bowed and turned to head to the kitchen.

“Wait!” Celeste stopped him. “Aren’t you eating with us?”

“Oh, of course. But meals are always best when made with love. So, I’ll be fixing your food for you.” He winked at her.

Being the teen that she was, she rolled her eyes. But it was more comical than her typical rude eye roll reserved for her father.

“You’re so cheesy.”

“Hey, I’m Italian. As are you. Food is often how we show our love. I can always teach you.”

“Maybe.” She smiled softly at her dad.

Mia could tell Celeste liked that idea. She knew that knowing your

heritage and being immersed in it, was a big deal to someone who had been denied that for most of their life. Especially for a mixed child trying to find their place in the world. Wanting to know both sides. Wanting to be accepted by both.

A waiter brought Mia's caprese salad and some freshly baked bread with olive oil for the table. The moment Mia bit into the bread, she slumped down onto the cushion and rolled her eyes to the back of her head.

"You've gotta be kidding me. It's so goooooood."

"Yeah." Celeste said around the piece she'd just shoved her in mouth.

They tried not to fill up on bread as they waited. They chatted about Celeste's school and what subjects she was interested in. About thirty minutes later, Dante and the waiter came out with a large tray filled with their food. The steam floated in waves up and evaporated before it reached the ceiling. The aroma was divine.

They placed the food in front of them. Dante had a plate of spaghetti carbonara for himself that he set in front of the chair. The waiter took away Mia's empty plate and left them to their dinner. Dante pulled the chair out and sat. He gestured at their plates.

"Please, enjoy."

Mia cut into her stuffed chicken. Dante watched her as she brought a forkful to her mouth. The chicken was so tender and flavorful that she couldn't help but sigh and close her eyes. She barely even needed to chew. The food practically melted on her tongue. When she opened her eyes to cut another bite, she saw that Dante was still watching her. While Celeste was busy destroying her pizza, the adults exchanged heated stares. Stares that held a secret conversation.

"*You like it, yes?*"

"*God, yes!*"

"*This is just the beginning. I can show you so much more, if you'll let me in.*"

Mia broke eye contact first. She could see the desire in his eyes and so much more. She didn't like it. It held the promise of a life she refused to hope for. Hope, at least for her in regards to love, felt so dangerous. For her, hope bred disappointment.

Is the dick worth the risk?

A flash of his long and insanely thick dick with a heavy steel ring hanging from the tip flashed before her eyes.

Hey, sometimes you gotta risk it for the biscuit.

Dante cleared his throat to break the spell. He adjusted in his chair and his jaw ticked. Mia would bet her car and risk walking home, that he was aroused. Aroused by her reaction to his food. *Interesting.*

“So, Mia, I saw in the Open Arms packet that you are an interior designer,” Dante said.

“Yep, I am.”

“I’m assuming you’re pretty successful then?”

“Actually, yes. It was rough for a few years. I struggled to find clients. But then I got that one client. Wealthy. Well respected. That was all I needed. Since money wasn’t an issue, I laid that house out. I worked my ass off for that one. I mean, I do for all of them. But that one, I barely slept.

“Once I was done, the couple had a party to show off and they invited me. The rest is history. I was booked for a solid year by the time I left that party.” Mia smiled at the memory.

“That is fantastic! Will you show Celeste how your business works?” He nodded to his daughter. “She’s into fashion. I know it’s not the same but it’s still art and design. And good for her to see a successful, self-made woman at work.”

“Oh, I’ll definitely show her the ropes when she’s finished with school for the summer. She can spend whole days with me if that’s okay with you,” she paused and looked at Celeste, “and with you too, of course.”

“Hell yeah!” Celeste beamed.

“Of course,” Dante said.

“Perfect.”

“I gotta go to the bathroom.” Celeste said before scooting out of the booth.

Once she was gone the adults were left to stare at each other. So much to be said, but they knew they didn’t have time to say too much before she came back.

“Thank you so much for all of this. You have been a godsend, Mia.” Dante said sincerely.

“You’re welcome. She’s a sweet girl. Just needs some direction, discipline, and someone who understands her and what she’s going through.”

Dante nodded, “I’m just so grateful that we found you.”

Mia noticed the ‘we’ part. And that’s the other part that scared her. Like he’s offering her a ready-made family. Falling in love with a mentee wasn’t

unusual. The kids were often lovable once they found someone who cared. It was the same with her assistant, Isabel. She adored her and Isabel loved her back. Like Mia was her big sister. But falling for the child **and** her father?

Nope. Can't do it.

The waiter walked up to clear their plates and break the awkward silence that had fallen over them.

“Ready for dessert?” Dante asked after the waiter walked away.

“Oh, I don't think I have room for that.” Mia rubbed her full tummy.

“But you *have* to try my tiramisu.”

“I've never really liked tiramisu.”

“That's because you haven't tried mine.”

“Are you a feeder? Or do you get off on people enjoying your food?”

Mia asked directly.

Dante scoffed but turned red. Mia had hit the nail dead on the head.

“You don't mince words, do you?”

“I do not.”

“I can't say I've ever experienced it before...until tonight. Watching you enjoy my food has been a pleasure I did not expect. So, I'm sure watching you eat one of my signature dishes would be equally...arousing.”

Hey, if eating his tiramisu makes him cum in his pants and gets me one step closer to riding that dick...I'M IN.

“Alright. It's worth a try. Although I'm sure I'll only be able to eat a few bites and will have to take the rest home.”

“Whatever you like. Just so long as you give it a try.” Dante said as he stood. “I'll be right back.”

Mia nodded.

Celeste came back and slid back in the booth.

“Your dad is bringing us some dessert.”

“Cool.”

A few minutes later, he came out with three small plates of his dessert. He placed them in front of Mia and then Celeste. He eased back down in his chair with his own plate.

“Please.” He gestured to the plate.

Mia picked up her fork. She'd never like the consistency of the dessert. But just simply putting her fork through it, she could tell something was different. Somehow, he'd fixed the mushy problem that turned off many. The flavors of coffee, sugar, and mascarpone cheese exploded on her tongue. The

crunch of the lady fingers surprised her. At this point, they'd normally be nothing but mush. Whatever he'd done to keep the firmness and crunch completely transformed the dish from a squishy mess to a delightful treat. To Mia, it was definitely giving cheesecake vibes. Whatever magic he'd done, Mia was in heaven.

Her eyes rolled to the back of her head. She closed them and just sat back like her whole world had changed. As she took a second bite, she couldn't help the moan that escaped her throat. She glanced at Dante and he stared at her with his teeth clenched so hard she was afraid he'd break them. For show, Mia licked her lips seductively. Dante grunted softly and then quickly stood.

"I...uh...excuse me for a moment." He said before rushing off.

Mia grinned.

Checkmate.

Chapter Fourteen

Mia spent the next several Saturdays bonding with Celeste. The teen was opening up like a flower to the sun. She had begun to tell Mia about school and her friends. Even the boys she liked. They did cute videos to post on social media. Mia took her to museums and art galleries to immerse the young girl in some culture. They were quickly becoming fast friends.

There was still some tension between her and her father every now and then. But for the most part, it was so much better from the little interaction Mia witnessed between the two. Celeste had even started hugging him goodbye before they left for the day.

Mia and Dante hadn't gotten any time to truly speak to each other since that dinner some weeks ago. Today, Dante seemed to want to rectify that.

"Celeste, can you wait in the car while I talk to Mia?" Dante asked.

"Sure, Dad."

The two adults looked at the teen and then at each other with raised brows. It was quite impressive that she did what she was told without a single question asked. And she called him dad. She was doing it more often now. But they just never knew with her.

"Mia, I just want to show you a room I was thinking about renovating. I was wondering if you could give me some advice." Dante said as they stood by her little red car.

"Sure. Point the way."

Mia followed him inside the expansive home as she admired his ass in his jeans and his strong back in a light green t-shirt. His home was also beautiful, outside and in. Even if it could use a woman's touch. It was a smidge too much on the bachelor pad side.

"You have a beautiful home." Mia said as Dante closed the door.

"Yeah, I do like it. And while I know many parts of my home could use some renovating. It's a little too masculine for a teen girl to live here." He said as if he'd read her mind. "But I'm not actually asking you for reno

advice. I'm sorry. I just didn't want Celeste to hear what I really wanted to ask you."

"Oookay. What exactly are you wanting to ask?"

"Well..." He nervously rubbed the back of his neck.

When he looked up at her, the green of his shirt made the green in his hazel eyes pop. He could ask her anything and she'd do it. That's just how mesmerized she was by his eyes.

"I have this fundraiser event that I have to go to next Saturday. So...I was wondering if you wouldn't mind accompanying me?"

"Are you asking me on a date?" Mia looked at him skeptically.

"Yes and no." He cringed. "While I'd love to take you on a date, I know your feelings about it. But it's actually more about the fact that this is a thing you want to bring a date to because these things can be awkward and a bit lonely without a plus one. And to be honest, you're the only woman in my life right now. At least that I see on a regular basis. And I know you'd be the most fun plus one to bring."

He smiled and chuckled softly.

"Well, since you put it that way. I don't think I could say no." Mia smiled brightly.

His speech was sweet. But she said 'yes' for a few other reasons as well. One, it had been a long time since she'd been to an event as a plus one. And two, it gave her an excuse to spend time with him without considering it a date and she was hoping for a happy ending.

"Fantastic! Grazie."

"Prego."

"You know Italian?"

"No. Not quite. Just a few words."

"Ah, I see." Dante smiled and then shoved his hands into his pockets. "Oh! It is a black-tie event. So, you'd have to dress up. I hope that's not a problem."

"Ha! Absolutely not. I have tons of dress up clothes."

"Good."

"What about Celeste? How will we go without her noticing?"

"Oh, yeah. She has a big slumber party next weekend. It's gonna be an all-day thing. She'll probably tell you sometime today. So, instead of spending time with her next Saturday, you'll spend it with me."

"Welp. It sounds like you have it all figured out. Just tell me what time

and where, and I'll be ready."

"Seven in the evening. Be ready by six-thirty. And if you'll give me your address, I'll pick you up."

"I thought this wasn't a date?"

"Do you want to drive in heels and a dress?"

"Touché." Mia conceded. "I'll text you my address."

"See you then." Dante said and opened the front door once more.

Mia smirked and walked out to her car. She practically rubbed her hands together like a movie villain.

I am so getting some dick next weekend.

Chapter Fifteen

Saturday night, Mia heard a knock at her door. She frowned as she walked to the door. She wasn't expecting Dante for another two hours. She looked through the peephole and saw Kennedy's green cat eye staring back at her. Mia choked on laughter.

"The hell?!"

Mia unlocked the door and Kennedy burst through with a bottle of wine.

"What are you do—"

Mia started to close the door, but it stopped midway. Next, walked in Royal. She too had a bottle of wine.

"Okay. I see what's happening here. Payton? You there too?" Mia peeked around the door.

Sure enough, Payton stood there with a huge grin on her face. And a pretty fancy charcuterie board of meats, cheeses, olives, and other goodies in her arms. Mia closed the door after Payton walked in. She tightened the belt to her black silk dressing gown as she turned to face her friends.

"So, what's all this?" Mia asked and gestured to their offerings.

"We bear gifts." Kennedy announced.

"I see that. Why?"

"Because you're going on your first date in *years*." Royal looked at her like she was an idiot.

"It is **not** a date."

"Right." Payton looked at her skeptically. "Let's state the facts. Black-tie event. You are the plus one. He is picking you up, old-fashioned style. And you're nervous. It's a date."

"I am so not nervous! What are you talking about?"

Payton looked at Kennedy and Royal to back her up.

"You are pretty nervous." Kennedy agreed.

"Yup. Sorry, friend." Royal confirmed.

"And how in the hell do you all know that?" Mia grumbled.

“You’re biting your bottom lip like you’re gnawing on gristle,” Royal said.

Mia froze. Her bottom lip was indeed between her teeth. She quickly popped it out. It was definitely something she did when she was nervous.

“I can’t stand y’all!”

They all started laughing uncontrollably.

“I’m not nervous about going out with Dante. I’m worried he thinks it’s more than a date.”

“Uh...huh. Just keep telling yourself that.” Kennedy said while she rummaged through Mia’s cabinets to find wine glasses.

“So, anyway. Not only are we here for moral support. We are also here to see what you’re wearing.” Royal sat on the couch and bounced her legs in happy anticipation.

“I could’ve taken a pic.”

“Definitely not the same.” Kennedy shook her head. “We already know you. You’re going to kill it. Kill *him*, in whatever you choose. We need to see the murder weapon. Now...show us, woman!”

“Can I finish my hair and makeup first, Little Miss Demanding?”

“I’ll allow it.” Kennedy nodded and waved her away.

“Here.” Royal handed Mia a glass of white wine. “Drink this to calm your nerves as you get ready.”

“For the last time... I. AM. NOT. NERVOUS!”

“Right. Well, drink it because it’s damn good wine and wine should never go to waste,” Royal said.

“Let us know if you need any help.” Kennedy offered.

“You all do remember I’m the one who taught *you* how to put makeup on.”

“Whatevs.” Royal stuck out her tongue.

Mia escaped into her bedroom and into her master bath. She’d already showered and gotten her skin baby soft with a moisturizer. Then she finished it off with a shimmery shine from the sparkling body lava she applied. Now, it was time for hair and makeup.

An hour had passed and the girls started to get antsy. Mia shook her head and smiled as they started to voice their complaints from the other room.

“Are you done yet?!”

“Yeah. It’s been forever! We’ve now moved on to your wine.”

“We do have lives, you know?”

“No one asked you to come over!” Mia shouted back.

“Touché!

Mia spritzed her favorite perfume in the air and walked through it. Then she stepped into her heels and finally sauntered out.

“Hot damn!!!” Kennedy shouted.

“Fucking A, girl!” Royal gasped. “That whole look is fire. You have to hook me up with that look at some point.”

“His brain is going to short circuit.” Payton added.

“Aww...thanks, ladies. You’re the best hype crew a woman could ask for.”

Mia’s dress had an edgy vibe to it. It stopped a few inches above the knee. It was all black, sleeveless, and fit like a glove against her curvy body. It had the illusion of a plunging neckline. A large V dipped down to just above the belly button. Except it had a rhinestone studded mesh overlay. So, while it showed off her cleavage, that had to be taped so she didn’t have any nip slips, it still gave her a little cover and toned down the sexy by a skosh. The sparkle of the rhinestones probably drew the eye even more if she were being honest. The same sparkling mesh also covered the large triangular slit up the left side of her thigh that stopped mid-hip.

Because of the edginess of the dress, she styled the rest to match. She’d straightened her hair and slicked it back into three ponytails going down the back of her head. She added some braiding hair and braided her own into it for more exaggerated length and fullness to one big braid. Then she pinned the large butterfly braid down the center of her head to give the appearance of a mohawk and added some rhinestone tipped bobby pins down the middle for sparkle. The tail of the braid landed just at the top of her ass. It looked good straight down her back or over her shoulder.

Mia added a shimmery smokey eye. An ombre look with glittery silver towards the inner eyelid and faded to black towards the outer lid. She’d added some false lashes for a more dramatic look. A little highlighter added shimmer and dimension to her face. And she finished the look with a dramatic, matte red lip.

And to finish it all, she wore sky-high platform heels. The top was black with an ankle strap. The platform and heel were sparkling silver.

“Now, we’re going to have one more glass of wine. And after that, you

don't have to go home, but you gotta get the fuck outta here." Mia finished with an air kiss.

"We see how it is." Royal fake pouted.

"I'm not having y'all here when he shows up."

"Damn." Kennedy sighed. "I really wanted to see his reaction. Mainly for the book version of this."

"You already know I'm good at details. I'll let you know his reaction. And you're **not** writing a book version of this, because this ain't turning into a romance. Got it?"

"Got it." Kennedy saluted her. Then she turned and winked at the other two.

"I saw that." Mia said as she poured herself a glass.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Mia rolled her eyes and then leaned against the counter to sip on her wine. She wasn't about to sit and get wrinkled before Dante could even see her.

It's interesting how much you care, her conscience said. Oh, shut up!

Chapter Sixteen

Dante stepped out the back of the SUV he'd ordered for the night. He adjusted and then buttoned his tuxedo jacket. It was a deep red with a satin finish. The left side had a shimmery design like snaking vines from shoulder to hem and down the one arm. Under it he wore a black dress shirt and black tie. On the bottom, he wore a classic black tuxedo pant. But his shoes, like his jacket, showed off his flare for fashion. They were red, Italian leather Oxfords.

He nervously tugged at the jacket one more time before taking a deep breath and walking towards Mia's door. He pressed the buzzer for M. Ayala. The speaker crackled.

"I'll be right down." She said over the intercom.

Dante turned to face the street as he waited. He figured it would be better to focus on cars passing by and checking out her neighborhood, instead of staring at the door. He heard the door open moments later and he turned.

"Jesus Christ!" He hissed.

"Wow!" Mia said at the same time.

They both sized the other up. Dante could see in his date's eyes that she thought he looked good. But he was too distracted by how gorgeous and fierce she looked.

Mia was all fire. A passionate woman who wasn't afraid to show it. And Dante loved everything about it. He was an Italian man after all. Italian women were known for their fiery personalities. He was used to it after growing up surrounded by the passionate women in his family.

"Mia," he whispered, "you take my breath away."

He saw her skin heat. Her cheeks pinkened.

"You clean up very well yourself, Dante. I'm impressed."

"I did grow up right outside the fashion capital of Italy."

"Ah. So, you're from around Milan?"

"From a town called Brescia. It's almost halfway between Milan and

Verona.”

“Verona, Verona? As in Romeo and Juliet, Verona?” Mia raised her eyebrows.

“One and the same.”

“Fashion on one side and romance on the other.”

“I never thought about it, but yes. Shall we?” Dante offered his arm and gestured towards the black SUV waiting for them.

“We shall.” Mia took his arm.

He helped her down the steps and to the car.

“Hello,” she said to the driver. “Very nice touch, ordering a car.”

“I do my best.” Dante winked at her.

He ran around to the other side to get in.

As the driver took them to their destination, Dante used every ounce of restraint he had not to touch Mia. For one, he didn’t want to scare her away. This wasn’t supposed to be a date. And the way he wanted to take her hand, entwine their fingers, and stroke his thumb over her skin; that was definitely in the ‘this is a date’ realm.

Two, if he touched her. Even something as innocent as holding her hand. He knew it would escalate quickly. Her red lipstick would be smeared on her face and all over his lips.

Patience.

He had a goal in mind. And he refused to deviate from it. Especially the more time he spent with her. Not to mention how well she got along with CeCe. He saw a future there and he was not about to fuck it up because his cock jumped every time she was around him. Anytime she was near him, he either had a chub or full erection. Now, was no different. Hell, the moment he turned and saw her in that killer dress and sky-high heels that made her legs look a mile long, he’d had a full erection. Thankfully his jacket hid his desire.

“So...what’s the fundraiser for, anyway?” Mia asked just as the car pulled up to the venue.

“It’s to raise money for the homeless crisis in the city,” Dante said.

“Oh, nice!”

He jumped out the car and walked around to her side to help Mia out. He offered his arm once more and Mia took it.

The building was an old historical building that had been turned into an events venue. Just a few blocks from Union Square. Tall pillars surrounded the front with a beautiful dome at its center. As they walked inside, it was

even more elegant than outside. Marble flooring, more pillars, and ornate walls and ceilings with glass domes featuring views of the night sky.

Beautifully decorated tables for dining were set up throughout the large space. A stage was set up front and center. A podium in the middle.

“I take it this will be an auction?”

“Yes, you are right.”

“Ah, yes. Rich people doing rich people shit to raise money for the homeless, instead of using all the money to hold this event to feed a couple hundred of them instead.” Mia shook her head.

“Welcome to capitalism.”

“Welcome to America.”

“I know it’s not the best way. And all of this is more for show and a way for the rich in this city to give themselves a congratulatory pat on the back for ‘doing some good’ for the homeless community. But it is something, I guess.

“I try and do more separately from this. Since I own a restaurant and there are a lot of hungry people, I try to help where I can.”

“Really? I didn’t know.”

“I think it’s a bit disingenuous to do charitable things and then brag about it. ‘Oh, look at me. I’m such a good person.’”

Mia chuckled at his joke.

“Well, I’m asking. It’s not disingenuous to answer. So, what all do you do?”

“Since my restaurant is mostly busy at night, in the afternoons on slower days, those in need come to have a free meal. No questions asked. If you’re hungry, you can come eat. And then, I’ve started something in the last two years, where I hold a block party. I cater it. There’s music and just little games for kids. Nothing big. I’m so busy with the restaurant, I can only do it a couple times a year. But each time, it gets bigger and bigger. So, people must like it.” Dante shrugged.

“That’s truly amazing, Dante. Don’t downplay it.”

Dante looked at Mia. She smiled at him sweetly. Her normally guarded light brown eyes, softened as she looked at him. With every interaction they had, it felt as if they were getting closer. Becoming more bonded. If he had to tear down her walls brick by brick, he would.

A waiter with a tray of champagne came towards them. Dante held up a hand and the young man came over.

“Champagne?” Dante asked Mia.

“Yes, please. I have a feeling I’m gonna need it.”

He grabbed two flutes off the tray. The waiter walked off, leaving them alone once more.

Dante looked around the room. No one had sat down yet. Everyone was still mingling and sipping on their champagne.

As the room filled, he noticed that while there were some older men with young bombshells on their arms, Mia was by far the most gorgeous and blatantly sexy woman in the room. Her curves could not be ignored. And many eyes found her and stayed for longer than was appropriate. Many were gazes of appreciation. Others oozed with contempt or jealousy.

But Dante also knew that most of the people in attendance knew about his sordid past. He wouldn’t doubt their opinion of him extended to his plus one.

One such couple Dante spotted and accidentally made eye contact with. They said something to each other and started heading his way.

“Here we go.” Dante said low enough so that only Mia could hear him.

“What’s up?” She immediately stiffened at his tone.

“Astor Bettencourt. An asshole financier who wouldn’t back my restaurant because of my former career choice.” Dante informed her.

Mia choked on the sip of champagne she’d just swallowed. She pressed a hand to her mouth and nose as she giggled.

“Astor Bettencourt?” She scoffed. “I don’t think you could come up with a better name for a rich, pretentious douche bag.”

“Exactly. And honestly,” Dante leaned in closer to whisper in Mia’s ear, “he’s only mad because his wife tried cornering me at a party, and practically begged me to fuck her. And he caught her in the middle of cupping my dick.”

Mia snorted even harder. She only had seconds to pull it together before the couple stopped in front of them. The Bettencourts looked them both up and down with disdain. Mrs. Bettencourt raised a lofty eyebrow at Mia.

“Bettencourt.” Dante said by way of a greeting.

“Bianchi.” Astor said back just as blandly. “So, I see you haven’t left your...humble beginnings.”

The man looked Mia up and down. His meaning was clear. Clear enough that Dante felt Mia bristle next to him. Dante stepped forward, placing his date slightly behind him.

“You forget yourself, you rich prick.” Dante stepped closer and stood over the little man. “I don’t care if you insult me, but don’t crack your crusty

lips to say shit about my date. She's a Berkeley educated interior designer who runs her own successful design company. She has nothing to do with my past."

Mia poked her head around Dante's shoulder.

"And even if I was, what does it matter? Don't be salty because his restaurant exceeded expectations to become a Michelin-starred establishment and you aren't getting a piece of the pie."

Astor stepped back, adjusted his jacket and straightened his spine.

"The nerve." His wife said. "You're both lucky to even be invited here."

"Ma'am. You were so happy to see Dante, I could see your lady boner. Please don't act like you wouldn't jump him like a bitch in heat the minute your husband turned his back." Mia said.

Mrs. Bettencourt gasped and pressed a hand to her chest. Her mouth flapped open and closed for several seconds. The guests closest to them had quieted their conversations to overhear the heated exchange.

"And another thing, because I wasn't finished..." Mia turned to Astor once more. "You're not only jealous because his business is soaring. But also, because he's better looking and your wife wants to fuck him. It's a condition you may not have heard of before. It's called Big Dick Envy. Not to be confused with Big Dick Energy. Which Dante has plenty of. Right, Mrs. Bettencourt?"

The couple both gasped in disgust and stormed away. The surrounding crowd tittered in shock and glee.

Dante looked at Mia. He tried to keep his face and voice stern when he finally spoke.

"Mia, don't get involved in my mess. I wouldn't want you to lose any clients because of me. They're powerful people in San Francisco."

"Okay, now, say what you really want to say." Mia raised a brow and folded her arms across her middle.

Dante couldn't stop the smile that spread across his face.

"That was so awesome!"

They both fell into each other and laughed.

"Your tongue is as sharp as a katana blade."

"Truthfully, I was holding back."

They burst out with more laughter. Mia dabbed at her eyes with her fingers in an attempt to not smear her makeup.

"I hate bullies. I have a visceral reaction to bullies. I don't care how

wealthy or important someone is. They couldn't possibly be that important if they act like that. Because I won't allow people like that in my life. I don't care what fame and riches they can give me. I wouldn't lower myself." Mia said the last sentence as if she was imagining a cockroach she was about to step on. "So, don't worry about my clients. My work speaks for me."

She was confident as hell. Dante was so completely charmed and turned on by her. Someone who stood up for others. Didn't suffer fools. Ran her own business. And went after what she wanted.

Dante took a deep, calming breath and guided her to the table they were assigned. Old Dante would've fucked her in the coat closet or wherever they could've found privacy in the building. New and improved Dante refused to let his desires for her get the best of him.

Just a little longer. She's softening. If you fuck her now, she's gonna run afterwards.

They found their name cards. *Bianchi* and *Bianchi +1*. Dante pulled out Mia's chair and helped her slide forward. Then took his place next to her.

The table, like all the others, was big and round. The decorations were gold and white. The plates were white and trimmed with gold. The tablecloth was a pristine ivory and the centerpiece sparkling gold.

The table began to quickly fill. Dante recognized a few. One was a wealthy guy, Barnett Livingstone, who'd come to his restaurant a few times. He'd made a fortune in the tech industry. Kinda dorky, but found popularity through buying it. But it was who was on his arm that made Dante internally shake his head in defeat.

"This night just keeps getting better and better." Dante said and swallowed the rest of his champagne.

"Oh, God. What now?"

"An ex. Lucky for me, she's sitting at our table." His voice dripped with sarcasm. "And now, she's apparently dating a techie who sold his startup for like a billion dollars. I've heard no one liked him until then. If you know what I mean?"

"Ooh! Where?!"

"The blonde. Ten o'clock." He jerked his chin in her direction.

"Hmm... Interesting." Mia said thoughtfully.

"In what way?"

"She seems very *Little House on the Prairie*. Just doesn't seem like your type. But..." Mia cocked her head to the side, "I don't really know your type,

do I? I just figured that if you're... You know what? Never mind."

"What? You figured that since I find you attractive that I couldn't find someone like her attractive?"

"Honestly? Yeah," she admitted.

Dante looked over at Shailee. She had wheat blonde hair that stopped mid-back that had been curled in big, soft waves for the evening. She was almost shockingly thin. Her eyes were big and blue. Her face was pretty, if not a little boring. She looked sweet but had the dirtiest mouth in bed he'd ever experienced outside of porn. Which, of course, for him was saying a lot.

She represented the last of his wholesome phase.

"I was looking for something. Someone. You know? Wholesome. Respectable. Someone to help me fit in, in this world. Someone who I could love and maybe she could love me and my daughter. A regular family." Dante played with his flatware.

"As much as you want that life, it just doesn't seem to fit you. Not that you're some one-dimensional guy who sleeps around and has a new bimbo on his arm every week. But you seem like a guy who needs passion in his life. Spontaneity. And surrounded by down to earth people.

"Not saying she can't be that type of person. But she just oozes prim and proper. Missionary position. And bake sales."

"She actually has a filthy mouth in bed."

Mia turned and gave him a shocked face. "You don't say?!"

"I do." Dante chuckled.

"Well, there I go being just as bad as the couple I just shamed. Judging a book by its cover."

"Oh, you're actually not that far off. The book cover is accurate, maybe just a different title."

"Ha!" Mia laughed.

The outburst drew a few eyes. Shailee's in particular. Her eyes widened a bit. Just by the look on her face, he could tell that she'd expected to see him, just not at the same table. Her eyes moved to Mia. Her lips pinched with jealousy.

"Yeah, the dirty talk was about the only exciting thing. She definitely plays performative Christianity. And tries to uphold a squeaky-clean reputation in the hopes of finding a wealthy husband. Which is why she dumped me. I wasn't squeaky enough for her. My past a little too messy. Can't exactly bring a former adult film star home to mom and dad." Dante

shrugged.

“I think it’s about time you find a more accepting crowd. You need to find successful people who are salt o’ the earth types. Those who weren’t born into it, but worked their asses off for it. I have a strong feeling they’ll be more accepting of you and your past. Which, *again* is nothing to be ashamed of. It got you here, didn’t it?” Mia nudged his shoulder with hers.

“It did.” Dante nodded. “And you’re right.”

“Eh.” Mia waved him away as if being right wasn’t a big deal. “Get used to it. I’m always right.”

It was his turn to shout out with laughter.

“Ha! Why do I believe that?” He shook his head at her wryly.

“Because it’s true. You might as well accept it now.” She sighed as if it was such a heavy burden to bear. “But in all seriousness, Dante, you don’t even like these people. You haven’t mentioned one redeeming quality about any of them. Why surround yourself with them?”

“I don’t know. A stupid dream from my childhood. To be wealthy and among the wealthy in America. Dumb. I know.”

“Well, maybe not for a child. But definitely now for a...”

“Forty-five.”

“...for a forty-five-year-old man. You’ve seen behind the curtain. And it ain’t worth it.”

“Word.”

Mia snorted. The use of the African American colloquialism in his accent must have tickled her.

“What’s so funny?” Shailee said from behind them.

She must have gotten up at some point, maybe to use the bathroom. And then made a point of stopping to speak.

Mia looked back at her and raised an eyebrow.

“Noneya.” Mia said under her breath.

Dante choked and then started coughing.

“What?!” Shailee’s voice got even higher and more babyish, if that were even possible.

“Shailee, I thought you didn’t want to have anything to do with me?”

“I was just trying to be friendly.”

“You could’ve just said ‘hello’ and then moved on. There’s no need to force unnecessary conversation. That’s what your new man is for.”

“Ugh! Fine.” She threw her hands up. “I was just going to congratulate

you on finding someone from your world.”

“Bitch, look. I’m sick of y’all assuming I’m in the porn industry. You do know if you take the stick out your ass, you can be sexy too. Sexy is not equivalent to porn.

“So, take your jealous ass back over to rich with no dick over there. I got this one taken care of.” Mia finished with a rub over Dante’s cock that could only be seen by Shailee.

Luckily, for Dante, the black fabric of his tuxedo pants hid his immediate response to Mia stroking over him. It grew and slithered down his pant leg like a snake. Mia’s hand curved around it. Her lips popped open and her eyes widened imperceptibly. Dante had experienced this before. It was one thing to see it on a phone, computer, or TV screen. It was a whole other thing to see it or feel it in real life. Most women had to collect themselves the first time.

“You’re disgusting.” Shailee hissed at both of them.

“And you look pinched.”

Shailee huffed and walked away.

She’d probably never been insulted like that in her whole privileged little life.

Mia leaned into him, drawing his attention back to her.

“You said the night couldn’t get any worse. Honestly, I’m having a blast.” Mia shrugged.

Dante shouted and then shoved his fist to his mouth to stifle it. He drew the whole table’s attention. He quickly held up his hand in the universal sign of ‘sorry, don’t mind me.’

And Mia was right. He was having a blast. Because of her.

This is the dream. A woman who challenges you, supports you, stands up for you, arouses you in more ways than one, and makes you laugh. This is what I want. And I’ll get it.

*Even if I have to fight **her** for it.*

~~~

The rest of the night passed without further incident. Mia was pretty sure it was because it had spread throughout the guests that it was best to steer

clear of her and Dante. If they knew what was good for them, that is.

During the auction, Mia spotted a beautiful abstract painting that she wanted. Dante insisted on bidding on it. As he put it, “In return for accompanying me tonight.”

After dinner and the auction, a band started playing music for the guests to dance to. Dante offered his hand. Mia took it and let him lead her to the dance floor.

Dante spun her around before pulling her into him. They stood almost perfectly eye to eye. Even in four-inch heels, putting her at 6’2”, Mia didn’t tower over him. Their bodies were in perfect alignment. She’d never been able to wear heels with Alejandro. He was so insecure about his height next to her. But Mia had a feeling that even if Dante were short, he still wouldn’t care if she wore heels. He oozed confidence in his appearance.

She just wished it extended to his life and his past. He had to stop letting people shame him for his past life. For one, how did they know he was in porn if at least some of them weren’t watching it themselves? It was all projection. ‘Let’s project our shame for watching it onto him. The guy who provided the entertainment I so thoroughly enjoyed in the first place.’

*The shame around sex in this country is maddening.*

Dante’s hand splayed on her back, brought Mia back to the present. Not to mention the hardness pressed against her mound.

As they swayed and his erection grazed her, Mia shuddered slightly and a little gasp escaped her lips. Dante pressed the side of his face against hers. His breath fanned the shell of her ear. Her braid was over her shoulder. With one hand, he brushed it off her shoulder to fall to her back. His fingers caressed the skin of her neck as he did it. Mia shivered. Dante breathed in deeply.

“Did I mention you smell amazing?” Dante asked. His breath warm against her skin.

“Nuh...uh.” She practically moaned.

“Well, you do.”

He pulled her even closer. His hand slid up her back. Up to the back of her neck. His thumb stroked over the sensitive skin. Mia closed her eyes. For a moment, she surrendered to the hold he had on her. His hold on her neck was feather light, but with firm pressure he was able to guide her head any way he wanted it.

Dante pulled her head back slightly. Until they were nose to nose. Mia’s

eyes remained closed. As if she were under a spell.

“You’re so fucking gorgeous.” Dante said passionately.

His breath fanned over her lips. He was so close that as some of the words he spoke, his lips grazed hers. Mia’s mouth popped open. In anticipation of his kiss. Instead of a kiss, Dante slowly moved his head from side to side, his lips lightly skimming over hers. The soft caress felt more intimate than a regular kiss. As if he just wanted to feel her lips. To memorize the feel of them. Then instead of deepening the kiss, he moved her head to the side and softly kissed the side of her neck just below her ear. She shivered.

Mia couldn’t figure him out. It was obvious he was a sexual person, but he wouldn’t give in to his desires. He had more self-control than any man she’d ever met. Everything he did had an element of intimacy to it. It seemed as if instead of just fucking her, he had launched a full-scale seduction. And she’d fallen right into his trap. Or so it seemed. She wasn’t there for love. She was there for sex. And if that was how he wanted to play the game, she’d suit up and play right along with him.

*But I’m not falling in love with you.*

No matter how much fun she was having with him. Or how much she enjoyed being with him.

They only stayed for a few more songs before they were both ready to leave. Dante paid for her painting, gave them her address for it to be delivered, and they both walked out arm-in-arm.

Dante must’ve called the car while he was paying for the painting, because it was there waiting for them when they walked out. He helped her inside and got in on the other side. Once the car started down the street, he turned to her.

“So...remember when I mentioned the block party earlier?”

“Yes. Of course.” She looked at him curiously.

“The next one is in two weeks. A Saturday. I know that’s your day with CeCe. But I wanted her to come. It would be good for her.”

“Oh, sure! And that’s a fantastic idea.”

“I was also wondering if you’d come as well?”

“Oh.” She looked at him with wide eyes. She hadn’t expected that.

“Sure, I’d love to.”

“Perfect.” He smiled brightly.

Mia smiled back. Then she quickly turned away. Unable to hold his gaze.

It was a little too...warm.

She looked out the window and noticed they were on the route back to her place. She frowned slightly. She'd wondered if he was going to take her back to his place. But then she remembered Celeste and figured her place would be the better choice.

Once they pulled up out front of her house, Dante jumped out and ran around to her side to open the door for her. He took her arm and guided her to her front door.

At the door, they faced each other. Dante lifted his hand to her face. He cupped her cheek. His thumb stroked over her skin. Without thought, Mia leaned her face into his hand. Quickly, his hand slid behind her neck and pulled her to him. His lips captured hers. Mia gasped and his tongue dove in. His tongue stroked over hers dominantly. Mia could feel his erection once more. This time she rolled her hips against him. Unfortunately for her, it broke the spell.

Dante pulled back with a gasp. Mia cried out in protest. Dante clasped her hand. He bowed and kissed it softly.

"I had an amazing night. And it was all because of you, Mia. Thank you." He dropped her hand. "I'll see you next weekend when you pick up CeCe."

And with that, he turned and quickly walked down the step and walkway to the car. Mia watched as the black SUV pulled away.

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me?!" Mia growled.

She turned and unlocked the door. Her swollen and highly aroused clit rubbed as she hobbled up the stairs. She flopped down on her couch once she was inside.

"Is it possible to die from sexual frustration?" Mia grumbled to herself. "I should call 9-1-1."

*"This is 9-1-1. What is your emergency?"*

*"Yeah, I'd like to report an attempted murder."*

## Chapter Seventeen

Two weeks later, Dante pulled up in his luxury SUV. Mia stepped out in ripped jeans, pristine white sneakers, and a white tube top with a lavender, short-sleeved crop top over it. She'd left the crop top unbuttoned to show off a little more skin on her tummy and chest.

She'd decided to go minimal on her makeup. She didn't feel it was appropriate to go full glam for a block party meant to feed the homeless. So, she went light on the foundation, a little highlighter for shimmer, mascara to define her long lashes, and a sparkly clear lip gloss.

Mia had been feeling a little cheeky and decided to pull her hair up into two buns. She laid her edges and popped in her big, silver hoops. The whole look made her look all of twenty-five instead of thirty-two.

As she walked towards the car, Dante ate her up with his eyes. While Celeste waved enthusiastically.

"Hey, Mia!" The teen greeted her as she slid into the back seat.

"Hey, Celeste!"

"Man, you look cuter than me." Celeste fake pouted.

"You look adorable. Hush."

Celeste beamed at the compliment from her new favorite person. And she did look adorable. She wore a cute romper with colorful sneakers and her hair pulled up into a high curling puff. Mia had spent one Saturday teaching Celeste how to enhance her 4a curls. Mia's was 3c in the top and front of her scalp and 4a in the back. So, she knew what helped her 4a curls to pop and imparted her wisdom to Celeste. Now, whenever she picked up the teen, her hair was rarely ever straight anymore.

"Your makeup looks good," Mia mouthed to Celeste so her dad wouldn't hear. Then she gave her the 'okay' symbol with her hands.

Celeste grinned excitedly and nodded her head.

She'd done her makeup similar to Mia's. Very light and fresh. And most importantly, invisible to most men.

“Alright,” Dante said. “You ladies ready for a busy but fun day?”

“I guess.”

“Absolutely.”

“Don’t worry, Celeste. You’ll have fun.” Dante assured her and patted her arm.

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“Well, hello, sweetie!” Mia said to a little girl about seven-years-old.

Mia was behind a long table weighted down with food. Dante was a few feet down serving the main course. Spaghetti bolognese as he called it. Mia always knew it to be just spaghetti. But Dante had schooled her on that. There was either spaghetti bolognese, which was spaghetti noodles with tomato-based meat sauce. Or there was spaghetti carbonara. A white sauce with cubed pork. How she’d never learned that until now, she did not know.

Her food station duty was to pass out bread and salad. And Celeste stood a few feet from her passing out drinks. The choices were water, juice, or sports drink. Dante wanted the meal to be hearty but also healthier. He doubted they were getting vegetables very often and he didn’t want them hopped up on sugary drinks either. Especially, since he had a treat awaiting them later. He’d spent the day before fixing hundreds of cannoli.

Mia added salad and some fresh bread to the little girl’s plate. Then did the same for her mom. They thanked her and moved down the line. They were the last of that wave of people. Mia took a moment to glance over at Dante as he grabbed another large aluminum pan filled with the pasta dish and replaced the empty one.

He looked really good in his casual ensemble. Slim-fit khakis, a white tee, denim jacket with rolled up sleeves, and white sneakers. His slightly wavy hair fell forward on his forehead. He removed his gloves and combed his hair through his fingers to pull it back. The silver strands at his temples always gave him a rakish look. A silver fox in the making.

Mia watched as he removed the denim jacket. It had gotten quite a bit warmer. The sleeves of his t-shirt hugged his biceps. He had the kind of body that was made through traditional exercise versus lifting tons of weights at the gym. Like he went for runs outside or on the treadmill, had one of those

pull-up bars in his house to do chin-ups, and did a hundred pushups and sit-ups a day. He gave off zero lunkhead vibes. Fit but nothing crazy. And Mia admired every inch of him.

Speaking of every inch, Mia would have to tell him that khakis were a bad idea for him. Unless he was looking to attract that kind of attention. She'd always noticed that when a man with considerable meat wore khakis, it left almost nothing to the imagination. The bulge in the crotch of his was quite impressive. She damn near swallowed her tongue when she got a first glance. It was also clear that he was a candidate for grey sweatpants season. But Hoochie Daddy shorts were a hard no. The tip of his dick would poke out the bottom of the leg if he tried.

Just then, Dante looked at her.

Damnit! Caught red-handed.

Dante gave her a sly look and then winked at her.

Well, I'll be damned. He wore them on purpose! That sneaky motherfucker. He knew I'd look.

Luckily, Celeste walked over to distract them.

"Can I go play some of the games now?" She asked her father.

"Yeah, go ahead. It looks like now will just be the people who want seconds. We can handle that on our own." Dante jerked his head towards the games.

"Cool."

There was a basketball hoop, corn hole boxes, sidewalk chalk hopscotch, jump ropes, etc. Even an eclectic mix of music, a little something for everyone, played loud enough for people to get into it, but not so loud that they couldn't hear each other. Dante had forgotten nothing. Mia couldn't help but be impressed.

"This is truly incredible, Dante," she said. "That you set this up on your own and cater the whole thing. And everyone looks so happy. Like all their worries are gone for just a couple of hours. Full stomachs, music, and fun. It's beautiful."

Mia felt herself choke up at those last words. She blinked a couple times to keep any tears from spilling. Even though she was sure he could see that her eyes had become glassy.

"Thank you, Mia." Dante smiled humbly. "I just couldn't ignore it. Ignore them. Especially since when I first arrived in the U.S, I didn't have much. There were a lot of nights I went to bed hungry just to pay rent for a

tiny studio in L.A.”

“You’re a really good man, Dante.”

“I try to be. Especially for her.” He nodded towards Celeste.

She was playing hopscotch with a little girl. The little girl was about five. Her clothes were dirty and torn. Her face was smudged with what God only knew. But Celeste acted as if she didn’t notice.

“Yeah, she’s a good egg.” Mia grinned.

“She is. When she’s not testing me.”

“Oh, I’m sure that’s pretty normal for a teenager. Ha! I was such an asshole as a teen. Hell, I don’t think I’ve changed much.” Mia shook her head at the memories.

“I bet you were a handful.”

“You better believe it,” she said. “You?”

“Actually, I was a model teenager. But I ended up disappointing my family anyway, when I moved here. But I’d watched, learned, and helped my mother cook. Then I went to culinary school in Milan. Once I was done and had worked in restaurants in my hometown, I just wanted more. So, at twenty-five, I packed up some clothes, scrounged up what little money I had, and bought a ticket to California,” he finished.

“Why California? Why not New York? Italian American culture is huge on the East Coast.”

“I know. But I figured there would be way more competition in New York than California. I knew there’d be a better chance of getting my modern infused classic Italian food noticed on the West Coast.”

“Well, your instincts were certainly right.”

“It only took about fifteen years.”

“You still did it though. Doesn’t matter how long it took.”

“This is true.”

“So...I think I might have an idea for your next block party.”

“Really? Do tell.” Dante stepped closer.

Mia’s eyes internally rolled to the back of her head. He smelled so good. There were hints of all those scents added to masculine fragrances. Sandalwood, sage, bergamot, etc. Panty melting combinations.

“Okay, so maybe do a clothing drive. Have a box where people can drop off clothes. Collect them over the next several months. Then at your next block party, have a couple of tables where they can ‘shop’ for clothes.

“And this might be harder, but you know how you have the portable

toilets? Why not get one of those trailers that have like two to four showers? Give them a chance to clean up,” Mia said.

“That’s a really great idea. But I have a feeling the portable showers are crazy expensive.” Dante said deep in thought.

“You could always do crowdfunding and a fundraiser to raise the money for it.”

“True.” Dante rubbed his stubbled chin. “Or maybe you could be my partner? I can handle all of this, and you can take care of the clothing drive and portable showers.”

He raised an eyebrow. He’d just thrown down the challenge.

“I see what you did there.” Mia squinted at him. “I just might take you up on that.”

“Let me know.”

The song changed and the beat to *The Cupid Shuffle* came on. Mia’s head jerked up in response. As if she’d just heard the call of her people.

“Come on, guys!” Celeste shouted at them.

Several people including the teen were gathering together and forming lines to do the dance. Mia didn’t hesitate. She grabbed Dante’s hand and immediately pulled him over to Celeste.

“What do you know about this song?” Mia said to the teen.

“Oh, I know.” A wistful look came over her face. “I did it with my mom, before...”

Mia rubbed a gentle hand down her back.

“Then let’s tear it up for your mom.”

“Bet.”

Mia turned to Dante, “You ready?”

“Uh...I’m not sure. I don’t know this song.”

Mia’s mouth popped up and she turned to Celeste.

“You hear that, Celeste? Apparently, we need to teach your dad what’s up.”

“Just follow what he says, Dad.”

As soon as the part where the instructions for the song began, Mia and Celeste went directly into the moves. Dante listened, watched, and partially did the dance until he picked up exactly how it went. As soon as he got the steps, which wasn’t long, he started to add hip movements and a little flare. Mia and Celeste looked at each other again and then back at him.

“Okayyyyy!!!” Mia shouted.

“Go, Dad!”

Mia and Celeste high-fived each other.

As the song progressed, Dante grabbed Celeste and spun her around a few times. Then he released her and wrapped his arms around Mia’s waist. He pulled her in close. With his hand at the small of her back, he rolled his hips and she followed the movement. The crowd cheered them on. They giggled and smiled at each other. He spun her out and then back to him once more.

After the song ended, they took a bow to boisterous applause. Celeste clapped but she eyed them suspiciously.

“Eww.” She scrunched up her nose at them. “You’re not flirting, are you?”

Mia and Dante looked at each other.

“No!” They said in unison a little too forcefully.

Luckily, his kid hadn’t learned nuance yet. It was obvious that they were lying. But she didn’t pick up on it.

“Okay, cool. Because that would be gross.”

Mia and Dante glanced at each other when Celeste turned away. Dante rubbed the back of his neck. Mia squeezed her lips together and turned to head back to the tables of food.

Welp, that may have thrown a wrench in things.

“Hey, Dad.”

“Yes, sweetie?”

“A friend wants to hang out. She said one of her parents could pick me up. Is it cool to go now?”

“Yeah, sure. You helped out a lot today. You earned it.” Dante gave her a side hug and kissed her forehead.

“Thanks!”

About thirty minutes later, Mia saw a car pull up and Celeste jump in the front passenger seat. Dante was in the middle of chatting with someone. He didn’t notice that the car had a girl and a guy in the back and another guy driving the car. Neither guy looked old enough to be anyone’s dad, but a little too old to be hanging out with two fifteen-year-old girls. They looked to be in their late teens. Either seniors or not long graduated.

Mia sighed heavily. This was not something she wanted to get involved in. In fact, she was pissed off that Celeste had put her in this predicament. If she told Dante, he’d lose his shit, immediately call Celeste snapping, and then

she'd never trust Mia again. That would undo all the work Mia had done to get the girl to open up. If she didn't tell Dante, he'd be furious with her for keeping it from him. She thought about it for a few minutes more. She came to the conclusion that she'd address Celeste herself first. And if the behavior continued, she'd have no choice but to tell Dante.

She pulled her phone out of her back pocket to shoot Celeste a text.

Mia:

I saw who you got in the car with.

Celeste:

Please don't tell my dad, Mia!

Mia:

Make sure you're home by 8 and I won't.

Celeste:

K. Thank you so much.

Mia:

Don't ever put me in this position again. I don't like lying to your dad, but I also don't like telling on you.

Celeste:

Sorry. I won't do it again.

Mia:

Thank you.

Mia slid the phone back in her pocket and released a pent-up breath. She hoped Celeste wasn't lying. But Mia knew what it was like to like a boy when you're a teen girl. The sun rises and sets on that boy. As if no one exists but him. Mia prayed the girl wasn't in that deep.

~ ~ ~

Dante watched Mia talk happily with the people coming up for the cannoli he'd made. She didn't turn her nose up. Instead, she was kind and welcoming. She let her warm heart shine. There was no sign of the tough, no nonsense business woman who ate men for breakfast.

Every layer he peeled back, revealed another side of the beautiful woman. The more he saw of her, the more he wanted her.

Not even CeCe's objections would deter him. She was a teenager who knew barely anything about life. It would be different if she didn't like Mia or if her and Mia's relationship was contentious. But they got along great. His daughter didn't see the bigger picture. But he certainly did.

"Alright. I think it's time to pack it up for the day. The crowd is dwindling." Dante said as he walked over to Mia.

"You don't have to tell me twice. Woo! It was a good day, but exhausting." Mia sagged a bit.

"How about after this we get dinner? I owe you at least that." Dante offered.

"Sure. I'd like that." Mia smiled.

She broke eye contact first and busied herself with packing up the leftover food. Dante smiled. He was a devious man, but he was definitely a persistent one. He didn't get to where he was in life by being passive. Just like she went for what she wanted, so did he.

An hour and a half later, they sat at a table in a dark corner of a mom-and-pop bar. Mia moaned as she took her first bite of fish from her fish-n-chips platter.

"See? I told you." Dante grinned. "The best fish-n-chips in town."

"You did. I'll admit I was skeptical."

"I'm a foodie. You kinda have to be as a chef. And just because a place looks questionable, doesn't mean they don't have amazing food. Some of the best places I've ever eaten were dives like this," Dante said.

"Well, I'm glad you brought me here. I'll have to remember to bring my girls."

"You all seem to be very close."

"We are. Since our freshman year in college."

“That’s amazing that you all have kept so tight. I lost touch with my friends in Italy. I do talk to my friends from the adult entertainment industry, but it hasn’t been the same since I left.” Dante shrugged.

“So, what happened there? How did you get involved in the porn industry? I mean, I can assume. But I’d rather hear your story from you.” Mia looked at him without judgment.

“Like I’d mentioned before, I came to California with barely a penny to my name,” Dante began. “I worked in restaurants as a busboy, waiter, and even a short order cook. But the restaurants were rundown places that didn’t pay much, if at all. The staffs were mostly made up of immigrants. So, they felt they could get away with not paying us. Who would we go to? A lot of them didn’t have papers. And I was running out of time on my own visa. I needed a job to sponsor me for a work visa.

“One night, a group of fancy looking people came into the restaurant I was working in. I was their waiter for the night. At first, I thought that they were Hollywood actors and actresses. I quickly learned they were actors and actresses, but of a different kind.

“The girls flirted with me shamelessly. They thought I was really cute. One of the guys happened to be an adult film director. He asked me, ‘Is this really the life you want? Because you could make more money shooting one scene in one of my films than a couple months working here.’ I didn’t respond right away. I went to get them more drinks. And when I came back, I asked if he could also help me get an extended visa. He told me he could get me citizenship. So, I told him yes on the spot. I would’ve done just about anything to keep from going home with my tail between my legs. And that was that.” Dante finished.

“So, how long did you stay in the industry?”

“Fifteen years.”

“Why so long?”

“You know how it is. Or maybe you don’t. But you get caught up in the day-to-day. I looked up and five years had passed. I was thirty and had barely saved up any money. I’d blown it on partying, expensive clothing, and toys. I bought a ridiculously big house for just me. I threw big parties filled with people I barely knew, just so I wouldn’t feel alone, you know?

“Just living life in the fast lane. But when I got Celeste’s mom pregnant, even though she didn’t want me to be a part of my kid’s life, I knew I had to do better. I sold the big house and got something more modest. I sold all my

toys and fancy shit. Started a savings account for CeCe and another one for me. I worked every single acting job that came my way and searched for others too. I paid my bills and necessities, and banked the rest. In ten years, I'd saved up a decent amount. Good enough to start a small restaurant. But I knew some important people, and they found me someone who would go in as a partner to help finance something bigger. Fancier."

"And so, *Bianchi* was born?"

"Yep."

"Once I received my Michelin-star last year, I was finally able to buy him out. Now, I have full ownership. Honestly, it happened a lot faster for me than other restaurant owners. And it's literally all because of my past career. I met a lot of people in high places."

"Then you should be prouder of your past." Mia quirked an eyebrow at him.

"I know." Dante sighed. "It's just that once you reach a certain level, a level where you get noticed by those even higher, they make you feel like you don't belong. Or that you don't deserve to be there."

"Pssh!" Mia waved his last statement away. "How I see it, you deserve to be there more than they do. You earned your success. Most of them were born into theirs. Honestly, I think they're jealous."

Dante frowned skeptically. "How so?"

"Think about it. Someone insanely talented, who came from nothing, and built a successful business that opened doors into rooms others can only dream of. Compared to them who may not have an ounce of talent, but was born with a silver spoon up their butt. That, sir, is grounds for some serious envy."

"You could be right." Dante rubbed his stubble thoughtfully.

"I am. Remember? I'm always right." Mia smiled brightly.

"Oh, yes. I forgot."

They giggled. Their eyes locked for longer than would be appropriate for two people who were only supposed to be friends. This time Dante looked away first. He didn't want to press it. They dug back into their food before it got cold. Although, Dante was surprised the heat from the tension between them didn't keep it warm.

Dante pulled up in front of Mia's house. There was a spot available right

out front and he parked the car. He turned to her. Her stunning face partially illuminated by the streetlights and porchlights outside.

“Thank you again, Mia. You were such a big help today and you absolutely made it more fun than all my previous block parties.” He confessed.

“You’re welcome. I actually had a lot of fun. I was worried it would be a little depressing. When all it did was inspire me to want to find other ways to help.”

“You do know you’re fucking amazing, right?”

“I have been told.” She tried to lift her nose in the air as if she was stuck up, but immediately broke into a little laugh.

Without thought, Dante reached out and wrapped a hand around the back of her neck and pulled her across the center console. His lips captured hers. She gasped into his mouth, not expecting the bold move.

His tongue took advantage and dipped into her mouth. This time, she didn’t try to take the lead. She let him be the aggressor. A sign she was beginning to trust him enough to let him dominate her. Comfortable enough to relax in her feminine energy.

Dante didn’t know how or who hurt her in the past. But he knew it had to be serious. Whatever it was hadn’t affected her confidence. But maybe her confidence in men. So, instead, she treated them like pieces of meat she could dispose of once she’d had her fill.

Because of that, Dante stopped the kiss before he lost control. He refused to be another notch on her bedpost.

Dante broke the kiss and Mia gasped her displeasure.

“What the fuck, Dante!” She finally snapped. “Don’t get something started you can’t finish.”

“I am sorry, Mia. You just looked so beautiful, I had to kiss you,” Dante said. “But come on. Be honest with yourself. When was the last time you built up tension? When was the last time you stopped and savored seduction? Yes, sex is wonderful. But it’s even better when you’ve held back.

“In fact,” he leaned towards her. Dante cupped her face and lightly stroked his thumb over her bottom lip. Mia’s mouth popped open instantly. Her pink little tongue peeked out to flick against the pad of his thumb. Dante clenched his jaw in response and felt his dick jump in his khakis. “I want you to restrain yourself from masturbating. And don’t fuck anyone else.”

Mia flinched back and gave him a cutting look.

“Not because we’re together or I’m trying to control you. But because we both want this. We both want to fuck until we’re unable to move. But when we do, I want the pleasure to be so intense that you speak in tongues. And that can only happen if you build pressure here,” Dante said against her lips as his hand cupped her sex through the fabric of her jeans.

Mia shuddered. Her gasp of breath fluttered against his mouth.

“Don’t you want that, amore mio?” He finished the question with a flick of his tongue on her lips.

“Yes!” She gasped.

“Then do as I instructed. Hold back. Let it build. And I promise I will give you what you need.”

He slowly let his hand slide up the crotch of her jeans. Her heat radiated from that secret place.

“Fuck!” She moaned. “Okay.”

“Good girl.”

Mia gave him a look. “Be careful. I’ll allow that phrase, but only in sexual situations.”

“Of course.” Dante nodded.

Her walls were still strong. He’d remove three bricks and she’d replace two.

But slow and steady wins the race.

“Trust me. The only place I want to dominate you is in the bedroom. I like your fire. Your passion. The way you challenge me. I would never take that away from you. But I want you soft, trembling, and begging me in bed.” He finished with a kiss on her nose.

“I think I can do that.” Mia pressed her head back against the headrest and nodded slightly.

“Perfect. Now, one more thing.”

“What now?”

“Are you on birth control?”

“Of course. IUD for life.”

“Good.” He paused for a moment. “I also want you to get tested. I’ll do the same. Because once I fuck you, I want nothing between us. I’d have to buy stock in condoms the number of times I plan fuck you.”

“Shit.” Mia hissed. “Alright, done.”

“Fantastic. Now, go get some rest. You worked your butt off today.” Dante grinned at her.

“Goodnight, Dante.”

“Goodnight, Mia.”

He leaned forward and without much thought, Mia moved towards him like a magnet. They kissed softly. The goodbye kiss of lovers who’ve been together years.

Then she opened the door, stepped out, and walked to her front door. Dante watched to make sure she got in safely and to watch her walk away. He breathed in deeply and expelled it quickly as he tried to calm his raging body.

“Soon.”

Chapter Eighteen

Mia relaxed back on her couch. Full wine glass in hand. The latest streaming show on. It was Friday night and she was going to enjoy it.

Her phone chimed. She rolled her eyes and almost decided to ignore it. But just in case it was a client panicking, she decided to look at it. It was a text from Celeste.

Celeste:

Hey, Mia! Is it cool if we cancel tomorrow? My friend wants to hangout. I swear it's just us girls.

Mia:

No worries. Be safe and have fun. I'll see you next week?

Celeste:

Absolutely!

Mia:

Perfect. See you then.

Celeste:

C u!

“Fine by me. A free day, all to myself.” Mia said to herself and sunk even deeper in the couch.

A few minutes later, Mia's cell started ringing.

“Jesus! Leave me alone!”

She grabbed her phone. Her heart stuttered and then started pounding at the name that stared back at her. She refused to acknowledge her body's reaction.

“Dante.” She whispered. She swiped the green accept button. “Hello, Dante.”

“Mia.” He breathed into the phone.

Just the sound of her name in his deep Italian accent made her pussy respond like Pavlov’s Dog.

“What’s going on? I just got a text from Celeste not that long ago.”

“I know. And that’s exactly why I’m calling you.”

“Ooookay?”

“I was wondering since CeCe won’t be here that maybe we could have a playdate.”

Mia sat up straight.

“What do you have in mind?”

“It’s supposed to be a beautiful and unseasonably warm day tomorrow. So, how about you come over about 11 a.m. I will cook for you, if you’ll be my helper. Then we can go for a swim in my pool. And after that...a nap.”

“Excuse me? I was following you, until you said ‘nap.’”

“Well, a cuddle and a nap.”

“Still not following.”

“First of all, when you were a child, what did you do after a day of swimming?”

“Ate and passed out.” Mia nodded.

“Exactly. You can tell a lot about a person by how they cuddle and sleep. Besides, I want to be close to you. Intimate. But without the sex.”

“I really don’t know about this whole seduction thing. Honestly, it seems like you’re trying to slowly kill me. Death by lack of orgasm.”

Mia heard his chuckle over the phone.

“Please?” He asked softly.

“Fine. Tomorrow at 11.” Mia was finding it unusually hard to say no to him.

“Yes.”

“Oh, by the way.”

“Yeah?”

“I got my STI results back. All clear. I’ll send you the email.” Mia informed him.

“I got mine back as well. All negative. I will also email you mine.”

“Good.”

“That still doesn’t mean we’re having sex yet, though.”

“Ugh! Whatever. See you tomorrow.”

“Until then.”

The line went dead.

“So much for relaxing.”

Mia got up and walked into her room to pick an outfit and a swimsuit for the next day.

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Chapter Nineteen

“Jesus Christ, Mia!” Dante said after opening the door for his guest.

She was in the shortest denim shorts imaginable. Her ass cheeks hung out the back. Her luscious thighs on full display. On top, she wore a white button-up shirt. But the buttons weren’t buttoned at all. And she’d gathered each side and tied them beneath her breasts. Breasts that he was sure were unbound. Not a bra to be seen, if the hint of her brown nipples underneath were any indication.

“I think you’re going to be the death of me.” Dante pressed a hand to his chest.

“Hey, this was your choice. I’m just showing you what you could have if you give up this celibate seduction.” Mia shrugged.

“It’s all about willpower. You just took me off guard. I have no problem walking around with my dick hard.” Dante winked at her.

“I see that.” Mia said, looking down at the evidence.

“Come. I have everything out ready to be prepped and cooked.”

“What are we having?”

“A nice cool antipasto salad. Bacon and cheese stuffed burgers with a nice garlic aioli on top and whatever toppings you want on it. I have homemade potato chips in the air fryer as we speak. And for dessert a three-layer cheesecake cup.”

“Holy shit!” Mia looked at the spread on the massive island. “I think you’re really trying to make me gain weight. I eat far too well when I’m around you.”

“I certainly wouldn’t mind.” He looked her up and down. “But for your sake, I’ll ease up on all the fattening foods from here on.”

“Hey, let’s not be too hasty. I don’t see you *that* often. I can handle the calories once every week or two.” Mia grinned. “By the way, your house really is beautiful. Modest but well done. Even if it’s a little too masculine for a single father of a teenage girl.

“I know. I desperately need your help to change things up.” Dante said and pressed his hands together in a praying gesture.

“I’ll create a virtual mockup of some ideas for you. And then we’ll see.”

“Thank you!”

“Now, what do you need me to do?”

“I mainly need you to put together the antipasto salad.” He pointed to the items on one side of the counter. “Cut the cherry tomatoes in half. Cut the provolone cheese and salami into cubes. And chop the romaine lettuce and the rest is ready to be placed in the salad as is.”

“Got it.”

Mia walked over to the sink to wash her hands before getting started.

Dante couldn’t stop smiling as they worked side by side. The banter. The laughter. The subtle touches as they moved around each other. The intimacy of it all was exactly what he’d been craving.

He’d never had it. Before he left Italy, he’d been focused on school and building a career. Plus, he’d always known that his destiny was in the U.S. He knew he couldn’t date anyone seriously, only to leave them. Then once he arrived, he worked night and day to make rent and put food in his belly. Which then quickly transitioned to partying and fucking his way through LA.

He’d started yearning for more by his mid-thirties. But the women that surrounded his life weren’t looking for a relationship or weren’t what he was looking for.

Mia had been a complete surprise. Sexy and beautiful. Yet so much more than that. Her outward appearance and what she was willing to show on the surface was just the beginning. She had so many layers to her. Dante felt honored that she let him in enough to see even a fraction of her depth.

“Okay, we can nibble on the antipasto and then swim for a bit, since it’s not too heavy to eat before swimming. I have beer. Or there is wine if you’d prefer.”

“Wine would probably make me too hot today. This is definitely beer drinking weather.”

“Perfect.” Dante said and handed her a bottle after popping the top. “Then after swimming, I’ll put the burgers on the grill.”

“Sounds like a plan. I just need to change into my bathing suit.”

“Alright. I’ll be waiting for you in the pool.” Dante said. “The bathroom is just down that hall, first door on the right.”

He then bent down and kissed her forehead. She gave him a withering

look, but didn't say anything.
Progress.

~ ~ ~

Mia strutted through the sliding doors and out into his backyard. It was a decent size for San Francisco. A really nice sitting area underneath a pergola surrounded with lighting, that Mia knew would be adorable at night, sat to her left. In the middle of the elegant outdoor furniture was a coffee table with a fire feature in the center. To her right was an outdoor kitchen, where the grill was the centerpiece.

The pool was large and welcoming and a few feet from the door. On one end the pool had three steps up to a sun shelf with permanent white chaise lounge chairs that sat in the water. A place to tan, half in and half out of the water, in order to keep cool. He'd placed the antipasto and beers on the little table between the lounge chairs.

Dante glided through the water as he did a few laps. His tanned olive skin glistened with the sun reflecting off the water that clung to it. Mia wondered if it was normal to be envious of water.

He wore olive green with a white waistband swim briefs that complemented his skin perfectly. They were sinfully short and showed off all of his thigh meat.

Definitely Hoochie Daddy swim shorts. Mia thought as she watched him.

Dante must have felt her presence. He reached the ledge and stopped. The way he broke through the water. Head back. Eyes closed. Long lashes wet and spiked. He was model hot and a girl's wet dream.

He opened his eyes and his mouth dropped open.

"Okay, I thought your outfit was gonna kill me. But this..." Dante looked her up and down. "I have no words."

Mia's bathing suit was a string bikini in a hot coral and goldenrod print. The strings of the bikini top she'd wrapped around and crisscrossed the front of her waist and tied in the back. Little triangles barely covered her breasts and mound. She'd tied the tiny matching sarong low on her hips. It was sheer and didn't hide much.

"Like it?" She grinned slyly.

“Like it?! Fuck. I love it. You’re definitely testing my resolve.”

Mia made a show of slowly untying the sarong and tossing it to the side. She turned and walked towards the sun shelf, showing off her barely covered ass. She felt his eyes eating her up. When she turned to step into the shallowly filled sun shelf, she saw that she was right. He’d watched her the whole way. She walked down the steps into the deeper water. They both went under water and swam towards each other, meeting in the middle.

The moment they reached each other, Dante pulled her into his arms. Mia wrapped her legs around him. He slid his hand around the back of her neck, under her wet curls and pulled her in for a searing kiss.

Mia could feel his desire against her thinly covered sex. She used her legs to pull him closer. She ground against him. Dante released her with a gasp.

“No. Nope. I’m not giving in.” Dante said through clenched teeth.

“Fine.” Mia said before dipping back down into the water.

She swam back over to the sun shelf. She crested the water and walked up the steps to the chairs like a goddess of water. She turned, sat on a chair, and rested back. She took a few bites of the food and then sipped her beer.

Dante watched all of this from a distance. Once she assumed he’d cooled down enough, he swam over to her. The way he stepped out of the water, all glistening muscles and slicked back hair, he looked like a younger Poseidon. All he was missing was a trident.

“You could tempt a saint,” Dante said.

“As could you, Sir.”

His little swim shorts could barely contain all the meat up front. If he wore them in public, Mia was certain no one would be able to ignore all that. Even straight guys.

He sat on the other chair and helped himself to the food. She watched him grab a handful and pop bits of cheese, olives, and different meats into his mouth. Maybe it was the lack of sex, but she couldn’t stop soaking in this man. Every single thing he did was sexy as fuck. But it was more than that. It was him as a person she was starting to feel obsessed with.

That obsession that comes with falling for someone. Something she hadn’t felt since high school. Something that struck fear and excitement in her heart.

I should cut ties with him now, before I get any deeper. But what about Celeste?

In order to cut all ties with him, Mia knew she'd have to end her mentorship with his daughter. Because there was no way she could continue spending time with Celeste and not see him.

Mia knew that she couldn't do that to Celeste. Her mother had already left her in the most tragic way possible. Mia didn't think the girl could handle another important adult leaving her life. No, Mia had to stay. She just needed to put up more barriers around her heart to keep this man out.

They sated their appetites long enough to swim for a while and work them up all over again. Dante walked over and opened up the little storage box against the house. He pulled out two super soaker water guns. He jumped back in the pool and handed her one. They pulled floaties and other toys into the pool to act as things to hide behind. Mia hid behind a giant unicorn floatie. She jumped out to shoot Dante. But instead, she got shot right in the eye. She bent over and held her eye.

"Ah! You shot me in the eye, you jerk!"

Dante rushed over to her.

"I'm so sorry! Let me see." He cupped her chin gently to raise her face.

Mia swiftly brought up the gun between them and shot him from under his chin. The water went straight up his nose. Mia screeched with laughter and swam away.

"Aww!" Dante shouted as he held his nose. "That was cold."

When they'd had enough of the water guns, they splashed each other. Did handstands together. He pretended to be a shark trying to grab her legs underwater. Mia screamed and giggled as she tried to escape him. But he was too fast for her. He grabbed her leg and pulled her under, where he'd reward her with an underwater kiss.

Mia felt like she was seventeen again. Playing in the cool water on a hot afternoon with the boy she had a crush on. Even them hiding it from Celeste, gave her the feeling of sneaking behind their parents' backs to be together. It was an element of excitement she hadn't expected.

"You ready for lunch?" Dante asked after they splashed up from underwater.

"Yes! I'm starving again." Mia groaned.

"Coming right up."

Dante swam over to the ledge and pulled himself out the pool. He walked over to a large fluffy beach towel and dried off. Mia folded her arms on the ledge, rested her chin on top, and enjoyed the view.

Dante started up the grill, and then walked inside the house. A few minutes later, he came out with the gourmet burgers covered in aluminum foil on a metal cookie sheet.

“Need any help?” Mia offered.

“No, my dear. You stay right there and enjoy the water. Would you like another beer?”

“Yes, please.”

He walked over to the cooler and pulled out another ice-cold bottle. He popped the cap and brought it over to her. He knelt down and Mia pushed up to meet him. She stole a soft kiss from him. Then she snatched the beer and pushed off the wall, back to the middle of the pool.

“Thanks.” She smirked, raised a brow, and took a swig.

As he grilled the burgers, they talked about Celeste and the improvements she’d made since meeting Mia. And they talked about his restaurant and the plans he had for eventually expanding to other major cities.

“Food’s ready. Come eat.” Dante called to her.

He’d already brought out the homemade potato chips. She settled onto one side of the loveseat. Dante brought her a plate with her burger. Laid out on the table were all the fixings. Lettuce, sliced tomato, pickle chips, and some condiments. Mia dipped her finger in the aioli mayo on her bun and tasted it. She sagged a little. She only added the usual staples of a burger, sans condiments since the homemade mayo was so good.

Dante came over with his plate and sat next to her. He immediately “manspread.” His leg from knee to almost hip pressed into hers. Normally she’d snap at a man for manspreading, but she enjoyed being skin to skin with him. Even if she barely wanted to admit it to herself.

Mia bit into the hamburger. The melted cheese and bacon inside with the seasoned beef and garlic aioli blended together on her tongue perfectly. She closed her eyes and moaned deeply.

Next, she popped a homemade chip in her mouth. It was crispy and perfectly salted. On the second bite of her burger, she did a little happy dance in her seat.

I don’t know. I might have to rethink my ‘No Relationships’ rule.

Mia didn’t think she’d be able to give up all the good food so easily.

Instead of ‘Friends with Benefits’ or ‘Fuck Buddies’, maybe we could be ‘Friends Who Fuck and Feast.’

She snorted at the thought.

“What?” Dante asked curiously.

“Nothing.”

“Come on. Tell me.” He coaxed.

“Fine. I was thinking instead of ‘friends with benefits’ we could be ‘friends who fuck and feast.’”

Dante snorted too. “That’s a new one.”

His laughter died down. And his face became pensive.

“What’s wrong?” Mia asked.

“Nothing.”

Mia gave him a long-suffering look.

“Are you really going to say ‘nothing’ after you pushed me to answer you?”

“I know.” Dante gave a small sardonic chuckle. “It’s just something I think you don’t want to hear.”

“Ah. Well, I’ll leave you alone.”

Mia had a feeling it had something to do with him wanting more. And since she wasn’t ready to have that conversation, she immediately backed off.

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“It looks like you get the honor of seeing what my hair looks like completely in its natural state.” Mia said. “I can literally feel it growing.”

They’d finished lunch. Now, they relaxed back. Drank another beer. And let their food digest.

Dante looked over at her. Sure enough, her normally tamed curls were frizzy and twice their normal size. It was like a mane of black with golden tips.

“I actually like it. It matches your personality. Wild and free.” Dante smiled at her.

He reached across the space between them and lightly tugged at an untamed strand. She just looked at him thoughtfully.

Dante often wondered what she thought of him. Of their time together. But he figured it was best he didn’t ask. Mia wasn’t exactly the type to tell you what you wanted to hear.

“I’m ready for that nap.” Dante said and scooted forward on the loveseat.

“If you’d like to take a shower first, there’s an outdoor one right there.”

“Yeah, I think that’s a good idea. I can feel the chlorine cracking my skin.” Mia stood up. “I can wash it off and put on some lotion I brought with me.”

“Be my guest.” Dante gestured towards it. “There’s soap in there. As well as shampoo and conditioner. Stuff that works for Celeste’s hair.”

“Oh, perfect.” Mia said and disappeared behind the wall.

The shower had three full walls, one being the side of the house. The other walls were made of stained wooden slats and beige stone. And there was one partial wall. It gave privacy as well as enough room to walk into the shower.

Dante heard the shower come to life. Just the thought of her bathing herself made him hard. Everything about her made him aroused.

*She thinks it’s frustrating for her. I’ve never gone this long without fucking someone I’m interested in. And I’ve never been more interested in someone as I am in her.*

Dante felt like his balls were going to explode. He’d told her not to masturbate or fuck anyone else. Well, he’d done the same.

He knew it was a bad idea, but he couldn’t ignore the pull. Dante stood and walked towards the shower. Mia was in the middle of washing her hair as he came around the half wall. Luckily, her bathing suit was still on. He wasn’t sure he had enough restraint if she was naked. Her insanely round, plump ass was tempting enough in the tiny bottoms.

Her back was to him, so she didn’t see him step behind her. He reached up and placed his hands in her hair and started to massage. To Mia’s credit, she didn’t even jump. She must have sensed him or anticipated that he’d come. The only reaction she gave was when her body tensed slightly. Then she relaxed back into him.

Dante massaged her scalp and Mia moaned lightly. He shut his eyes and clenched his teeth. He felt his swim shorts shrink a size as he grew in them. He shook his head and focused on washing her hair.

He helped her rinse the shampoo. She applied the conditioner. As she did, he grabbed the bar of soap, rubbed it between his hands and then began to soap her at her neck and shoulders. He kneaded the muscles there.

Mia twisted her curls up into a messy knot on top of her head to let the conditioner sit. He turned her to face the wall. His hands slipped under her bikini top. As he lathered her breasts, her nipples puckered up into little

pebbles. Her head fell back onto his shoulder. He stayed a little longer than necessary. Mia rubbed her ass against his aching cock. He immediately pulled back.

“Amore mio, please don’t.” Dante hissed.

“Why not? You want it and so do I. Let’s just get it over with.”

“Oh, yes. ‘Let’s just get it over with’ is so sexy.” He said against her ear. Mia shuddered.

“Aren’t you tired of just fucking? Wham bam, thank you ma’am. Where is the pleasure in that?”

“Ugh! I know you’re right, but still. I don’t have to like it. Oh my God!” Mia shouted as he dragged the bar of soap to her mound. “Don’t be cruel.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll stop.”

His breath fanned her ear. He dragged his lips lightly down her neck and then kissed a trail down her shoulder.

Dante finally stopped torturing her. He turned her around and knelt in front of her. He washed each leg. Her hands clutched his shoulders as he continued down her body. When he was finished, as he stood back up in front of her, he slid his arms around her. His hands dipped into her bikini bottoms. He soaped and kneaded the round globes of her ass cheeks. On several passes, he came within centimeters of her rosette. And by the way she pressed her ass back searching for more, he had a feeling Mia liked her ass ate and possibly anal sex as well.

*Noted.*

“My turn.” Mia held out her hand after he finished her back.

He passed her the soap. It slipped out of her hands.

“Oops.” She said innocently.

Mia slowly turned and bent over to retrieve it. Her ass was perfect level to his cock. Her level of petty was currently unmatched.

“You little minx,” Dante said.

He slapped her wet ass. It made the most satisfying sound.

Mia shot up and rubbed the spot. She gave him the side eye. He winked at her.

“There’s more where that came from. Don’t tempt me. Instead of getting fucked, I’ll spank your ass until it’s red.” Dante warned, letting his dominant side shine through.

“Harrumph.”

Mia didn’t protest any more. Instead, she began to lather up her hands.

Like him, she started at his neck to his shoulders. She massaged and caressed down his chest. Her fingertips lingered at his nipples. He tried to stifle a giggle when she moved under his arms.

“Ticklish?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Uh huh.”

She walked around him and continued down his back. When she was finished there, she came back to his front. Her hands stroked down his abs. Once she dropped down to wash his legs, she stopped. It was a few moments before he realized she wasn’t bathing him anymore.

Dante looked down and saw Mia just staring at his crotch. He was hard as a rock. His cock had slithered down his shorts and about an inch or two of shaft and the pierced tip hung out of his shorts. Mia glanced up at him and the fire in her eyes scorched him and damn near the earth around them.

The way he wanted to fuck her mouth, her pussy, and that ass; it took every ounce of strength he had not to shove down his shorts and let her do what she so desperately wanted to do. His whole body trembled with the need.

*Come on, body. Just a little bit longer.*

“Don’t. Just ignore it. I am.”

“You sure.”

Dante took in a deep breath. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but yes. I’m sure.”

Mia nodded and finished washing his legs. Afterwards, she shampooed his hair. She massaged his scalp and gently scraped her nails across it.

Once they were done and they’d dried each other off, Dante took her hand and led her into the house. He guided her up the stairs to his large master bedroom. It was all dark wood and masculine furniture. The star of his room was the massive custom-made platform bed. He’d gotten it made during his partying days, when it was nothing to have group sex on a Wednesday night. The cozy charcoal gray comforter he’d chosen made the big bed even more welcoming.

“That bed is insane!” Mia exclaimed. “You could fit like 8 people on it.”

“Ten actually.”

Mia’s head whipped around to look at him. Dante gave her a sly grin.

“I’m impressed.”

“It was during my partying days.”

“I’m sure.”

Mia shivered next to him.

“You cold?”

“Yeah. I think from being in the sun for so many hours. I probably got a little burnt and now I’m feeling that chill.”

“Hold on just a sec.”

Dante strode into his walk-in closet. He found an oversized white sweatshirt and green joggers. He walked back out with them and handed them to her.

“The bathroom is right through there.”

“Thanks.”

She disappeared into the bathroom. While she changed, Dante went back into the closet and changed into a pair of navy joggers and a white t-shirt. He came back out and asked Alexa to turn on some relaxing music. The music she chose was soothing meditative music.

A huge smile spread across Dante’s face when Mia reemerged from his bathroom. The joggers fit her like a glove. The men’s clothing was not exactly accommodating for the very curvy female form. But the sweatshirt nearly drowned her. She looked adorable and sexy at the same time.

“Ready?” Dante asked as he placed a knee on the bed and held out his hand to her.

“As I’ll ever be. This is still so weird.”

“Just come on. It won’t be that bad. You act as if I’m asking you to eat your brussels sprouts.”

“It certainly feels like it.”

Dante couldn’t help but chuckle at her face as she frowned at the bed. But she finally walked over and took his hand. She crawled onto the bed and he followed. Dante grabbed two pillows. He handed one to her and took the other and laid his head down. They faced each other.

“Now what?”

“Well, people have been known to talk while in bed.”

“I prefer dirty talk.”

“That’s not happening. So, how about you turn on your other side. I think that’ll make it easier for you.”

Mia followed his suggestion and turned over. As soon as she was settled, Dante slid closer to her. He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her back to him. He aligned their bodies just so. Their heights being so close,

they made perfect spoons for each other.

After they laid quiet for a few minutes, Dante decided to broach a subject he'd been hesitant to bring up for fear she'd shut down. But being in such an intimate position and her facing away from him, giving her the comfort of not looking him in the eye, now was as good a time as any.

"Mia?"

"Hmm?"

"Why are you so against relationships? Why do you keep men at arm's length? What happened and who do I have to beat up?" Dante added a joke when she stiffened slightly.

She didn't answer for a few long moments. Then she took a deep fortifying breath.

"I was married before."

Dante's eyes widened. He would've never guessed.

"We were high school sweethearts and best friends. Or so I thought." She paused.

"Go on." He coaxed.

"Well, we got married after I graduated from Berkeley. Everything was fine until he joined this church. He got really into it and barely had time for me. He wanted children, but I wasn't ready or didn't want any at all actually.

"Then we stopped having sex altogether. I've always been an overly sexual person. So, I was not cool with no sex from my own husband. He almost seemed repulsed by me. He said that he was either too tired, too busy, or felt that sex without trying to procreate was wrong. I was so confused. And angry." Mia sighed heavily.

"What happened to push you to divorce? Or did he... Did he..."

"Die? Ha! I almost wish he had. It would've been better." Mia almost growled. "No, I found out when I found his second phone that he and the pastor had a fucking child sex trafficking ring going on in the basement of the church."

"You've got to be fucking kidding me?" Dante actually shot up on his elbow.

Mia rolled over to face him. Her face was sad. Dante wished he could take it back for her.

"Nope." She shook her head against the pillow. "It's all true. I immediately ran to the police station. Literally drove there in my nightgown and slippers.



“They were arrested on the spot. Charged with kidnapping, the sex trafficking of children, and molestation.”

Dante’s eyes widened with an unspoken question.

“Yeah, my ex had a thing for younger girls, which was the real reason why he no longer wanted to have sex with me.”

“My God, Mia! I am so sorry.”

“It’s okay. It was years ago.”

“Doesn’t make it better. And you’re obviously still affected by it.”

“Yeah, well. There ain’t shit I can do about it. So, I just live my life. But I will admit, what happened is part of the reason I got involved with Open Arms. I felt if I would’ve investigated sooner. Followed him to see what he was up to. *Something!* I could’ve saved more kids. So, I’m giving back now.” Mia shrugged.

“It was not your fault or your responsibility to right his wrongs.”

“But it does make me feel better. Helps me sleep better.”

Dante laid back down against his pillow. He scooted a little closer to her and wrapped his arm around her. His hand stroked her back soothingly. Her eyes closed heavily. The events of the day exhausting her.

“You are an extraordinary woman, Mia Ayala.”

“You’re not so bad yourself.” She said sleepily.

He stretched his neck forward and kissed her forehead.

“Alexa, set an alarm for two hours.”

“Why two?” She asked half in and half out of consciousness.

“To make sure you’re gone before CeCe gets back.”

“Mmm...”

And with that she was out.

Dante watched her breathe in and out peacefully. He stroked a strand of curls back from her cheek. He leaned forward and softly kissed her lips.

“I think I’m falling in love with you.” He whispered.

“Ditto.” She said in her sleep.

Dante didn’t know if in sleep she was being more forthcoming or if she was just delirious. Either way, he still couldn’t stop the spread of hope that just filled his heart.

## Chapter Twenty

“Okay, sis! Look at you all tan and glowing. Looking like somebody’s bronzed goddess.” Royal exclaimed as Mia sat down at their table.

“Yesssss! What have you been up to, ma’am?” Kennedy asked.

It was Sunday brunch and it was obvious the girls were ready to gossip.

“Can I get my mimosa first?” Mia huffed.

“Nope. Spill it, sister. What have you been up to?” Kennedy pressed.

“Yes, I am quite invested in you and the chef.” Payton nodded.

“I concur!” Royal chimed in.

“You ladies better be glad I love y’all.” Mia rolled her eyes.

She still waited until the waiter came by to fill up her glass. She took a couple of sips. The girls stared at her in exasperation.

“Okay! Sheesh!” Mia put down her drink and began. “So, Celeste texted me Friday night and told me she had plans to hangout with a friend. Then only a few minutes later, Dante called me and asked if I could come over for a playdate. Food, swimming, and napping.”

“Napping!?!” They all said in unison.

“Shh!” Mia hushed them as other tables looked over at them. “I’ll explain, just let me get it out.”

“Sorry.” They all cringed.

“Okay, so. I went over. I helped him with getting the food ready. God, the food was bomb as hell. Anyway, we swam and played in the pool like teenagers. Then we ate and talked. Then we showered together in the outdoor shower. And after that, we went up to his room and cuddled until we fell asleep. He set the alarm for two hours, so I could be up and gone before Celeste got back. He kissed me at the door and I left.” Mia lifted her hands and then dropped them to the table.

“That’s it?!” Royal asked.

“No, sex at all?” Kennedy looked perplexed.

“YOU. Mia Ayala, spent a whole afternoon with a man and didn’t have

sex?” Payton’s eyes bulged.

“That is correct. It’s not like it was my choice. But we did kiss quite a bit. And there was a little grinding until he stopped me.”

“Okay.” Kennedy started. “Let me get this straight. He asked you to be his plus one to a fancy event? Where you had a blast. Then he asked you to help with a block party to feed the homeless and you guys had a great time? And now, you’ve had an afternoon date where you flirted, kissed, and napped together?”

“Um...yes, to all of the above.” Mia confirmed.

“I’m sorry to tell ya, but you’re dating him.” Royal said.

“I...am...**not!**”

“Yeeeeeah, you are.” Kennedy agreed.

“I’m not even that familiar with it because I married the first man I dated, but that definitely sounds like dating to me.” Payton interjected.

“I’m just in it to get the D.”

“Does he make you laugh?”

“Yes.”

“Do you like being around him?”

“Yes.”

“Have you told him personal things you don’t tell anyone outside of us?”

“Umm...yeah.” Mia thought about how she’d opened up to him about her past the day before.

“Ma’am, you’re dating.” Kennedy said again.

“Aht aht.” Royal held up a finger. “Before you deny it again, if you don’t think you’re dating...*he* does.”

“Yes, he has initiated every single date. He dresses them up as if it is only a hangout to ease your mind and keep you from running. Mia, you’ve definitely been hoodwinked.” Payton smiled at her.

Mia fell back into her chair. “Well, I’ll be damned. He tricked me into dating him.”

“How did you not realize?” Kennedy squinted at her.

“Girl, I’m blinded by lack of orgasms and dreams of pretty dicks with cock jewelry. I can’t be trusted.” Mia shook her head.

“Haven’t you at least pleased yourself or fucked someone else in the meantime?” Royal asked.

“No! The night of the block party, he told me he wanted to build the tension to make the sex even better when we eventually have it. So, he

instructed me not to masturbate or have sex with anyone else and he'd do the same.

“Not that I was able to orgasm anyway, when I did masturbate. It's like my vagina is broken. And I haven't been interested in fucking anyone else, honestly. Only that dick will do, currently. And then when I'm finished with him, I can get him out of my system and move on with my life.” Mia finished.

The girls sat there quietly. They only stared at her with varying expressions of shock.

“What?”

“Are you falling for him?” Kennedy asked.

“What?! Absolutely not!”

“Because you only wanting one dick. And being so affected by him that you can't even get off by yourself. That's just not you.” Kennedy said.

“At least not the you we've known for the past several years since ‘he who shall not be named.’ Royal added.

“But you're absolutely more like the Mia we first met in college.” Payton added the last nail in the coffin.

Mia's heart pounded a little too thickly in her chest. She started to shake her head quickly.

“Nope. No. Fuck that shit. Dante Bianchi is about to get the shit fucked outta him. And then when I get that dick, I'm done! No more sneaky dates or any shit like it. After I'm through with him, he's back to just being the dad of the girl I mentor.” Mia proclaimed passionately.

“Aww...Mia. Don't be like that. You guys really seem to be hitting it off. Don't cut off your nose to spite your face.” Kennedy pleaded.

“I just can't, guys. I really can't. It's been great. But this is where it needs to stop.”

The girls didn't say more. But they did look at her sadly the rest of their brunch date.

*I won't bend. I won't!*

## Chapter Twenty-One

**Mia:**

**Hey, Dante. Are you home? I wanted to drop off the clothes you let me borrow.**

**Dante:**

**Yeah, I actually am. But there's no rush on returning them. Not that I wouldn't mind seeing you.**

**Mia:**

**I did laundry and they're just gonna sit here. Might as well.**

**Dante:**

**Sure. Stop by whenever.**

**Mia:**

**Will do.**

Mia smiled deviously as she closed out her texts.

It had been a week since their playdate. After their afternoon together, Mia had dropped Celeste off at her friend's house for a sleepover, about an hour ago. So, Mia knew the teen would be gone all night.

"Operation Get that Dick, has officially commenced." Mia said to herself.

She walked into her room to prepare.

"Mia." Dante greeted her. "Wow! You look gorgeous."

"Thank you."

She smiled knowing that the trap was set.

He was only complimenting her face and hair. He hadn't even seen the rest of her yet, since she was wearing a long trench coat. A classic move.

Her makeup was sultry. A dramatic smokey eye and red lip. She'd straightened her hair and roller set it with big barrel rollers. The end result were old Hollywood waves that stopped just under her breasts and covered one eye. Very Jessica Rabbit.

"You must be headed out for a night on the town." Dante said as Mia handed him the folded sweatshirt and joggers.

"Not exactly." Mia said.

She leaned against the doorway and let the coat swing open. Underneath she wore nothing other than a black lace garter belt with black stockings attached and sky-high red heels. Her breasts were on full display. Her Brazilian waxed mound tucked prettily at the apex of her thighs.

From the time it took him to look down her body and back up again, the front of Dante's gray sweatpants had tented before her eyes. When his eyes connected with hers again, she tilted her head to the side. Her hair swept in front of one eye. The look she gave him through her lashes was a combination of demure and downright sinful.

"Well..." She said and bit her bottom lip.

Dante stared at her for a little longer as if he was having an internal battle.

"Fuck the plan." He growled.

Dante grabbed her arm and pulled her inside. He slammed the door shut and pushed her up against it. He was on her a split second later. Mia gasped and he took the opening to devour her mouth. Her fingers gathered up his white t-shirt on his back and began to pull it up. Dante released her long enough to step back. Mia whipped the shirt over his head. She could barely toss it to the side before he was on her again.

Her hands frantically stroked over his taut skin. Her fingers slid up his neck and into his silky hair. They gripped the strands tight as she pulled him closer.

Dante pulled back. He stared at her, only inches away from her face. One of his hands tightly clasped the back of her neck, holding her still to keep the eye contact. The other hand skated down her center. From the center of her chest. Between her breasts. Over her trembling tummy. And down her mound.

Mia's mouth popped open in anticipation. One large digit slipped

between the folds that protected her most sacred place. Dante's eyes widened.

"Fuck, Mia! You're so fucking wet."

His finger, now saturated in her arousal, circled her clit twice. That was all it took, after weeks of no orgasms and craving his touch.

"Ahhh!" Mia screamed as her head fell back against the door.

Dante rested his head against the crook of Mia's neck.

"Jesus Christ! You're so responsive."

"It's your fault. Too many weeks with no orgasms will do that."

"I must warn you now. I will cum quick the first time too. Hell, you almost made me cum just now." He chuckled against her neck. "But we have the whole night. I will make it up to you."

"And I will hold you to it."

"Come." Dante grabbed her hand and pulled her towards the stairs.

Mia stopped at the foot of the stairs. She let her coat drop to her feet. Then she passed him and started walking up the stairs in just her garter, stockings, and heels. Her ass on full display in front of him.

"I think you will be the death of me." Dante said. "And you're always showing off that ass. Fair warning... I'm an ass man. I hope you prepped."

"What do I look like? An amateur?" Mia looked back at him.

"Just making sure."

Mia had made sure she cleared the pipes with her anal douche before taking a shower. She enjoyed ass play and always made sure she was ready to receive.

They reached the top of the stairs and he gave her ass a good smack. Mia yelped and then giggled. He growled and stalked her. She kicked off her heels and ran towards his bedroom. He gave chase. He caught her around the waist, just as she reached the bed. He tossed her onto the bed and crawled over her. They laughed as he lowered himself to her lips. The smiles still on their lips as they tried to kiss. Their teeth knocked together a few times. Mia snorted. She turned her head to the side and pressed a hand to her mouth. Dante chuckled against her exposed neck.

In all the sex she'd had, Mia had never experienced playfulness in sex. Everyone was always so serious. Including herself. She felt so lighthearted going into lovemaking.

With featherlight fingertips, Dante brushed her hair back from her face and neck.

"Hmm..." He hummed against her ear. "Since you're in such a giggly

mood, let's see what makes you laugh and what makes you gasp, shall we?"

Mia answered by turning her head further, offering up her neck to him. Dante growled softly. He moved his head slowly from side to side. His lips gently swept back and forth over the skin under her ear. Mia immediately giggled and raised her shoulder to her cheek. Effectively pushing him away.

"Noted." Dante said.

He moved to her shoulder and planted soft kisses there. Mia sighed. Her first gasp came when his warm, wet tongue flicked her nipple. He circled it and then blew cool air over her dusky brown nub. It puckered so tightly it was almost painful. He laved over it with his tongue. Mia gasped again as the sensation sent a shot straight to her clit. She rolled her hips up to find him.

"Also, noted." He breathed against her breasts.

He paid homage to her other breast before making a slow descent to where she'd been waiting for him to be, since she'd watched him give oral to his co-star. But, of course, he bypassed her pussy and moved down her leg. He unclipped her stocking from the garter. Then he kissed down her thigh as he revealed her skin inch by inch. Once he touched the back of her knee, she almost shot off the bed. Dante chuckled and continued down her calf to her foot. Once he whipped away her stocking, he kissed up the sole of her foot and she squirmed. He unclasped the other stocking, slid it down her other leg, and tossed it with the other. He grasped her other foot and then made his way up the other leg.

Once he reached the lotus between her legs, Dante laid down on his stomach. He softly kissed her mound as he slid his hands under her until he gripped her ass. Mia let out a yelp as he rolled over quickly, flipping her up to her knees with his head between her legs as he laid on the bed.

"Fuck, you have a pretty pussy." Dante groaned.

"Thank you." Mia said sweetly.

"Now sit."

Mia grinned down at him and did as she was told. She lowered her dripping pussy to his face. His soft, wide tongue lapped from her opening, up to her clit. He took his time as he made his first initial swirl around it. Mia's head fell back and she slowly rocked her hips back and forth. On every backward roll, her hips trembled with the stirrings of a second orgasm.

When he switched it up and began to gently suckle her clit, while giving it little flicks, Mia cried out.

"Shit, Dante!"



He didn't stop or let up. He ate her pussy with precision. And within minutes, Mia detonated.

"FUCK!!!" She screamed as she bucked against his tongue.

Dante quickly slid out from under her. She felt his hands on her ass cheeks. He spread them wide and buried his face into the split of her ass. His tongue swirled around her rosette and she fell forward until her face was pushed into the mattress. Mia's already pulsing cunt, quivered even more.

Mia flipped around to face him once he had his fill of her ass. She eagerly reached for the waistband of his still tented sweatpants. Mia loved it when a man stayed hard while giving oral. To her it was a sign that pleasing his partner turned him on. And if that was the case, he'd always be willing to pleasure her.

Mia peeled the sweatpants down his narrow hips. Finally, she was able to see him in his full glory, face to face. Or head-to-head, as it were.

His dick was pure perfection. Long, but not so long she'd fear going to the ER later. The thickness was what made her damn near pass out in delight. And it was heavy. Some penises were bouncy and buoyant when hard. His hung wide and weighted. And it wasn't just because of the thick steel ring through the tip. Although, it did add to the weight. She knew she'd be sore later. His cock was a battering ram and her pussy was the entrance he wanted to bust through.

Dante stood to remove his pants. Mia took advantage and slid to the edge of the bed. Before he could stop her, she clasped his shaft. It was just as heavy as it looked. She leaned forward and swirled her tongue around his head. Her tongue flicked the ring and he gasped.

"Noted." She imitated him from earlier.

She sucked him into her mouth. She was careful to keep the ring from her teeth. She drew him into the back of her throat.

"Jesus!" Dante gasped above her.

She glided back to the tip and rolled her neck back down to the base.

"Mia..." He said in a warning tone. "If you keep going, I'm gonna cum."

"Isn't that the point?" She came up for air to respond.

She dipped right back down. Then she started to suck more forcefully.

"Oh...my...God!"

She added her hand and more neck rolls. Within a few strokes he was done.

"I'm cumming. I'm cumming."

Suddenly, Dante let out the deepest, sexiest growl Mia had ever heard. It was animalistic and sent a shiver down her spine, as his cock rippled and sent shots down her throat. She swallowed him down and Dante's knees buckled.

He pulled his dick from her mouth, gripped her hips, and flipped her over. He was still rock hard.

"Knees. Edge of the bed." He grunted.

Mia did as he commanded. As soon as her knees settled on the bed, Dante slid into her wet recesses. He teased and dipped his cock shallowly. Playing 'Just the Tip' to taunt her. Mia rocked back greedily. Dante bent forward and whispered in her ear.

"Let me know when you've had enough."

Mia scoffed.

"I'm not your average woman. I'm sure you'll tap out first."

"Hmm..."

Dante gripped one hip and slapped one cheek hard as he finally plunged in to the base. Mia screamed. Never had a man reached so deeply. Nor hit her G-spot with such precision. She immediately regretted taunting him.

He glided back out to the tip and stroked back in to the base again. Mia collapsed forward. Even her elbows couldn't support her, they trembled so badly. No toy, no cockhead, nothing as hard as his ring had ever been inside her that deep. His length helped him reach that special spot. But the ring pressed on it like nothing before.

"Yes, Mia!" He hissed. "Your pussy is so tight."

Mia was glad that the scales were at least somewhat balanced from the number of Kegels she did a day. She squeezed him as he slid out and his legs shook.

Dante began to roll his hips rhythmically. On every inward thrust, he hit that same spot. Mia felt something building. It wasn't like other internal orgasms she'd had. It felt more intense.

He leaned forward and wrapped her hair around his fist. With his other hand, he wrapped his hand around her throat. He pulled her head back until her back arched. He held on tight to both her neck and her hair and began to deliver punishing strokes. Her ass rippled with every smack of his hips against her cheeks. His mouth by her ear, whispered words in Italian.

"Shit. Shit. Shit." Her cries punctuated every stroke. "Please!"

"Please what?" He panted. "More? Less? Stop?"

"I don't know!"

“I know what you need.”

Miraculously, he increased his speed.

“Oh my God! Oh my God! YESSSSSSS!” Mia screamed as her climax ripped through her.

Dante pulled out and her pussy gushed all over him, her thighs, and the edge of the bed. He slid back in and Mia gasped.

“No more!”

“But I’m not finished and you said that you weren’t the average woman.”

Mia whimpered but didn’t say more.

He took mercy on her and rolled her over. With her ass still at the edge of the bed, he lifted her legs and placed them against his torso. He tapped his ring and head against her clit and rubbed them back and forth over her already swollen and sensitive button. She shuddered. Slowly, he glided back in. This time, they could watch each other’s expressions.

Dante turned his head and kissed her ankle. His hands smoothed down her lush legs as he rolled his hips. Mia bit her lip to keep from crying out. At least from this position his piercing didn’t hit any overly sensitive spots. The position of the ring at the bottom of his cockhead was for hitting the G-spot during doggystyle, reverse cowgirl, and spooning positions.

It still didn’t stop his sheer size and girth from being any less pleasurable in front-facing positions. His finger slipped into her mouth as he thrust deeply. She suckled the digit and stared at him. His hazel eyes lit up in a greenish brown fire. He pulled his finger from her mouth and caressed a path down her sternum. He stopped at her breasts and circled her nipples. Her inner walls clenched around him.

He licked his thumb and reached down to her clit and began to circle the little button.

“Dante…” Mia said in a warning tone.

“Just one more, amore mio.”

He placed a foot on the mattress, leaned into her a bit, and pumped into her rapidly. His thumb still on her clit, he strummed it in time to his strokes. Mia’s body started to shake uncontrollably.

“UNH!!!” She cried as another powerful climax ripped through her.

This time, her pussy milked him so hard Dante finally exploded inside her. He growled with every emptying thrust.

He collapsed on top of her. They both gasped for breath as they let their heartrates slow.

“Death by abstinence. And then death by orgasm. You don’t do anything halfway, do you?” Mia asked.

Dante raised up on his hands to look down at her. He grinned brightly.

“Not really.”

“I need food and sleep.”

“I can definitely help you with the food part. But sleep? I apologize, but you’ll have to catch up on that tomorrow. When I’m finished with you, I’ll have to drive you home in your car and get an Uber back. Because you won’t be able to drive, let alone walk.”

“Dear God.”

## Chapter Twenty-Two

Dante woke up after taking an hour power nap. He blinked sleepily. The soft dawn light gently illuminated the woman in his bed. She faced him. She looked stunning, even in sleep. Even with her mouth slightly slack with a little drool sliding from the corner.

She'd washed her face of all the makeup she had on after their first round. Fresh faced Mia was his favorite version of her. Her long curling lashes laid against the tops of her cheeks. Her cheeks were flushed from a night of sex. Her lush pink lips were even fuller from numerous kisses.

After the first round, Dante had made them pastrami sandwiches. They laughed and ate naked in the middle of his massive bed. Then he fucked her over and over. In the shower. Every corner of the bed. Even the floor. Dante could not get enough of her.

He'd worn her out and he didn't want to wake her peaceful sleep. But he was hard as a rock again.

Dante slowly scooted towards her. He leaned his head forward and softly kissed her nose. Mia stirred slightly and winkled her adorable nose. He laughed to himself. He kissed it again. This time she grumbled and turned over. She unknowingly gave him full access to her full ass.

*Perfect.*

Dante moved closer to wrap his arm around her waist and pulled her back against him. She snuggled deeply into him. In her sleep, she pressed her ass back against his hard length. Dante hissed quietly. He gripped his cock and sought out her entrance passed her luscious ass and between the folds of her labia. He gritted his teeth and his eyes rolled to the back of his head, when he discovered her still sopping wet.

He slipped between her folds easily. He stroked in shallowly. Mia moaned sleepily in response. Then Dante thrust in deeply. His ring hit that secret spot within her and Mia came awake with a gasp.

"Dante!" She cried out.

“Hmm...” He hummed into the back of her neck.

“Aah! You’ve got to be kidding me. You’re not tapped out yet?”

“Not even close.”

“Fuck me.” She hissed under her breath.

“I am.”

“Funny.”

Dante pulled her closer and began to stroke in and out in earnest. Mia gripped his arm that banded around her. Her head thrown back against his chest. Back arched. He planted soft kisses on her neck, back, and shoulder as he plunged in deep.

“Oh my God. Dante!”

“I know.” He whispered in her ear. “I know what you need.”

With his body, he pushed her over onto her stomach. He positioned himself on top, instructed her to keep her legs together, and stroked through her thick thighs and ass into her deep recesses. His hips rolled seductively. And he hit that spot over and over.

Mia’s body tensed. She screamed into the pillow. Then her body convulsed over and over as she came on his dick. Her internal walls rippled around him and Dante quickly followed her. He leaned his forehead against the middle of her back and growled deeply as he spilled whatever he had left in him.

Mia melted into the mattress. As Dante melted into her. Their hearts pounded together in tandem.

Dante couldn’t deny the feelings coursing through him. He couldn’t deny them any more than he could deny the sun rising outside, that would end their night together. He had fallen completely in love with the woman lying under him. And that scared him to death.

She didn’t want a relationship. She’d already been married and that ended in disaster. He didn’t blame her for wanting to steer clear of anything serious. But where did that leave them? Where did that leave *him*?

And he definitely didn’t want to mess up what CeCe had with Mia. His daughter had experienced enough loss.

He knew and decided that for the time being, he would have to keep his feelings to himself. He’d have to wait and feel Mia out first. His gut told him that she cared more than what she was letting on. But she’d have to admit it to herself, before she could even begin to admit it to him.

“Okay, I think I’ve had my fill...for now.” Dante said and kissed the

skin between her shoulder blades.

“I never thought I’d say this, but...thank God!” Mia laughed into the pillow.

The movement forced his softened cock to slip from her folds.

“I’ll get you a towel.” He pushed off the bed.

“Thank you.”

Dante strutted into the bathroom. He wet a towel with cool water. He came back and Mia still hadn’t moved. He grinned. After crawling back over to her, Dante pressed the cool towel to her battered and bruised pussy. Her body tensed.

“Ah! Sssss...” Mia gasped and hissed.

“Sorry.” Dante cringed.

“It’s okay. It’s a good pain.”

Dante finished wiping away his cum mixed with her feminine nectar.

“I better get you home. I have no idea when Celeste will be back.” Dante hopped out of bed as if he’d had a full eight hours of sleep instead of one.

“But first...breakfast. We definitely have time for me to fix you that.”

“You don’t have to get me home. I’m fine.” Mia slowly scooted to the edge of the bed.

She stood and then quickly fell back to the mattress.

“You sure about that?” Dante smirked.

“Yes!” She gave him a pointed look that said ‘shut up.’

Mia tried again. She stood and then took a step. Her knees buckled and she began to crumple to the ground. Dante’s reflexes were fast. He swiftly leapt towards her and caught her before she could reach the ground. She clutched his arms as he helped her stand.

“Where would you like to go?” He asked.

“To the bathroom.” She grumbled.

Dante squatted slightly and lifted her up into his arms. He cradled her like a baby as he walked her into the bathroom. He left to give her some privacy. Once the toilet flushed, he walked back in and helped her back into his room. He sat her on the edge of the bed and then handed her the folded clothes she’d brought back.

“I think you might need these again.” Dante grinned.

“You can wipe that little smirk off your face.” Mia frowned up at him.

“What smirk? I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“That ‘I told you so’ smirk.” She waved at his face. “Fine. I’m having

difficulties walking. Whatever. You don't have to look so smug."

Dante snorted in an attempt to stifle his laughter. Mia's lips twitched. They looked at each other and then burst out laughing. She fell back against the bed.

"I can't believe you damn near fucked me into a wheelchair."

They laughed even harder.

Dante wiped the tears from his eyes after their laughter subsided.

"Come on. Let's eat some breakfast." He stood. "What would you like? Pancakes, waffles, or French toast?"

"Pancakes!"

"I also have some turkey sausage and eggs. Does that sound good?"

"Yes, please!" Mia said urgently. Her stomach growled and she rubbed it. "I could eat everything in your fridge at this point."

"We did burn a lot of calories."

"Indeed." It was Mia's turn to smirk.

Dante helped her get dressed. He helped her up and guided her down to the kitchen. Once they reached the island, he gripped her waist and lifted her onto one of the stools.

"This is just embarrassing." Mia chuckled to herself.

"You're just not used to the ring. It can be intense if you've never tried it before."

"Whoever Prince Albert was, I thank him and despise him at the same time." Mia said wearily.

Dante's shoulders shook with mirth as he grabbed things from the fridge. Placed them on the counter. He walked around the island to stand next to her.

"You just relax right there, Goddess Mia. And watch me work."

"Gladly."

He leaned down and planted a soft kiss on her lips. When he pulled back the look on Mia's face made his stomach flutter. It was such a loving and contented look. The look of someone deeply in love.

*Please...*



## Chapter Twenty-Three

Mia thanked the Lord she took an Uber to their girls' brunch anyway on Sundays. She certainly wasn't up for driving. She wasn't even up for brunch. All she wanted to do was sleep. Dante had only given her about an hour. Then he drove her home after a coma inducing breakfast. Once he'd helped her inside and up the stairs to her condo, he'd kissed her so thoroughly, she feared he'd ask to come in. Instead, he smirked and left her there.

The restaurant hadn't filled up yet when she walked in. She spotted the girls and they waved her over. Mia hobbled over to them slowly.

She hadn't changed from the sweatshirt and joggers he'd given her. She'd gathered her tangled hair up into a messy bun. If it could even be called a bun. It appeared more like a rat's nest than anything else.

"What the hell happened to you?" Kennedy asked with wide eyes.

Mia gingerly lowered herself to the remaining empty chair and tried not to hiss with pain.

"You look like you got jumped." Royal added.

"I kinda did." Mia groaned.

"Ladies, I'm severely disappointed in you." Payton said.

"Huh?" Both Kennedy and Royal looked at her perplexed.

"It appears as if our friend had a night of extremely impolite sex." Payton said proudly, being the first to figure it out.

Apparently, she hadn't forgotten Mia's lecture about polite sex being bad sex.

"Ding. Ding. Ding." Mia said wearily. "I'm proud of you, Payton."

Payton beamed proudly as Mia waved over the waiter.

"Shut up!" Kennedy shouted under her breath.

"Finally!" Royal clenched her fist.

"Yeah, I got jumped, alright. Jumped by Dante's dick."

The waiter choked hearing the last sentence.

"Sorry." Mia raised an apologetic hand. "Fill 'er up. And, of course, keep

'em coming. Oh, I'll take a glass of ice water too. I need fluids. Dear God, I need fluids."

She held up her champagne flute. He quickly filled her glass with the champagne and orange juice mixture. He left to get her a glass of water. When he came back, Mia chugged the water within seconds.

"I wonder if they have IVs of fluids in the back." She looked at the menu, pretending to look for it.

The girls could only stare at her in wonder. Never in the ten plus years of knowing her, had they seen her this thoroughly ravaged by a sexual encounter.

"Did the retired porn star break you?" Royal asked. Her voice was tinged with wonder.

"My pride wants to say no. But my girl," Mia looked down at her crotch, "says otherwise."

"Wow..." Kennedy said just as astonished. "How many orgasms did you have?"

"I lost count."

"GOTDAMN!!!" Kennedy and Royal shouted and clenched their teeth.

"So...you've finally met your match." Payton said.

"Eh. I won't necessarily say that." Mia tried to play it off.

"It wasn't a question." Payton clarified. "It was a statement of fact."

"Whatever."

"I mean, you never leave the house without being presentable. Well, other than the one time." Kennedy cringed when Mia gave her a face.

They were never to bring up Alejandro and that horrible day.

"I didn't have the energy. I almost didn't come. Especially, since he made me a huge and amazing breakfast. But we so rarely get to see each other these days." Mia sighed.

"So..." Royal said.

"So, what?"

"Are you gonna give us the deets or what?" Kennedy answered for her.

"Well, it started with a trench coat and a plan..."

Mia told them the juiciest parts of her night. But for time constraints and pure exhaustion, she didn't regale them like she usually did.

"Hot damn!" Royal exclaimed after Mia finished. "So, he lived up to his former profession?"

"Probably better. You know how porn isn't exactly a realistic example of

regular sex. Gotta angle everything just right to get the money shot. Little or no foreplay. That kinda stuff.

“But he was playful. He was very giving and found pleasure in it. He was rough yet gentle. But then he was also the beast that you see in his films.” Mia finished thoughtfully.

Her mind cleared and she looked at the girls. They just stared at her in varying degrees of shock.

“What?” Mia asked fearfully.

“Nothing.” They said in unison.

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“You all saw what I saw right?” Royal asked.

Mia had gotten up to use the restroom. The moment she was out of earshot, Royal had leaned forward to pose the question.

“Uh...yeah.” Kennedy said.

“She’s in love with him.” Payton answered.

“Absolutely.”

“One hundred.”

“But you know the minute we bring it up, she’ll deny it. And quite possibly run.” Royal predicted.

“Without a doubt. So, we have to keep it to ourselves and try to help Dante in any way we can.” Kennedy suggested.

“That’s as good a plan as any.” Payton agreed.

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“We’d like to speak to Dante, please.” Royal said to the hostess at *Bianchi*.

The three friends had decided to head to his restaurant after brunch. Mia hadn’t been in the mood to do anything extra. All she’d wanted to do was go home, take some ibuprofen, and sleep for the next eighteen hours, before the work week started. But they were tipsy and on a mission.

“Uh...he’s quite busy. Can I ask who’s here to see him?”

“Tell him Mia’s friends.” Kennedy said.

“Okay. Excuse me a moment.”

The hostess walked back into the kitchen. It took only a few moments before Dante walked out. The girls took in his appearance. While Mia had looked like a wildebeest, Dante seemed energized and had a little pep in his step. As soon as he spotted them, he beamed brightly.

“Oh, he’s a goner.” Kennedy said.

“Fo sho.” Royal agreed.

“The best word would be smitten.” Payton added.

“Yeah...” The other two said dreamily.

Dante reached them and shook their hands.

“Payton, how is married life?” He asked politely.

“Wonderful. Thank you.”

He squinted at the other two thinking for a moment.

“Kennedy and...Royal, right?”

“Right!” Kennedy said brightly.

“So, what can I do for you ladies?”

“We need to talk Mia.” Royal said.

“Okay.” He frowned a bit nervously. “She is okay, no?”

“No, she’s fine. A little worse for wear, but fine.”

Dante sighed with relief and then smiled as if he was remembering a private moment.

The girls looked at him and then at each other knowingly.

“How about we take this to my office where it’s a little more private?”

“Works for us.” Royal said.

They followed him to the back and into his very rustic Italian designed office.

“Please, ladies. Sit.”

He found a third chair and placed it with the other two in front of his desk. As they got comfortable, he walked around his desk and took a seat.

“Okay, I’m ready when you are.” Dante said to get the ball rolling.

“What are your intentions?” Kennedy said first.

Dante didn’t pretend as if he didn’t understand the question or the subject matter.

“I am in love with her.” He didn’t mince words.

All three women sagged in their chairs with relief.

“Oh, thank goodness!” Kennedy said.

“Why do you ask?”

“We’re sure you know that she has an aversion to relationships.” Royal said.

“I do.”

“Well, we want to make sure we help out in any way we can. Without getting in the way too much, of course. But we wanted to make sure your intentions were pure. No sense in helping out a guy who doesn’t want more with her.” Kennedy said.

“I absolutely want more.”

“And you’re not just looking for a replacement mom for your daughter?” Payton asked.

“Great question!” Kennedy lightly smacked Payton’s arm in approval.

“Right?!” Royal leaned forward to look at them both.

Dante stifled a chuckle.

“I promise you that isn’t the only reason, but I can’t deny that it’s part of why I love her. She is everything *I’ve* ever wanted. And then there’s the bonus that my daughter loves her and she seems to love my daughter right back.” Dante said honestly.

“I appreciate your candor.” Payton said.

Dante nodded.

“I don’t want to get your hopes up,” Royal started, “but it does seem that Mia is smitten with you.”

“Even though she was uncharacteristically bedraggled today, she seemed almost dreamy. That’s not our Mia. But we won’t bring it up to her, for fear she’ll run.” Kennedy said.

“Same. I have not told her of my feelings for the same reason.” Dante confessed.

“Just take your time with her. I mean, whatever you’ve been doing has worked better than any man who has tried in years.” Kennedy explained.

“Yeah, try to make sure you show her that you have no intentions of taking away her freedom or stifling her in any way.” Royal suggested.

“Definitely, work on keeping things exciting.” Payton added.

“Duly noted.” Dante nodded. “I really appreciate your help, ladies. It means a lot.”

“You’re welcome.” They said in unison.

“Okay, we see it’s busy. We won’t take up any more of your time.”

Kennedy said thoughtfully as she stood up.

The other two followed. They shook his hand and showed themselves out of the restaurant.

“He wasn’t even intimidated by the three of us grilling him.” Royal said.

“And did you see how his face mirrored Mia’s. They both are walking around with their heads in the clouds.”

“Well, I would be too if I had the kind of sex they had last night.” Payton said.

“Payton!” Kennedy shouted. “You’re such a freak now. I love it!”

Payton grinned happily. Kennedy and Royal laughed.

“I just hope that Mia doesn’t do anything stupid. They’re perfect for each other.” Royal sighed.

“Her perfect match.” Kennedy said dreamily.

None of them wanted to kill the hopeful mood. But they all had an uneasy feeling that their spicy friend was one hundred percent going to fuck up the good thing she’d found.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Dante gave Mia her space for a few days. One, to help her recover from their first night together. And two, because he took her friends' advice to heart. He didn't want to come across as clingy or needy. He was pretty busy with his restaurant and trying to spend time with CeCe. That helped a lot to keep his mind off her.

He did text her here and there to check in. And to tease her.

It was Thursday. He figured four days was a suitable amount of time for her to recover. So, he decided to shoot her a text.

**Dante:**  
**Walking straight yet?**

**Mia:**  
**Fuck you! But, yes.**

**Dante:**  
**Ha! Fucking me is what got you into trouble in the first place.**

**Mia:**  
**Had I known you'd be this cocky, I wouldn't have shown up on your doorstep.**

**Dante:**  
**You know you enjoyed it. You could've tapped out at any time.**

**Mia:**  
**I couldn't let you show me up, old man.**

**Dante:**

**Oh ho! You'll pay for that.**

**Mia:  
Promise?**

Dante's dick immediately hardened at that one-word question.

**Dante:  
Where are you today? Office or worksite?"**

**Mia:  
Office.**

**Dante:  
Don't get lunch. Be there at 12:30.**

**Mia:  
Okay...**

**Dante:  
Relax.**

He ended the chat there without further explanation. With a huge grin on his face, Dante walked into the kitchen of his restaurant and began to fix food for lunch.

As he prepared it, he thought about how he couldn't wait to take Mia out on proper dates. He felt bad for all the home dates, his restaurant dates, and anything else he could come up with to trick Mia into thinking they weren't dates. If he could, he'd take her to the best restaurants in the city, get her on a boat for some sun and a gourmet picnic, take her to art galleries, concerts, and anything else he could come up with. Anything to let her know she deserved the best.

He was Italian after all. Maybe it was a stereotype to say all Italian men were romantic, but in his case, the stereotype fit. Instead, he tried to find small ways to cherish her. And food was his go-to love language.



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“Hello, I’m looking for Mia.” Dante said to the young assistant. “I’m here to deliver lunch.”

*Among other things.*

He held up the brown paper bag with the logo for his restaurant on the side.

“Hello, Mr. Bianchi. She’s waiting for you in her office.” The woman pointed to a closed door.”

“Thank you.”

Mia’s office space was decorated like a living room, except with two desks across from each other. One smaller one for her assistant. And a large one, more like a table, where Dante assumed she had consultations with her clients. But the rest looked like something out of a magazine. Light gray couches, coffee table, fireplace, and all the trimmings to make it look like a home. The space showcased her talent.

Dante walked to her door and knocked.

“Come in.”

Dante opened the door. His eyes immediately found and connected with hers. His heart flip-flopped in his chest. His stomach felt like someone put a thousand butterflies inside him. And the heat... The moment their eyes connected the temperature rose to dangerous levels.

Dante couldn’t stop the goofy smile that spread across his face.

“I brought—” the words came out gruff and husky. Dante cleared his throat and tried again. “I brought lunch.”

He thought Mia looked so fucking hot sitting behind her desk. The boss vibes radiated over her. He wondered if he could make her beg in the place she was most alpha female.

“Look at that. My own food delivery service.” Mia said as she stood.

Dante watched as she walked towards him and then past him to the door.

“Isabel?”

“Yes, Mia?”

“You can go to lunch.”

“Alright.”

“Oh, and Isabel?”

“Yes.”

“Take your time coming back.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Dante immediately felt himself stiffen even further in his jeans.

Once her assistant had quickly grabbed her purse and left the office, Mia walked over to the front door, flipped her sign to closed and locked the door. She turned with a small smile and strutted back to her private office.

She wore a body-hugging white pencil skirt with a pretty yellow blouse. Her sun-kissed skin glowed against the bright color. Yellow pumps made her legs flex as she came towards him. Her hair was pulled back into a perfect bun.

The moment she closed her door, Dante practically dropped the bag of food and was on her. Her back was to him and he pressed her against the frosted glass. Mia gasped at the feel of his erection against her ass. His mouth next to her ear, he flicked the shell with his tongue.

“I’ve been dreaming of this from the moment I dropped you off at your house Sunday.” Dante whispered against her ear. “But I knew I needed to wait for you to recover.”

“Recovery complete.”

“Then how about we work up an appetite for the food I brought?”

“Are you gonna keep talking or are you gonna fuck me?”

Dante growled.

He spun her around. His mouth crushed against hers. He dipped his tongue into her mouth rhythmically as his hands caressed over her ass. Dante found the zipper of her skirt and slid it down. He pushed the fabric down and the skirt dropped at her feet. He grabbed her hand and pulled her over to her desk. He sat in her chair and pulled her to stand in between his legs.

“No one has sat in my chair before.” Mia quirked an eyebrow.

“There’s a first time for everything. Now, turn.” He said as he circled the air with a finger.

Mia did as instructed. She turned to face away from him. In front of his face was the glorious, round globes of her delectable ass. The fabric of a yellow thong disappeared between them.

Dante leaned forward and kissed each cheek. He lifted his hands to the waistband of her skimpy panties and began pulling them down until they fell to the floor.

“And now for dessert.” Dante breathed against her skin.

He pressed a hand against her back, forcing her down on her desk. He

spread her cheeks wide. Her pretty rosebud inviting him to taste. Dante buried his face between her crack. His tongue flicked her lightly and she gasped. He applied more pressure and circled her anus. Mia moaned. He found her pussy dripping with arousal. Dante flattened his tongue, gathered up her feminine nectar on it, and licked up to the top of her back slit.

“Dante, please!” Mia begged.

Dante smirked. It’s just what he’d wanted. To take her from tough boss to soft and begging.

He gripped her hips and turned her around.

“Sit.”

Mia wasted no time following his command. By the way her eyes lit up, he could tell she knew what was coming. She sat on the edge of her desk. Then she kicked off her heels and lifted her feet to the armrests on her chair he was occupying. She spread her knees wide.

“Fuck.” Dante whispered in awe. “You really do have the prettiest pussy.”

To Dante her vulva was beautiful. Her mound, plump. The outer lips were fat and made him want to nibble them. Her inner lips unfolded like flower petals to reveal what was underneath. A pink center that glistened with her arousal. Her clit plump and poking out from under its hood.

He slid the chair forward. His head descended between her legs. Mia dropped back to her elbows and threw her head back as his tongue licked her from pussy to clit. Dante wrapped his hands around the tops of her thighs, holding her open as he feasted on her.

He slurped and suckled her the way he’d eat a peach. And just like the fuzzy fruit, she dripped down his chin. She’d tasted so good on Saturday, and now was no different. He’d gladly eat her pussy every day as part of his already well-balanced diet.

Dante flicked his tongue slowly and deliberately over her clit. Mia rolled her hips against him for more friction. Small pants escaped her lips.

“Shit! Stay. Stay.” Mia commanded breathlessly.

Dante knew better than to deviate from where he was, how he was doing it, and the speed in which he was doing it. Mia’s fingers found their way into his hair. He looked up and found her eyes on him. Their gazes locked as he tongued her. She bit her lip and began to fuck his tongue in earnest. Dante nearly came in his jeans. Her body tensed and she threw her head back. Her pussy began to flex. She bucked against his mouth as she came apart.

“Aaaaaah...Dante!!!” She cried out.

Before she could come down from her high, Dante frantically unfastened and pulled down his jeans and briefs. He plunged in deep, bringing back Mia’s climax.

“Fuck!” She shouted.

She wrapped her legs around his waist. Dante gripped her hips tightly and pounded into her fast and hard. He felt himself losing all control. She made him wild. But his head was clear enough to want to give her another deep orgasm.

Dante flipped her over. Placed his hand at the back of her neck, pressing her cheek against her desk. And then thrust back in. He aimed his ring straight towards that soft spongy spot at the back of her clit. Mia’s legs immediately began to shake.

“That’s it. I want you to cum hard on my dick.” Dante leaned forward to whisper in her ear.

He punctuated the last of his sentence with a deep stroke. Mia could only gasp in response. He kept the pace slow. His hips rolled with every thrust. And just when he knew she was comfortable with the pace and rhythm, Dante gripped her neck harder and slammed into her. He increased his strokes until their skin smacked and Mia’s feet raised off the floor every time his hips met her ass.

“Yes! Yes! Fuck yes!” Mia screamed.

Dante felt the pressure and he pulled out. Her pussy gushed with her orgasm. When all was clear, he slipped back in. Mia cried out and her legs trembled. Dante extended her orgasm and the ripples he felt around his cock, ripped his own climax from him. His signature growl filled the room as his cum bathed her internal walls. Dante leaned forward and rested his forehead between her shoulders. They both panted erratically.

“Jesus Christ, Mia! You make me cum so hard.”

“YOU!” Mia exclaimed. “You make me gush damn near every time we fuck. My office floor is a mess!”

“Sorry.” Dante cringed. “I have some napkins in the bag with the food. Let me grab them.”

He finally lifted himself off her. He pulled up his pants as he walked over to where he’d left the bag on the floor.

Mia peeled herself off the desk. She bent over to pick up her panties.

“Well, these are ruined for the rest of the day.” She held up the

completely soaked undies.

“If it’s any consolation, at least your skirt wasn’t over there.” Dante picked it up in front of the door.

“The silver lining.” Mia grinned at him.

He walked over with the bag and her skirt.

“I’m gonna go to the bathroom to clean myself up.” Mia told him.

She headed out to the office bathroom. Her steps quick, so as not to be seen by any passersby through the front windows.

Dante busied himself with cleaning up the mess. When she came back, he headed to the bathroom to clean off his cock and wash his hands. He came back and unloaded the food on her desk.

“Since it’s lunch and you have quite a few more hours to go, I didn’t want to feed you anything too heavy. So, I made you an Italian garden pasta dish. Just spaghetti noodles, freshly chopped tomatoes and basil, garlic and olive oil. I also have salad and some fresh baked bread with olive oil, salt, and pepper to dip it in.” Dante said as he revealed each item.

“Ugh! Thank you! I’m starving and it all looks and smells so delicious.” Mia looked at the spread lovingly.

“Please, dig in.” Dante gestured.

Mia busied herself with filling a plate he brought.

She missed the look of pure love on his face.

*In due time, Dante. In due time.*

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Mia had officially broken her 'Three Times Only' rule.

### **Three Times Only Rule**

*You can only have sex with someone three times. Any more than that and people start catching feelings.*

She'd broken it ten times over. Over the next month, Mia and Dante found every chance they could get to fuck. If Celeste went to a friend's house and neither Mia nor Dante were too busy...they'd fuck. It was after dinner and Celeste was busy on her phone, Dante would sneak over to Mia's... they'd fuck. Lunch in her office...fucking. After her work day was over, they'd have dinner in his office and then...fucking.

They had sex like teenagers or early twenty-somethings who'd just started having sex. They couldn't get enough of each other. She'd never been fucked so thoroughly in all her life. She was not about to go from Beef Wellington back to hamburger patties. Sacrifices had to be made.

Mia rolled off Dante's lap and grabbed a towel she'd grabbed before they started. They'd gotten in the habit of having something nearby to clean up the mess. She wiped her lady bits and passed the towel to Dante.

Mia closed her eyes and focused on catching her breath. When she opened them again, she caught Dante staring at her. The look on his face was so loving that it made her heart jump into her throat and her tummy somersault. She'd caught him a few times over the last month giving her similar looks, but he never said anything. She knew he had feelings for her and she couldn't deny that she was extremely fond of him. But it was something she didn't want to talk about. Mia also knew that she should end it. She didn't want to hurt him, but she couldn't stay away either.

The situation was becoming more and more difficult. And she had no idea how to move forward, so she just kept doing what they'd been doing.

Fucking and pretending there were no feelings between them.

“Hey, I have a question to ask you.” She said quickly to keep the subject safe.

It must have worked because Dante’s look of love cleared.

“Sure. Go ahead.”

“I was wondering if it would be alright to take Celeste to Bradyn’s gym to learn some self-defense. You know Bradyn. Payton’s husband.”

“Yeah, I remember him. He’s kind of hard to forget.” Dante chuckled. “Massive, red hair, and fun accent.”

“Right?!” Mia chuckled. “So, what do you think?”

“I think it’s a wonderful idea. It would actually give me peace of mind knowing CeCe can handle herself if she’s ever alone and needs to fight back.”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking.”

“Yes, please take her. You have my permission.”

“Perfect.” Mia grinned.

“Now, are we gonna rewind what we missed.” Dante pointed to her TV.

“I’m pretty sure we missed half the season.”

Mia looked at the screen and saw the words ‘are you still watching,’ which tended to mean at least four episodes had played continuously. They’d started fooling around within the first ten minutes of the first episode. So, definitely half the season.

Dante snorted. “When I’m around you, all I have to hear is the ‘Dun... Dun’ before every show and I’m hard.”

Mia shouted out with laughter and collapsed against him.

After they got their laughter under control, they snuggled up, and began to watch the new series for real this time.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

“Hey, hermanas!” Mia said as she and Celeste walked into the locker room.

“Hey, Mia!” Kennedy smiled.

“Sup!” Royal said as she closed her locker.

“Hey!” Payton waved.

“I’d like you ladies to meet, Miss Celeste.” Mia wrapped her arm around Celeste’s shoulder. “Celeste, these are my sisters from another mister. My besties. Kennedy. Royal. And Payton.”

As she said their names, they each raised their arm.

“Hey.” Celeste said somewhat bashfully.

Mia had already told the girls that Celeste didn’t know about what was happening between her and Dante. She didn’t need one of them slipping up and telling on them.

Royal hopped over to them. She shadowboxed and danced around like she was warming up for a boxing match.

“You ready to kick some ass, Celeste?” Royal asked the teen.

Celeste tried to stifle a giggle. “Uh...I guess.”

“If you don’t calm your ass down.” Mia placed her hands on Royal’s shoulders. “Must we forget when I did the same thing before kickboxing class.”

“I certainly haven’t.” Payton raised her hand. “I can still feel the sting of the heavy bag against the side of my head.”

“That’s how the romance between her and her now husband started.” Mia informed Celeste. “I was goofing around and kicked the bag too hard. She was staring at her future husband and not paying attention. The bag smacked her right upside the head. Knocked her clean out.”

They all burst out laughing except Payton.

“I still don’t see what’s so funny.” Payton pouted.

“That’s because you didn’t see it.” Royal said and they laughed some



more.

“But Bradyn came over with some ice and smelling salts. He was so sweet. You’ll see. He’s a giant man but a big ol’ softy.” Mia assured Celeste.

Once they’d changed into their workout clothes, they headed over to the sparring ring. Bradyn was already there in black gym shorts and matching tank top. His new bestie, McKinnon was there as well. He wore a white tank and gray shorts that showed off his prosthetic leg. Royal skipped over to McKinnon and he leaned down to give her a kiss.

Not long after McKinnon and Royal became an official couple, he and Bradyn had bonded. The big Scotsman and former MMA fighter had helped McKinnon get back into fitness model shape after his accident. The firefighter hadn’t let losing a leg in a horrific accident stop him. An accident that had brought him and Royal together. And once he was back in shape, he had more modeling jobs than before he’d lost his leg.

“Jeez!” Celeste said.

Mia searched for who the teen was looking at. It was Bradyn.

“I told ya. He’s a big, scary looking dude. But I swear he’s harmless.” Mia promised her.

After kissing Payton softly on the lips, Bradyn looked over at Mia and Celeste. He strode over with a smile. Mia knew the smile was on purpose, as not to scare away the teen.

“Hello, ladies. Mia.” He nodded his head at her. “An’ you are, lass?”

His thick, charming accent was enough to make the teen’s lips immediately spread into a smile.

“I’m Celeste.” She beamed up at him.

“Well, Celeste. Are ye ready to learn how te kick some arse?”

“Sure!”

“Then get yerself over there with the rest of the ladies.” He winked at her.

Celeste scampered over to Mia’s friends and a few others who’d signed up for the self-defense class.

“Hey, B.” Mia stopped Bradyn before he walked away. “She’s been hanging out with some older boys. She said she’s not anymore, but I highly doubt that. I need her to be able to defend herself. So, if you’ve got some moves on how to get out of sticky sexual situations. Like being cornered against a wall or getting a guy off her if she’s lying down. That would be great. I know how quickly things can go sideways in those situations.”

Mia thought about Payton and what she'd gone through in college. By his expression and the way his eyes traveled over to his wife, Mia knew he was thinking about it too.

"I can absolutely do that." Bradyn nodded.

"Thanks, B."

"Yer welcome, lass."

They spent the next hour working on techniques to defend themselves during a date rape situation. They worked up a decent sweat. But mostly they bantered and encouraged each other.

"So, one more time. If he has ye on the ground and in between yer legs. Ye start fighting and he goes to choke ye. Wrap yer legs around his waist to hold him there." Bradyn demonstrated as he positioned himself on top of Payton.

Mia was so proud of her friend. Payton would've never been able to do something like that a few years ago. Even if it was pretend. Bradyn had definitely eased her fears of men.

"Then he has yer neck, wrap yer hands around his arms and place yer hands behind each elbow. Payton raise yer legs from my waist to my shoulders with yer feet crossed behind my head." Payton did as he asked. "Now, raise yer hips. Whoa! Whoa! It's me, Payton. It's me.

Everyone laughed. The position had begun to bend his elbows backward.

"As ye all can see, once ye have their elbows trapped and their head locked, when ye lift yer hips, it bends back their elbows. If ye keep going, ye'll break their arms." Bradyn finished.

Payton released him. He bent down and kissed her on the nose before jumping up. He held out his hand and pulled her off the mat.

"Okay, Celeste. Ye ready te try?" Bradyn asked the teen.

"Yeah, I think so." She stepped forward.

"You can do it, Celeste!"

"You got this!"

"Woot! Woot!"

Everyone encouraged her.

"I dinna think I should do this with ye. I dinna want to scare you completely." Bradyn said to her and then scanned the gym. "Hey, Ty!"

A teenage boy, who also looked mixed race, stopped as he headed towards the treadmills. He was cute as a button. Mia saw Celeste's eyes widen.

“Yeah, Bradyn?” The boy said.

“Can ye come over and help with a self-defense move?”

“Uh, sure.”

Ty jogged over to the mat. When he got a closer look at Celeste and realized he had to work with her, his eyes also blinked with shock and attraction.

*Smooth move, Bradyn.* Mia grinned.

Bradyn quickly demonstrated what they were working on. Ty must have been one of his mixed martial arts students, because they had a camaraderie like they already knew each other and the boy quickly picked up on what Bradyn was asking him to do.

“Alright, you two. Show us what ye’ve got. And be careful, Celeste. Dinna go too hard. We dinna want to break his arms.” Bradyn chuckled.

They all screamed and cheered as Celeste successfully stopped Ty multiple times as they practiced. All the while they smiled shyly at each other.

After class was over and they all milled about, Mia walked over to Bradyn and Payton.

“I see what ya did there, B.” Mia said to the big man.

“What?”

“Ty and Celeste. Don’t pretend that was one hundred percent innocent.”

“Och, ye mentioned she was seeing older boys and I know how that can be. Using their age to manipulate a younger lass te do things they’re not ready for. Ty is a sweet kid. I figured if they hit it off, he would be better suited for her.” Bradyn shrugged.

“Well, I, and I’m sure her dad, appreciates it. And they do seem to be hitting it off. Maybe she’ll give up on the older boys now.” Mia said.

“You really love her, don’t you?” Payton asked.

Mia looked over at the teen again.

“Yeah, I do. She’s a wonderful kid.”

“Hmm...it’s so easy for you to say it about her. Maybe you should try it with...others.” Payton smirked at her.

“I love you. See? I say it all the time.” Mia stuck out her tongue.

“You know what I mean.”

“Leave it, Payton.”

“Fine.” Payton raised her hands in surrender.

Mia cut the conversation before it could even get started. She knew her

friend meant well, but it wasn't something she was ready to face.

*I like things just the way they are.*

She felt everything was perfect. What was the point in getting emotions mixed up in it?

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## Chapter Twenty-Seven

Dante pulled up to Mia's condo. Celeste was gone for the night, so he was taking Mia to a very special party. A party with some of his former co-workers and other sexually open people in the city. He was on a mission to show Mia that a life with him didn't have to be ordinary or boring.

He parked and walked to her front door. He wore slim-fit navy slacks, brown dress sneakers with the white soles, and a fitted white button-up shirt. He left several buttons undone to show off his tan, toned chest underneath. He adjusted his shirt and then pressed the buzzer.

"I'll be right down." Mia answered.

He stepped back and waited. A few moments later, he heard a door shut from inside. He looked through the glass of the front door. The second Mia came into view, Dante's jaw dropped. He hadn't thought she had a better dress than the one she'd worn to the fundraiser. But he'd been wrong.

The dress was all black and looked like a cropped turtleneck with long sleeves on top. That was where the modesty stopped. The bust area looked like a string bikini top that was connected to the bottom of the faux turtleneck. Then the dress split from under her breasts and curved to the left all the way down to her left thigh. The only thing holding the dress together was a crisscrossing tie, like a shoelace, from breast to thigh where it was tied. The split displayed most of her torso, left ribcage, down her hip, and the top of her leg. It left no room for panties. So, the black fabric was tied just tight enough to hide her sex. But knowing if she moved just right, you might catch a glimpse of her mound or pussy lips, was such a turn on.

Dante thought the dress was quite brilliant. It gave the appearance of leaving nothing to the imagination. Yet, everything truly intimate was covered. And the tie gave the feeling of waiting to unwrap a gift.

Her makeup was seductive but not too much. Probably because she knew it would get fucked off anyway. And to match the sleek dress, she'd straightened her hair with zero curl to it, and draped it over her right shoulder

where it laid against her breast.

“Fuck, Mia!” Dante said as soon as she opened the door and stepped outside. “Whenever I think you couldn’t possibly take my breath away anymore, you do it again.”

Her signature sexy smile spread across her lips. “Thank you, Dante. You look really good too.”

“Eh...I’m a guy. Pants. Shirt. Shoes. That’s it.” He looked down at himself and then looked back up at her. “But you? I know this is a superficial asshole thing to say, but I can’t wait to show you off.”

“I’ll take it. Many women enjoy being arm candy every now and then. That might not be the most feminist thing to say, but I’mma keep it real. I’m a multifaceted woman.” Mia winked.

“I’ve noticed.” Dante grinned and offered his arm. “Shall we?”

Mia took his arm and they headed to his car.

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“Dante! It’s so good to see you.” A blonde woman hugged him warmly. She looked familiar to Mia, but she couldn’t fathom where she’d know her from.

“It’s good to see you too, Heather.” Dante turned to Mia. “This is my... special friend, Mia. Mia this is one of my former co-stars, Heather.”

Mia smiled and took the woman’s hand to shake. *Ah! That’s where I’ve seen her.*

“It’s nice to meet you, Heather.”

“It’s nice to meet you too, Mia.” Heather nudged Dante’s shoulder. “You’re a lucky woman. He was always my favorite to work with. Very giving and always made sure I was comfortable.”

Mia could tell the woman wasn’t trying to upset her or make her jealous. She was genuinely fond of Dante. And Mia wasn’t the most jealous person, so it wouldn’t have bothered her even if the woman was trying to make her jealous.

“He is a wonderful lover.” Mia nodded.

“And you’re *gorgeous*, by the way. I’d love to get a taste of you later.” Heather admitted. “I like guys, but I prefer women.”

“She does.” Dante agreed. “But tonight, I think we are going the route of the exhibitionist but only together. Just to get our toes wet.”

“Noted. I respect that. But I’ll be sure to come watch.” Heather winked.

“Please do.” Mia smiled back.

“So, then it’ll be the blue wristbands for you two.” Heather said as she grabbed them.

She placed the wristbands on their right wrists and explained the rules to Mia.

“Okay, Mia. White wristbands mean, no touching or anything else. These are for voyeurs only. The blue wristbands mean, you can look but don’t touch. Basically, for the exhibitionists who came together as a couple. Or single people who like to masturbate to an audience. The green means, you can look and touch but in private. And the black means, ‘I’m down for anything.’”

“I love it.” Mia nodded. “Such a great way to make everyone comfortable without needing to turn anyone down.”

“Consent is pretty important at these gatherings. If anyone has to say ‘no’ more than once, the other person is promptly kicked out. There’s zero tolerance. We want people to keep coming back.” Heather explained.

“Well, I’m already a fan.” Mia winked.

“I do hope you come back and maybe choose green or black next time.” Heather smiled seductively at her. “I’d love to be a third with you two. You’re so hot together.”

“I might take you up on that.”

“Good. Now, go. Have fun.” Heather waved them away.

Mia was straight, but her line was a smidge crooked. She was attracted to masculinity. The differences between a man and a woman were a real turn on for her. But she did love sex in general. And if she was attracted enough to a woman, she wasn’t opposed. The opportunity just rarely ever presented itself.

Maybe with Dante I could explore more of my desires.

Mia shook off the thought and instead took in her surroundings.

It was one of those mansions always seen in pornos. The entrance was massive. Twenty-foot ceilings with a giant chandelier in the center. White tiled floors with smaller black tiles in between each. Mia guessed they couldn’t have hardwood when they didn’t know if any fluids would gush onto them.

The only difference between this mansion and the ones she’d seen in

porn videos, was that there was way more furniture and artwork on the walls. She wondered if they'd had the mansion staged for the party or if this actually was someone's house.

She spotted glass bowls filled with condoms and lube. They were strategically placed throughout the space. At the front door, the base of the stairs, at the top of the stairs, and many other places. And they were the good condoms. Thin for the best feel.

There were people cozy on the couches or at tables drinking and playing cards. The downstairs seemed to be a place more for mingling than fucking. A place to get the flirtations started, before heading upstairs.

Upstairs, where the sounds of smacking, moans, and lovemaking drifted down. Another thing to enhance the senses and get the downstairs guest in the mood as they flirted. And Mia was not immune. The sounds drew her ears. Her pulse pounded between her thighs. Sounds of sex always turned her on.

Even though she was ready to run upstairs to see all that was happening there, she let Dante guide her around downstairs to meet the other guests. Many of them knew him and they greeted him warmly. And they eyed her like she was a delicious dish to try. Mia saw their disappointment when they spied the blue wristband on her arm.

Surprisingly, she was glad for the wristband. Many of the men were attractive, but none of them got a rise out of her. No heartrate spikes, like she used to get when she saw a handsome man. She'd tried countless men and their dicks. Tongues as well. And not a single one could compete with Dante's magical joystick or his fat, talented tongue.

When he'd first mentioned the party to her and asked what she preferred. Voyeur only, exhibitionism as a couple only, or whatever happens, happens? She'd gone with exhibitionism as a couple only. At the time, she'd told herself it was because she wanted to get a feel for the party and the people there. Knowing that any other time, she would've gone with whatever happens, happens. She knew how to tell someone no, if she wasn't interested. So, she'd almost regretted her answer. But now, she knew she'd made the right choice.

No, Dante was the only man she wanted to fuck tonight. But the idea of an audience had her so wet, she could feel the slickness on her thighs. Unfortunately, it looked like she'd have to wait a little longer.

"Mia, I'd like you to meet our gracious hosts." Dante stopped in front of

an older white couple. “This is Dylan and Sheryl. Dylan is a producer in the industry.”

“Hi, it’s nice to meet you, Dylan. Sheryl.” Mia said as she extended a hand to both of them.

“Wow! Mia, you’re a stunner.” Sheryl said. “Isn’t she honey? So, your type.”

Mia’s eyebrows raised.

“That she is.” Dylan eyed her up and down. “If you don’t mind me saying, of course?”

“No, not at all. Thank you for the compliment.”

Dylan was a relatively handsome silver fox. Sheryl looked like a former pinup girl. Still beautiful, but a little too sucked, tucked, and plumped as she tried to chase her youth.

“Oh, but they’re only playing with each other tonight.” Sheryl pouted. “It’s a shame. You’re such a fucking stunning couple. I would’ve loved to watch you fuck my husband, while he watches me fuck Dante. Such good times.”

“Sounds like it.” Mia smiled politely.

“Hopefully next time.”

“It’s possible.”

“Well, we will certainly come watch later.” Dylan said.

“I look forward to it.” Mia smirked as Dante pulled her off towards the stairs.

“I think everyone likes you.” Dante grinned down at her.

“Um...yeah. Our dance card for the next party is filling up fast.” Mia joked.

“There hasn’t been an eye, male or female, that hasn’t eye-fucked you. Even some of the gay guys said they’d fuck you if they had the chance. I think you’re the type of woman who scrambles people’s sexuality. They thought they were straight or gay and then they see you.” Dante chuckled.

“I’d never noticed that many women being interested. I usually get a lot of hate from women. That’s why my circle is so small and tight.” Mia admitted.

“Well, in spaces like this where sexuality is free-flowing and judgment free, you’re going to find a lot more women approaching you.” Dante informed her.

“Duly noted.”

“So...you ready to explore what’s happening upstairs?” Dante extended his arm to her.

“I thought you’d never ask.” Mia took his proffered arm.

They walked up the curving staircase. Once they reached the top, Mia took in the layout. The landing was actually a loft. To the left was a railing, which was why she could so easily hear what was going on when they were downstairs. In front of the railing was a red leather sex lounge chair. It had the signature high hump on top that sloped down to a lower hump. The design was simple, yet the amount of sexual positions one could do, seemed endless. The floor upstairs was carpeted with white, plush carpet, so Dylan and Sheryl had the forethought to lay a black tarp underneath the sex chair, just in case. And surrounding it in a semicircle were several chairs. The whole setup awaited a brave few who would be willing to be the center of attention. And currently, not a soul was bold enough to use it as it sat empty yet inviting. Dante caught her staring at it.

“All you have to do is ask.” He whispered in her ear.

“Oh, I’m already there. I just want to see what’s going on first. I’m nosy.” She grinned.

“Lead the way.” Dante extended his hand out to the many rooms down the hall.

Several doors were wide open. And quite a few were shut. Mia figured the latter rooms were those who preferred their lovemaking in private. She walked over to the first open doorway. Inside a man was on his knees in the middle of the bed. The bed had four narrow, black iron posts at each corner with bars connecting each one at the top. White sheers draped from them. Not to hide what was happening, but to give the scene a kind of ethereal vibe.

The man’s arms were extended out as his wrists were cuffed to straps that connected to the bars at the stop. He wore a gimp mask and a cock cage. That was it. A woman with deep red hair in a shiny pleather catsuit with a matching red half corset that cinched in her waist, stood next to the bed. As they stopped and watched, she punished him with a black riding crop. She spanked his ass, back, and nipples.

Mia gave Dante a questioning look.

“Don’t even think about it.” Dante laughed.

“Not into being dominated?”

“I didn’t necessarily say that. But I’m **not** wearing a cock cage!” He hissed under his breath.

“Fair enough.”

“Truth be told.” He leaned in closer. “You are about the only woman I’d allow to dominate me.”

Mia smirked happily.

A passionate cry came from the next open door. They quickly moved on to see what was happening inside. Mia’s eyes widened when they reached the door.

In the middle of the room was a massive bed, not much unlike Dante’s. And on the bed were four people. A woman laid on her back. A man was on top, fucking her with slow, steady thrusts. Another woman sat on the first woman’s face as she ate her pussy and the man on top leaned forward to eat her ass. And the second woman getting her ass and pussy ate in tandem, was sucking the dick of a second man lying down in front of her.

“Well, if that doesn’t turn you on, I don’t know what will.” Mia remarked softly.

Dante was behind her. His arm rested high above on the doorframe where she leaned. His crotch pressed into her backside.

“I think I’m suitably there.”

“Yeah, I can feel that.”

They made their way around to each open door. Every scene they encountered intensified their arousal. Dante found small ways to touch her. The bare skin of her waist. Her ass. Her nipples through the fabric of her dress. Even his hand at the small of her back as he guided her to each room. His lips brushed her ear when he spoke, after moving her hair behind it with gentle fingers. By the time, they made their way back to the sex chair, Mia was ready to hump his leg. Luckily, it was still empty.

Dante took her hand and led her over to the chair. Mia placed her rhinestone sparkling clutch on the table next to a bowl of condoms and lube. Inside the clutch was a little something in case there was a need for it later. She walked over to the chair and sat back against the highest hump on it. He straddled her legs in a wide stance. His hands reached up to cradle either side of her face as he kissed her softly. His tongue flicked against her closed lips and she gasped softly. As soon as her mouth parted, Dante’s tongue swept in.

Mia heard footsteps. Her eyes opened slightly and she saw Heather watching. Mia held her gaze as she continued to kiss Dante. Heather turned and leaned over the railing. She hissed softly to get everyone’s attention below and waved them up. Mia closed her eyes and tried to contain the smile

that wanted to spread across her lips.

Apparently, Mia and Dante had turned into the main event for the night. Mia had only fucked in front of a few people before. But as the crowd all reached the top of the stairs, took the available chairs and brought up a few more, making space for each other around the loft, she realized it would be the largest group she'd ever fucked in front of. Even those who were finished in the rooms down the hall had come out to witness the new 'it' couple fuck. For once, Mia got a little stage fright mixed with her excitement. Her body tensed a little.

“Are you okay? Is all of this, okay?” He asked.

He must have felt her hesitancy and wanted to check in. Mia loved how in tune he was to her needs.

“Oh, I'm good. Just wasn't expecting quite that big of an audience.” Mia whispered.

“It's just you and me.” Dante said against her lips. “Focus right here.”

Dante pointed a finger at his eyes. Mia nodded. He kissed her deeply once more to get her back into that haze of eroticism she was under before.

His fingers found the ties at her thigh. Slowly, Dante pulled one string until the tie came undone. He took her hand and helped her lift off the chair and stand straight. The man knew how to build anticipation as he slowly walked behind her. He reached around her front and gradually undid the tie of her dress. Once he reached the top, just under her breasts, he peeled back the fabric of the dress to reveal her waxed mound. Some within their audience sighed audibly.

Dante unzipped the short zipper at the back of her neck. Once her turtleneck was loosened, he helped her pull her arms from the sleeves and the rest of her dress up over her head. She stood before the crowd in nothing but her clear heels. Murmurs of delight traveled through the onlookers.

Mia's fingers found the buttons on Dante's shirt as he kissed her again. They'd turned where their audience got a good look at Mia's backside. Some gasped softly. Dante reached around and clutched it possessively. Mia smirked to herself.

She stripped him of his shirt. Then she squatted down in front of him. She undid his slacks and pulled them, along with his black boxer briefs, down to his feet. Dante toed out of his shoes and Mia helped him step out of his pants and briefs.

His dick hung heavy and thick. She was sure many there had already

seen or experienced his cock. But it was so magnificent that it drew excited responses anyway. Her pussy included.

Mia slowly and deliberately flicked her tongue against the head and piercing. Dante gasped and the audience hummed with delight. He lowered his hand and pressed his index finger under her chin. Mia rose to stand again.

“Turn around.” Dante commanded.

She turned and faced their audience.

“Lift your leg up onto the chair.” He brought his mouth to her ear and whispered. “Show them what a pretty pussy you have.”

Mia raised her leg and placed it on the highest hump of the chair. The crowd moaned their pleasure. Several men had their hands down their pants. Some women had their hands down their man’s pants. One couple traded handjobs.

Dante walked behind Mia. He kissed up her neck to her ear. As he went, his left hand wrapped around her to find her breast. The other hand slid down her trembling tummy, past her mound, and directly to her slick folds. His tongue flicked against her ear as his fingers strummed her nipple and circled her clit. Mia cried out as her head fell back against his shoulder. The leg that held her weight buckled slightly.

The tension had been building for the last hour as she’d heard the lovemaking noises and then as they peeked in to watch it. Not to mention, the audience watching them so intently. Mia feeling their desire pulsate around them. How much they wanted her. It all built until Mia’s body could no longer hold it. Dante circling her clit only a handful of times made her explode.

“Aaaaaaah!” She screamed out as she wildly bucked her hips against his hand.

“Wonderful.”

“Just beautiful.”

Different people murmured. The words meant to encourage them further.

“I want you to lie on the highest part of the chair. Facing down.” Dante instructed.

Mia walked over to the middle of the chair. She stepped one foot over the middle part that sloped low to straddle the chair. She leaned forward until she was laying her torso on the chair. Dante walked around and straddled the smaller hump and faced her ass. He slid down into the slope. He lifted her right leg and placed her foot behind him on the lowest hump. And did the

same with her left leg. The position held her up with her ass and cunt wide open and offered up on a platter for all to see and for her lover to enjoy. Everyone being able to see her pussy and ass turned her on so much that she could feel her arousal drip down her clit to the chair under her. Dante dug in.

He spread her cheeks wide. He buried his face deep in her crevice. She felt his fat tongue flick and lap at her rosette. She moaned with pleasure. He dipped down further and lapped up her slickness. Mia ground down on his tongue. Dante found her clit. It was swollen and highly sensitive with her arousal and previous orgasm. He laved it lovingly. His tongue rolled against her, setting off another intense orgasm.

Weakly, Mia slid down to his lap and cock that awaited her. Dante quickly positioned his dick and helped guide her down the length of his shaft. He kissed her shoulder as she threw her head back against his chest. The chair was the perfect height for her to ride him reverse cowgirl. Mia placed her feet on the ground. She used that as leverage to lift up on his cock and slide back down. His ring hit that sweet spot inside her.

“Ah fuck!” She called out.

“Yes, ride that dick.” Dante said breathlessly.

He placed his hands on her wide hips and helped her bounce up and down his length. Mia’s eyes rolled to the back of her head. Her back arched and her ass ground down into him, forcing his ring to create even more pressure against her g-spot. One of his hands slid up to clutch one bouncing breast. The other slid over her thigh to her pleasure pearl and strummed it as she rode him. Mia immediately detonated for the third time.

“Shiiiiit! Dante!” She cried as her pussy flexed around him.

“I love to feel you cum on my cock.” Dante gasped as he held back.

“Now, turn around for me. I want to see you.”

On wobbly legs, Mia turned to face him. He guided her back down his length and she shuddered. Dante lifted his hand and gently brushed her hair back to cup her face lovingly. His fingers slid behind her neck and pulled her mouth to his. His tongue stroked into her mouth seductively to the rhythm of her riding him. Every inward thrust of his tongue matched his upward thrust into her warm, wet recesses.

He hit a good spot and Mia gasped, releasing his mouth. He pressed his hand to her sternum until she rested her back against the chair. With her back arched it gave him easy access to her breasts. His hands caressed her waist up to her breasts. He gathered one up into his big palms and squeezed it upward

towards his mouth. His lips drew in her little nipple. His tongue flicked and swirled it. Mia's hips undulated in response.

They were so in sync. Their lovemaking always felt like a dance. A dance where he led and she followed. Perhaps the tango or paso doble. He was the bullfighter that guided her. Or maybe he was the bull. Either way, he was the only man she felt comfortable guiding her. The only man she let down the tough chick attitude for. Possibly because he'd built trust with her long before they ever fucked.

Mia was so drunk off the three climaxes she'd already had that she completely forgot about their audience. Or she knew they were there, but they'd become hazy. Their conversations and murmurs of delight sounded like a low hum. White noise.

Dante placed her in several more positions. But each time, he stopped before she could climax. She instinctively knew he wanted her last one to be epic.

Finally, he guided her to stand and drape her top half over the back of the highest hump of the chair. He grabbed a tube of lube from one of the bowls. Dante then opened her little clutch purse and pulled out her clit sucker toy. He walked back over to her and handed her the toy. Mia knew exactly how he wanted this to end. She took a deep breath because she knew what was coming.

The cold, wet drizzle of the lube touched her skin and then promptly slid down her ass. It made Mia's ass clench as she gasped. Dante's index finger smoothed the lube around her brown starfish. He slowly eased his finger inside to prep her for what was to come. As if she would ever be suitably prepared for Dante's dick in any of her orifices the first round of every sexual encounter they had. Especially her ass. Besides his fingers were no comparison.

Mia braced herself as he rubbed the head of his dick against her rosette. She felt the cold steel of his ring opening her up. He gradually inched in and slowly her ass welcomed him. He reached the ridge of his head and pulled back out. He dipped shallowly until the tension eased. Once her entrance opened wide for him, Dante plunged down to the base and Mia arched back on a scream.

“FUCK!”

The length of his cock sent him deep within her. And the heavy ring at the tip, hit her A-spot and G-spot simultaneously. Her legs instantly started to

tremble uncontrollably. Dante rolled his hips as he dipped within her depths. The roll with the punctuated thrust at the end massaged both those nerve-endings. Mia's fingers gripped the edges of the chair. Her eyes began to roll to the back of her head. The way he'd built up the last climax and then fucked her in just the right position and spot, she knew he was trying to kill her.

Dante gently wrapped her hair around his fist at the nape of her neck. His signature move that let Mia know he was about to unleash the beast and beat up the pussy. Once he had a tight grip, he tugged her head back. Hard enough to show his dominance. But gentle enough that she didn't get pissed. With his other hand, he wrapped it around her throat and squeezed tightly. He held her tightly as he stroked into her ass.

"Go on. Use it." Dante coaxed in her ear. Each word punctuated with every thrust.

Mia's hands trembled as she turned on her clit sucker. She knew she'd be no match for him and the toy. She kept it on its lowest setting. Mia took a deep breath before she placed it on her already tender button.

The moment she gasped at the feel of it, Dante pulled her hair back harder, gripped her throat a little tighter, and sped up his deep thrusts. Her ass rippled with every punishing stroke. He hit those bundles of nerves from the inside as her toy stimulated her from the outside.

It took only a minute for her to self-destruct. Mia's entire body tensed from scalp to toes. Her vision blurred. Her body convulsed as she gushed down her legs. Then everything went black. Before she lost consciousness, the last thing she heard was an ear-piercing scream. It was her own.

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"AAAAAAHHHHH!" Mia screamed and went limp over the chair. Her feminine cum splashed Dante's legs. And he exploded inside her. This time, after such a long buildup, Dante's signature growl turned into a roar. Then he collapsed against her back.

Everyone who'd gathered to watch gasped and clapped. They'd been so quiet the last several minutes and he'd been so focused on making Mia lose all control, that he'd forgotten they were there.

He looked up now. Many of them were no longer hiding their desire.



Most of the men had their dicks out and stroking them. Some had already cum. Some couples fucked in their chairs. The women riding their men in reverse cowgirl to fuck and watch at the same time. The scene was hot enough to make Dante's dick start to harden again. But he had Mia to tend to. And she did not have another round left in her.

Dante leaned forward. He brushed her hair back from her neck. He kissed her spine as he tried to coax her to consciousness.

"Amore mio?" He kissed her neck.

She stirred a bit.

"Come on, cuore mio. Wake up." He rubbed her back soothingly.

"Hmm..." Mia hummed.

Dante breathed a sigh of relief.

"Are you okay?"

"I need a towel and some water." She murmured.

"I got it." Sheryl said. "I would serve at her feet after that."

Their gracious hostess stood from her husband's lap and tugged her dress down.

"Yes, that had to be one of the most magnificent sexual encounters we've had at one of our parties." Dylan chimed in.

Everyone agreed with nods and excited chatter.

Dante smiled humbly.

He wanted to get dressed, but didn't dare move for fear she'd slip down to the floor. Once Sheryl came back with a large towel and glass of water, Heather walked over as well.

"We can hold her up as you clean her up." Heather offered.

"Grazie." Dante nodded.

The women placed gentle hands on her back and arms. He knelt down and wiped away the evidence of their intense sexual performance from her legs, pussy, and ass. Mia flinched and hissed.

"Sorry." Dante cringed.

"It's okay. It's a good pain." Mia chuckled to herself.

"I must say, the way that you both responded to each other. It was far more than fucking. It was so loving and intimate, I felt like we were intruding. Yet, I couldn't look away. Just incredible." Heather sighed.

He smiled slightly at his former co-star.

Inside, Dante's heart squeezed. He knew exactly what Heather was talking about. He'd fucked countless women. On camera and off. But it had

never been like what he had with Mia. Their sex transcended everything. It was adoration, intense need, flirtation, true intimacy, and love. He just wished that she could see it.

He knew it was time to have a serious discussion with her. He wasn't ready to be rejected. But he had to let the chips fall where they may. Because he'd rather be rejected and work on moving on than to stay in this limbo where she preferred them to stay. Plus, he couldn't keep sneaking behind Celeste's back. They needed to either be together fully or not at all.

"I think I can stand now." Mia said.

They all stood back to give her space to rise. But Dante stayed close just in case. Mia stood on wobbly legs like a newborn fawn. She stepped back and her knee buckled slightly. Dante pressed his hand to her back.

"I've got you."

"I'm good. I'm good." Mia assured him.

She finally stood without problem. Sheryl handed her the glass of water and Mia drank greedily until it was gone.

"Thank you." She gasped as she finished.

"You're very welcome."

Once Dante was sure she wouldn't collapse like an accordion, he quickly dressed. Sheryl and Heather left them to have some privacy. He grabbed her dress and helped her back in it. He sat on the lowest part of the hump, and re-laced and tied her together as Mia stood in front of him. Dante looked up at her and smiled. She grinned back down at him.

"You were magnificent, Mia."

"Thanks. So were you."

"I have a feeling everyone will be talking about that for months to come." Dante teased her.

"It was so hot. I really enjoyed that. Even if you did try to kill me."

"I did no such thing!" Dante exclaimed with fake horror.

"Then it must have been someone else that had me slumped over the chair passed out."

Dante snorted.

"It was a good little death."

"That it was."

Mia paused and looked at him curiously.

"So, what made you come to this party? It seemed like you were intent on leaving this life behind." She asked.

“Well, I think I took your advice. For one, the people here have never made me feel shame for who I am, like those who I tried to fit in with. And you being so non-judgmental helped. Now, I simply want to be around people who match my energy and make me feel comfortable being wholly me.” Dante said sincerely.

Mia’s eyes filled with love for a split second before it was gone. He also caught the look of fear in her eyes right before she plastered on her regular, ‘I’m fond of you but nothing more’ face.

Dante sighed and stood up.

“You ready to get outta here? Maybe go grab some food?” He suggested.

“Absolutely! I’m starving.”

“Come. Let’s say our goodbyes.”

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

“Oh, thank God you all are here! Please, come in.” Dante said to Mia and her crew behind her.

Dante stepped to the side to let them in. He looked gorgeous, but frazzled. He wore navy and white shorts with a white tank. His hair was sexily mussed. As if he'd combed it back with his fingers several times.

It was Celeste's Sweet 16. Dante had decided to have a pool party for her and told her to invite all her friends. But by the sounds of things, or lack thereof, it wasn't much of a party.

Mia had planned to come to the party anyway, but Dante had called her frantic that no one was showing up. That a lot of Celeste's friends had told her that they couldn't come, because their parents knew what he used to do for a living and they didn't want their children around that environment. As if he'd have porn star friends over, doing any number of sexual things in front of teenagers.

Mia called up all her friends and they immediately said they were down to come. Payton had told Bradyn and he'd gotten Ty to come and bring a few of his friends. And the minute the teen boy walked out into the backyard; Celeste's morose mood immediately brightened.

A few of her friends who had parents who weren't judgmental or just too busy to notice, laid on the patio with her getting some sun. Ty had brought three friends, and she just so happened to have three friends there.

Mia watched them with a smile. She hoped it would actually be better than having a gang of kids. A better chance for them to get to know each other.

Payton, Bradyn, Kennedy, Royal, and McKinnon all filed in. They immediately went to the kitchen ready to help.

“Point us where you need us.” Bradyn offered.

“All the food is prepped. If someone wants to man the grill while I finish decorating her cake, that would be great.” Dante said gratefully.

“I’m a master griller. I’ll take care of that.” McKinnon said proudly.

“He’s not lying.” Royal agreed. “He grills for the fire department all the time.”

“Perfect.” Dante said.

McKinnon grabbed the tray of prepared meat and headed out back.

Dante looked out the glass door to the teens beyond. Then he gave Mia a curious look.

“She met the one kid, Ty, at self-defense class. They seemed to hit it off. So, Bradyn asked him if he wanted to come and bring some friends.”

“As much as I want to keep her in a gilded cage, away from boys, I’m really grateful they’re here.” Dante sighed. “It was looking like a disaster.”

“Yeah, he seems like a sweet kid too. I don’t think you’ll have too much to worry about.” Mia smiled at him and rubbed his back.

She remembered that their interactions were supposed to be platonic only. She quickly removed her hand before any of the kids, especially Celeste, could catch her. Or maybe she needed to remind herself that it was supposed to be purely platonic with sex on the side. It didn’t help how her friends grinned at her as she’d rubbed his back.

She missed the look of disappointment on his face when she pulled away.

“What do you need me to do?” She asked.

“DJ, bartend, chaperone, take your pick.” Dante grinned at her.

“Ooh! I’ll be bartender.” Royal piped up.

“I’ll DJ!” Kennedy raised her hand like she was in school.

She pulled out her phone, opened it up, and synced her phone to his wireless sound system. Within seconds a party playlist began playing inside and out on the patio. The girls outside immediately got up and started dancing to a Cardi B song.

“I guess that answers that question. I will be the chaperone.” Mia said.

Kennedy grabbed her hand and spun her. Then they danced out to the backyard. Payton followed closely behind. Along with Royal with four bottles of booze. One tucked under each arm and in each hand. Bradyn lifted the cooler filled with beer, hard seltzers, juice and soda for the kids and brought it out to the sitting area.

As the adults got organized at the table, Kennedy slid close to Mia.

“You two make a gorgeous couple, by the way.”

“Ken...” Mia said in a warning tone.

“What?!” She said innocently.

“Don’t get started.”

“I’m just saying. You look good together and more importantly...you both look *happy*.”

“I am happy. With things just the way they are.”

Kennedy gave her a sad frowny face.

“Your green puppy dog eyes aren’t going to change my mind.” Mia rolled her eyes.

“Fine!”

“She is right though.” Royal chimed in and shrugged when Mia gave her the stink eye. “Facts are facts.”

“What are you guys talking about? How Mia and Dante should absolutely be together because they’re the most gorgeous couple to have ever been together?” Payton came in with her usual ability to get straight to the point.

Royal and Kennedy snorted as they tried to suppress their laughter.

“All three of you can eat a bag of dicks.” Mia grumbled under her breath.

“Too late! You ate them all.” Royal shot back.

Now, it was Payton and Kennedy who doubled over with laughter.

Once Dante was done decorating the cake, he came out onto the patio to enjoy the festivities. Mia watched behind her sunglasses as he walked over to the kids. She smiled when he approached Ty. They shook hands and Ty engaged with him easily. After a few minutes of talking, Dante must have realized that Ty was harmless, because he moved on and let the kids have fun. He walked over to McKinnon and the grill, to check on how the food was coming along.

Eventually, Dante made his way over to the sitting area and sat next to Mia. Their legs pressed together from hip to knee. They chatted with the group, reminiscing about when they were sixteen. The music changed to *The Thong Song*. A song much older than the kids appreciated. They groaned with irritation at the adults. But that quickly changed to laughter as the adults got up to dance.

Mia swayed her hips to the beat and Dante came up behind her to dance against her. She turned and without much thought, they danced a little too closely. Neither noticed Celeste was watching them closely.

Throughout the rest of the day into the night, everything went smoothly. The adults got a little tipsy, but nothing too serious with the kids nearby. The

kids played and flirted in the pool for hours. McKinnon served up perfectly cooked ribs, burgers, and brats. Dante brought out the sides he made earlier. They all dug in. Everything was perfect. Too perfect.

Mia saw how well Dante and Celeste got along with her friends. Her circle. Her family. She'd carefully curated this family and she wasn't sure she was ready to bring anyone else into the fold. Or if it didn't work out how devastated everyone would be. Relationships weren't just about the two people. They often involved blood relations and friend circles. One side always lost.

Mia sighed softly. Dante nudged her shoulder with his.

"You, okay?"

"Yeah, I'm good." She grinned at him.

She looked away and caught Celeste's eye. The teen was watching her curiously. Mia winked at her. She smiled softly back, but it didn't reach her eyes.

*Shit! I hope she hasn't noticed anything.*

The adults got up and started cleaning up everything. The sun had set, the air had gotten chilly, and it felt like everyone was winding down.

As they cleaned the kitchen, Celeste skipped over to Dante.

"Hey, Dad. Can I stay the night at Jess's?"

"Sure. You need a ride?"

"Nope. Her mom's on the way to pick her up."

"Okay. Well, have fun. Enjoy the rest of your night." He leaned down and kissed her forehead.

"Daaaaaad!" She whined at the kiss.

"Sorry. Sorry." Dante raised his hands.

She ran upstairs to get pajamas and clothes for the next day.

"Thanks for a great time." Bradyn said to Dante. "Yer food is always perfection."

"Thanks, man." They shook hands.

"Alright, come on, lads. Ye had enough fun flirting all day. Leave the lasses be." He teased them.

Ty flushed red. But followed Bradyn outside with his friends.

The girls hugged Mia.

"See ya tomorrow at brunch?" Royal asked.

"Of course." Mia said.

"Alrighty. We'll see ya tomorrow then."

“Bye.”

Celeste ran back down the stairs. She looked as the rest of Mia’s crew walked out the door but saw Mia still next to her father in the kitchen.

“Aren’t you leaving with them?” Celeste asked.

“No, I’m gonna stay behind and help your dad clean up the rest of the mess. I feel bad leaving him with all this.” Mia explained.

Celeste frowned slightly. But then she shrugged it off and waved before walking out the door.

*That kid definitely knows something’s up.*

A bad feeling crept up Mia’s spine.



## Chapter Twenty-Nine

After they cleaned up, Dante grasped Mia's hand and led her upstairs to his bedroom. He didn't talk. He knew if he opened his mouth that he'd say something foolish. Instead, he wanted to tell her with his body.

She also seemed unusually quiet. Another reason he feared opening his mouth. It felt like she was also on the verge of saying something. But he worried what she had to say was the exact opposite of what he needed to get off his chest.

Mia stood at the foot of the bed. Dante wrapped his arms around her from behind. He kissed the side of her neck, and she let her head fall to the side to give him better access. He pulled the straps of her yellow sundress off her shoulders and down her arms. His fingernails lightly scraped her soft skin as he went. He planted a light kiss on her bare shoulders.

Dante dropped to his knees behind her and pulled down her matching yellow panties. He kissed the round globes of her ass cheeks. He stood once more and quickly peeled out of his tank and kicked off his shorts and briefs.

"Middle of the bed." He instructed.

Mia did as he asked and crawled to the middle of the bed. Dante grabbed a pillow and met her there.

"Lift your head." He said.

Mia raised her head and he slid the pillow under her. Dante moved over her and she opened up so he could settle between her legs. His thumbs brushed over her cheeks. He caressed every feature with his eyes. Mia's hand raised and she brushed back a strand of hair that had flopped on his forehead. Her eyes also took in his face.

Dante feared it was, again, for different reasons for her. He memorized her face because he loved her and wanted more. He worried she memorized his face because this was goodbye.

He inclined his head until his lips touched her forehead. He planted a soft kiss there. His soft lips greeted each eyelid. Then he moved to each cheek. He

kissed the tip of her nose. She wrinkled it and laughed softly. He kissed her chin and along her jawline.

Finally, his lips found hers. The kiss started off sweet and soft. Light pecks. Then Mia opened up to him and Dante dipped his tongue deep within her depths. His hands still at the sides of her face clutched her tightly. Her hands wrapped around his back and held him to her.

Dante released her lips with a gasp. He moved down her neck. He took his time as he kissed, licked, and suckled her breasts. He stayed until she began to squirm. He kissed and licked down her stomach. He softly kissed the top of her bare mound, and then traveled even further south where he knew she wanted him.

“Pillow.” He said from between her legs.

Mia reached back for another pillow and handed it to him. He shoved it under her backside, raising her pussy up to mouth level. Dante dipped back down.

He ate her like he had kissed her moments before. His tongue moved with loving strokes. He French kissed her pussy, gathered her slick arousal on his tongue, and used it to glide over her clit. He circled the nub and ended on a butterfly soft flick of the tongue. Mia gasped above and rolled her hips towards his mouth. His sign that he'd found the spot. Dante wrapped his hands around her thighs to hold on as he continued that same move. He circled and flicked her clit until her ass clenched and a cry ripped from her throat. Mia bucked against his tongue and her pussy flexed as she hit her climax.

Dante crawled back up her body. He left the pillow under her to help with what he had planned. He rubbed the tip of his cock against her slick opening. After her orgasm it was easy to slip right in. He moved high up on her body and laid flush against her.

Mia looked at him curiously. Then Dante ground down against her. She gasped and her eyes widened.

Years ago, he'd learned about the Coital Alignment Technique but had never tried it. It seemed like something to do with a partner that he had a deep connection with. He'd never found that person...until now.

The position helped to stimulate the clit during penetration. It was mostly for her, since the position only let him in to the tip. But Dante didn't mind. Pleasuring her was a turn on for him.

So, he clutched her face once more and kissed her deeply and he grinded

into her. Mia gasped and he looked down at her. They held gazes as he circled his hips against her. Dante stared into her soul. Mia's eyes became glassy and she blinked rapidly. She tensed and her mouth popped open. Dante held her eye contact as an orgasm tore through her.

As her climax crested, Dante slightly repositioned himself and stroked all the way into the base. Mia cried out as it reactivated her orgasm and extended it. Dante slowly rolled his hips and let the walls of her lotus flex and squeeze around him. The intimacy of their lovemaking brought Dante to the brink quickly. Their eye contact had never broken, and it was her turn to look into his eyes as he exploded. He growled and rode out his climax as his shaft rippled. As if the streams of cum could mark his territory. Brand her. Make her his.

Dante melted on top of her. His cheek rested against her chest. He listened as her heart slowed to a steady beat. Her hands caressed through his hair and down his back. The act was soothing and loving. His heart filled with hope.

“What of your family?” Dante asked curiously. “You never speak of your family. I know you are Latina. I thought Latino families were really close.”

“We normally are. And my family is really close. Just not with me.” Mia said without much emotion.

Dante rose up to look at her.

“Why?”

“Loyalty and the patriarchy. Take your pick.” Mia continued at his confused expression. “My family thought it was worse that I turned in my husband than what he was actually doing to children. ‘Mia, how could you turn him in?! He’s your *husband*. Where is your loyalty? You don’t turn on family.’”

“Oh my God!”

“Yeah. It didn’t help that our families were close. His family blamed me and so did mine. Not him though for doing terrible things. I asked them where was their loyalty towards me and they acted like being there for me, their blood, wasn’t as strong as it was for him. So, I left and never came back.” Mia finished.

“You haven’t spoken to any of them? Not even a phone call?”

“Nope.” Mia shook her head.

“I’m so sorry, Mia.”

“It’s okay. I created my own family. My girls are my family.”

Dante took a deep breath. *Here goes nothing.*

“You could have a family with me. Me and Celeste. She loves you. I-I love you.” Dante stammered but recovered quickly.

The emotions that ran across her face, Dante’s heart reacted to each one. The very first was reciprocal love. But that was only for a split second, and Dante wasn’t sure since it came and went so fast that it could’ve been a figment of his imagination. The second was fear. That one lasted long enough for him to know it was real. And the last emotion he saw before her face completely shuttered was a deep sorrow.

“I’m sorry, Dante. I can’t.”

Mia rose up, which pushed him partially off of her. He rolled off completely. He scooted to the edge of the bed to find his shorts. But instead, he just sat there with his elbows on his knees and head bowed.

“Tell me you don’t love me.” He whispered.

“I-I don’t love you.” Mia’s voice trembled slightly.

“You’re lying.” Dante growled as he picked up his shorts and pulled them on.

“No, I’m not.” She said softly. Unconvincingly.

“You are!” He stood and turned to face her. “You can lie to yourself, but you can’t lie to me. Or even your friends. They told me they can tell you have feelings for me. But I won’t beg and I won’t try to convince you.”

“Dante, I’m fond of you, yes. But that’s where it ends. I don’t catch feelings.”

“Then get out.” He ground out. “And don’t let the door *catch* your ass on the way out.”

“Dante.”

“GET OUT!” He bellowed.

Mia grabbed her sundress and quickly pulled it on.

“I fucking knew it!” A shout came from the door.

Dante and Mia’s heads jerked up to the door. Celeste stood there staring at them red-faced.

“Celeste.” Dante stepped towards her.

“No!” She held up her hands. “I knew you wouldn’t be able to keep your hands to yourself. You say your old life is in the past, but here you are, can’t keep your dick in your pants.”

“Celeste!” Both Dante and Mia shouted.

“You ruin everything! I knew you’d do something to push her away.” Celeste yelled, her eyes welling with tears.

The teen turned and ran to her bedroom. Her door slammed so hard it shook the walls and made both adults flinch.

“See?” Mia said. “This could never work.”

“Bullshit!” Dante hissed. “You know damn well that if you wanted this and we sat down and talked to her, she’d be ecstatic. She’s an irrational teenager that makes up stories in her head. She hears us arguing and assumes the worst.”

“And she wasn’t wrong.”

“Yeah, because you’re a coward.”

“Fuck you, Dante!”

“Don’t like hearing the truth? The door is wide open.” He pointed to it.

Mia’s jaw clenched. She quickly turned away from him and stormed out the room. He could hear her stomp through his home looking for her shoes and purse. His eyes closed and he flinched again when the front door slammed closed.

Dante took deep gulps of air to keep his emotions in check. He wiped at the few tears he wasn’t able to hold in. Instead of focusing on the woman who’d easily walked out of his life, he focused on the girl who couldn’t so easily leave. He took a fortifying breath, grabbed the gift he’d wanted to give her in private off his dresser, and headed down the hall to her room. He lightly knocked on the door.

“Go away.” He heard her muffled voice.

“You know that’s not going to happen. Can I come in? I have your Sweet 16 gift.”

He heard nothing. It was his cue that she was willing to talk but didn’t want to admit it.

He turned the knob and opened the door. Celeste laid on her bed face down on top of the covers. Dante walked over and sat on the edge next to her hip.

“Before we talk about me, I want to know what happened that made you come home so early.” Dante began.

“I found out Jess was trying to talk to Ty behind my back. We got into an argument and I left.”

*Ah...so she was already upset. Like I thought. Irrational teenager.*

She’d lost a friend and then another in one night. To be so young and

plagued with so much loss, it was no wonder she'd exploded.

"I'm so sorry, Celeste."

"No, you're not. You're just sorry I caught you."

"Caught me doing what exactly? Spending time with the woman I love?"

He said and Celeste whipped her head around to look at him. "I'm an adult. I am allowed to have relationships."

"But why her? Why my mentor?"

"I can no more help who I fall for than you can. We spent time together and really liked each other."

"But you were arguing?"

"Because she's scared to fall in love. Tonight, I told her how I felt and she rejected me. That's why we were fighting." Dante's shoulders slumped dejectedly.

The bed shook under him and suddenly he felt small arms wrap around him and a cheek rest against his back.

"I'm sorry, Dad."

Dante swallowed thickly to keep from breaking. His daughter's sudden empathy squeezed at his heart for more reasons than one.

"I love you, Dad. You'll always have me." She squeezed tighter.

"I know, tesoro mio." He clutched her arms.

It seemed as if he'd lost one love and gained another.

"What does 'tesoro mio' mean?" She asked.

"It means 'my darling' or 'my treasure.'"

"Will you teach me Italian?"

"Of course!" Dante finally raised the small wrapped present he'd been holding. "For you."

Celeste took the present and tore the wrapping paper off. Inside was a black velvet box. She opened it and gasped. It was a white gold chain with a matching pendant. A name plate with her name in cursive.

"It's beautiful, Dad." She whispered.

"I got it especially made. Using your mom's handwriting. Exactly how she wrote your name." Dante explained.

"I love it." Celeste hugged him tightly again. "Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"You can call me CeCe, if you want."

Dante finally broke.

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## Chapter Thirty

Mia walked into their Sunday brunch spot. She was running late, since she hadn't been sure she even wanted to show up. The girls waved to her. She did not return it.

"Hey, Mia. What's wrong?" Kennedy asked once she'd reached the table.

"We left you in a good mood last night. Now, you look pissy. Did anything happen?" Royal added.

"I'm not staying. So, this won't be long." Mia said as she sat.

"What's going on?" Payton looked at the other two nervously.

"You all had no right to tell Dante I have feelings for him."

Their eyes widened.

"Mia-"

"No." She cut Kennedy off. "I don't wanna hear it. You had no right. All it did was give him false hope and make me look like I was stringing him along."

"But weren't you?" Payton asked. She often asked the hard questions since she leaned more toward logical than emotional.

"Payton!" Kennedy and Royal said in unison.

"But she was."

"We are both adults. I told him I didn't want more in the beginning. He pursued me, remember?"

"But you knew he wanted more. You used his vulnerability to manipulate him into the sex you wanted." Payton pressed on.

Royal and Kennedy could do nothing but look back and forth between the two with their mouths open. A tennis match of words.

"He's forty-five years old. He could've stopped it anytime he wanted."

"You sound like those fuckboys you guys always talk about. You're no better than some asshole who toys with a woman's heart simply because you can. And then you gaslight them as if you have no blame in this." Payton said



passionately.

Mia blinked. She was completely taken aback by her normally reserved friend's harsh takedown of her character.

"I'm sorry, Mia. I saw the way he looked at you. He loves you. Deeply. And from what you've already said, it is obvious to anyone paying attention that you broke his heart last night. **You** hurt him and **you** refuse to take accountability, so you take out your anger for being wrong on **us**. It's not right." Payton finished, crossed her arms under her breasts, and looked away.

Mia looked at Kennedy and Royal. Neither could look at her.

"Oh, so you both agree?" Mia asked.

They looked at her sadly.

"Mia...she's not wrong." Kennedy said sadly.

"You know what? Fine." Mia stood. "I'm leaving before I say anything I might regret."

And with that, she turned and walked out of the restaurant. Even though it was a gloomy day, like her mood, Mia quickly shoved her sunglasses on so no one could see her eyes welling with tears.

## Chapter Thirty-One

Mia spent the next three weeks buried in work. She added an extra client just so she didn't have to think about anything other than design. The only person she spoke to in her personal life was her assistant, Isabel.

She hadn't spoken to the girls. And she definitely hadn't spoken to Dante. But the one that kicked her in the gut was the text she'd gotten from Celeste.

**Celeste:**

**I think we probably shouldn't hangout for a while. Maybe longer. You really hurt my dad and I don't wanna get in the middle.**

Mia told her that she understood, but it still cut deep. She'd really bonded with Celeste. And it didn't pass her notice that Dante had obviously told Celeste what had happened. That he was so hurt, his daughter couldn't spend time with her anymore.

The nights were the hardest. The quiet was so loud. No friends. No man. No family. Just her. And her thoughts.

So many freaking thoughts. She couldn't quiet them.

She played music. Loudly. Loud enough that her neighbor upstairs stomped on the floor. She watched countless movies and shows on all the different streaming services. But in the end, they just watched her as she stared off into space. She even went for evening walks after work and morning walks on the weekends. Hell, she even considered getting a pet. Anything to stop the noise in her head.

It was Saturday night, on the third week of her solitude. Mia stood in her closet seriously considering getting dressed and going to a classy bar to find someone to fuck for the night. Even a cozy coffee shop would work. She'd done similar a million times before.

She sighed heavily. She knew there was no point. If she were being

honest with herself, and over the last couple of weeks she'd started being just that, she knew that she'd look for Dante in every masculine face she saw. And she'd only be disappointed when she couldn't find him there.

A knock at her door made her jump. Mia pressed a hand to her chest as she walked out to her living room. She reached the door and looked through the peephole. Just like several weeks ago, all she could see was Kennedy's green eyeball. Tears immediately stung Mia's eyes.

She unlocked and swung the door open. In walked her best friends and family. They were armed with wine, yummy greasy food, and an old DVD they'd watched a hundred times. *Waiting to Exhale*.

Mia closed the door and turned to face them. She dissolved into tears. Instantly, the girls dropped their gifts and wrapped her in a group hug.

"I'm so sorry!" She sobbed.

"I'm sorry, Mia." Payton said. "I didn't mean to be so harsh. You know I have no finesse with these things."

"I know. And you were riiiiight!" Mia cried.

"Aww! Sweetie, it'll be okay." Kennedy rubbed her back.

"Come on. Let's sit and talk. And drink. I think we all need a drink." Royal suggested and they all laughed.

Payton and Mia sat on her couch. Royal plopped down in the matching chair next to the couch. Kennedy found a box of tissues and brought them over. She sat them on the coffee table in front of them and sat on Mia's other side. Mia took a few gratefully and blew her nose.

"Have you talked to him?" Kennedy asked.

"No."

"What about Celeste? Have you seen her?" Royal asked.

Mia could only shake her head as fresh tears rolled down her face.

"S-She thinks we shouldn't hang out anymore. She said I h-hurt her dad and she didn't want to p-pick sides." Mia hiccupped.

"I guess that's understandable." Payton nodded.

"I know. But I didn't expect it to hurt this bad." Mia sniffled.

"That's because you fell in love with both of them." Kennedy placed a hand on her knee and rubbed soothingly.

"Mia. My love. My friend." Royal leaned over and clutched her arm. "Why are you doing this to yourself? Why are you denying yourself this love? A whole ready-made family that seems made just for you?"

"I don't know." Mia shook her head and took a deep breath before

admitting things she'd never even admitted to herself. "I think because I'm just scared. Scared it'll fall apart and I'll be hurt worse than the last time."

"Um...friend? I think you're already heartbroken." Royal said logically. "Hmm...let's think about it, shall we?"

"You pushed them away and you're still heartbroken and may never get over it. Always thinking, 'what if.' Or...give it a try and actually have the life you dreamed of? There's always risk in love. Because it's so important. There's always risk involved in important things. You took a huge risk in going into business for yourself. And it paid off. Now, take a risk in love."

"I know I should. But what if I don't deserve it? What if I got my one chance at love and I chose wrong?" Mia said sadly.

"Oh, Mia!" Kennedy grasped her hands tightly, forcing Mia to look into her eyes. "Why are you punishing yourself for the past? Choosing wrong once doesn't mean you'll choose wrong again. Or that you have to be alone for the rest of your life because your ex did bad things. You didn't do those things. He did. So, don't continue to cut off your nose to spite your face because of his trash ass."

"I just feel so guilty for all the babies I could've helped but didn't because I ignored his behavior. I don't feel like I deserve love."

And there it was. The truth of it. And it landed like a sonic boom in the middle of the room.

"Mia!" They all shouted and wrapped her in another hug as she sobbed uncontrollably.

Kennedy wiped at her own eyes before speaking. "Mia, you have the biggest heart. And so fiercely protective of the ones you love. That alone makes you worthy of all the love the world can give you."

"Yes!" Royal agreed. "And yes, maybe you did miss the opportunity to save the other kids. Mind you, how in the world would you have guessed that?! But...not only did you save the group that was found, you also saved countless others they would've taken in the future."

"And you stood up to, and gave up your blood family to do what was right." Payton added. "You are the strongest person I know."

"But now," Kennedy injected, "it is time for your gentle season. It's time to let go of all that 'Strong Black Woman' persona and rest. Let us... Let *Dante* take on some of that weight you're carrying."

Mia nodded as more tears rushed down her face. She grabbed a throw pillow, placed it on her lap, and bent over to bury her face in it. Her shoulders

shook as she let out seven years' worth of guilt, self-loathing, and the façade of impenetrable strength.

The girls rubbed her back or held her hand as she let it out. She felt fortified by them. She'd always worried they couldn't or shouldn't have to handle what was going on inside of her. Now, she let them lift the weights off of her shoulders.

Once she settled down, they cracked open the wine.

"Fill that shit to the top, please." Mia said as Royal poured.

They snorted with laughter.

They sat back, ate their burgers and fries, and watched their favorite sleepover movie.

The movie was halfway through when Mia's phone started ringing. She glanced at the screen.

"Shit!" She hissed. "It's Dante."

## Chapter Thirty-Two

They all stared at each other for a few beats.

“Well? Don’t just sit there. Answer it!” Kennedy urged her.

Mia jumped. Kennedy’s shout bringing her out of her stupor. She quickly swiped her thumb across the screen to answer.

“Dante?”

“Mia!” His voice immediately made her sit up at attention.

“What’s wrong?” She asked and looked up at the girls. Their eyes were wide.

“It’s CeCe. She’s gone missing and she’s not answering her phone.”

Mia’s eyes widened and her heartrate spiked.

“Celeste has gone missing.” She whispered to the girls.

She quickly put the phone on speaker.

“When was the last time you saw her?” Mia asked.

“Yesterday afternoon.”

Mia clapped a hand over her mouth. *Oh no!*

“Where was she going?”

“She said she was going to hangout with friends. I figured it was harmless. She’s always going to hang with friends.” He said quickly. His accent thicker in his agitation. “But then she never came home and hasn’t answered her phone. I’ve tried to call and text. But nothing.

“I know things ended badly between us, but I figured you might know where to look. That maybe she told you something in confidence that I didn’t know about.” He finished hopefully.

“I don’t recall her telling me anything.” Mia hesitated nervously before continuing. “But a few months ago, at the block party, I saw her get into a car with a friend and two older boys.”

“Mia!”

“Dante, now’s not the time to yell at me. We have to work together.”

“Okay, go on.”

“I didn’t tell you because I knew you’d snap and then she’d never trust me again. I needed her to feel open enough to tell me things. But I told her I knew who she was with and to never do it again. She said that she wasn’t seeing the older guy anymore. And after meeting Ty, I figured she was definitely done with the older boy.” Mia finished.

“Fuck!” Dante shouted.

“Dante, just calm down. I know we’ll find her. Sit tight. We’ll be over.”

“We?”

“The girls are with me. We’ll all help look for her.”

“Absolutely!”

“We sure will.”

“Whatever you need.”

“Thank you, ladies.”

Mia hung up and ran into her room to put shoes on. She was already in shorts and a sweatshirt.

Moments later they were out the door and on their way to Dante’s.

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Dante saw the headlights through his front windows and a couple of cars pulled up. He quickly walked to the door and opened it. Mia, her friends, and their men all got out of their cars.

“We called for more help.” Mia said as she walked forward.

Her eyes were soft and concerned. She looked beautiful and like a life raft for a drowning man. He immediately walked up to her and without hesitation they wrapped each other up in a warm and reassuring hug. Their differences put aside for the moment.

“Did you call the cops?” Bradyn asked.

His question pulled them apart.

“Yeah, last night.” Dante ran his fingers through his hair angrily. “And those assholes told me that she probably just ran away. And that if she hadn’t returned in forty-eight hours to give them a call back.”

“Why the fuck do they always do that? They say the first forty-eight hours are the most important, yet they tell you to call them after forty-eight hours.” Royal growled.

“We’ll find her on our own then. Fuck them.” McKinnon said.

“Oh! Do you have anything on her phone to track her?” Mia asked.

“No.” Dante paused and then his eyes lit up. “But back when I first got her and she started as the new kid at her school she was getting bullied because they’d found out about my past. So, when she was busy doing homework one evening, I put an app on her phone that could monitor if she was being bullied. But then she got some friends and I haven’t thought any more about it.”

“Check your phone! It might have other features you didn’t even realize.” Mia urged.

Dante pulled out his cell from his jeans’ pocket. His hands shook as he opened his phone. He pulled up the app and sure enough. There was the ability to locate her phone as well as check her text and social media interactions.

“I can’t believe I didn’t think of this right away.” Dante ran a frustrated hand through his hair.

“Don’t beat yourself up. You were panicking. It’s rare anyone thinks straight when they panic.” Mia soothed.

Dante tapped through the app and found her location.

“It says she’s at Judah and La Playa. It’s by the water.” Dante looked up at his unexpected support group.

“Let’s roll.” Bradyn commanded.

Everyone immediately jumped into whatever car was available. Dante couldn’t drive. He was far too shaken up to drive safely. Plus, he wanted to check further in her phone. He and Mia jumped in the back of Bradyn’s SUV. Bradyn was levelheaded enough to drive and Payton took her place next to him in the passenger seat. McKinnon drove Royal and Kennedy.

“I want to check who she’s been texting.” Dante told Mia.

She leaned over and they both scanned the app as he tapped and scrolled through everything. They found a now deleted text conversation with a guy named Noah, that the app had miraculously saved. One of its many features.

The beginning of the text conversation had been flirtatious. Innocent. Her and the mystery guy going back and forth. As time went on, he got more and more pushy. Aggressive. He wanted her to send nudes. He wanted to meet up at ungodly hours. He called her a prude for refusing to have sex with him.

They finally reached the last of the texts between them. Texts that were

from the day before, when she went missing.

Noah:
Come on. Let's hangout 1 more time.

Celeste:
I don't really feel comfortable. And I like someone else now.

Noah:
Don't b like that. I just want 2 chill. And I have a belated birthday gift 2 give u.

Celeste:
Really?

Noah:
Of course. U know I feel bad 4 forgetting ur birthday. We could have a little b-day party. Just us as friends.

Celeste:
K. Where?

Noah:
I'll pick u up at that gas station where I met u and ur friend. At 4.

Celeste:
K. C u then.

“Fuck! What a creep!” Dante growled.

“Oh, Celeste.” Mia groaned.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Dried tears streaked down Celeste's face. Her mouth was duct taped, her hands taped behind her back, and her feet taped together at the ankles. Without much success, she'd tried to pick at the tape around her wrists in the hopes of eventually getting free.

She wasn't the only girl there. There were four others as well. All similarly taped. Unfortunately, they were no help to her. They'd all been injected with some kind of sedative or worse. They'd all fought. It's why Noah drugged them. Celeste had pretended to go along with everything to keep from getting the same.

He'd coaxed each one of them to some motel near the water. And as each arrived, he tied them up. When Celeste had first walked in and saw the girls on the beds, floor, or at the table. She'd immediately tried to turn and bolt. Noah had grabbed her and shoved her back in.

That's when a girl at the table lifted her feet and kicked him in his knees. He'd fallen to the floor. The girl was gagged, so she looked at Celeste with wide eyes urging her to fight. To do something while he was down. Celeste only froze. Unable to remember a single thing she'd learned in self-defense.

Noah had gotten up and slapped the girl so hard she slumped down in her chair unconscious. Then Celeste watched with wide eyes as he injected the girl.

Celeste knew then, that to stay alive was to keep from getting injected. She did everything he asked, while her mind whirled with ways to get free.

He left multiple times throughout the night. But he never brought back another girl.

At one point when he came back, Celeste listened to a phone conversation he'd had.

"Yeah, man. I got some... Five... Yeah. All of 'em are pretty... Four virgins... Okay, I'll meet you there tomorrow night... 1am. Got it... Don't fuck me over on my money, bruh. There better be \$25K."

After listening to his one-sided conversation, Celeste gathered that he was getting paid \$5,000 for each girl. And he said four were virgins out of the five. Something in her gut said that she was the one who supposedly wasn't. Meaning he planned to take hers before selling her, but didn't want to get caught damaging the 'product.' So, he was pretending she was already damaged goods.

Celeste knew what she had to do. It would be her only shot. She had to let him think she wanted it.

It was dusk, the night of the planned exchange. She knew he'd come for her soon. Celeste heard the door unlock. She took a deep breath.

As soon as the door opened, Noah's eyes were on her. He walked over and knelt down next to the bed to get more eye level with her.

"I only have a few hours with you." He caressed a curl from her cheek. It took all Celeste had not to cringe away. "Are you ready? I can see in your eyes that you want me."

Celeste nodded. She must have hidden her revulsion well. A moment later, he pulled the duct tape from her mouth.

"Thank you, Noah." She said sweetly.

"You're welcome, cutie." He grinned at her. "You're not gonna fight me, are you?"

"No. I-I've wanted to do this since we met. I was just really nervous because you're older and I felt so inexperienced." Celeste almost gagged.

"Oh, don't you worry. Let Noah take care of you."

"Okay."

He reached in his pocket and pulled one of those pocket knives that pop out with a simple press of a button. Celeste's eyes widened as he came towards her with it. But he only cut through the tape around her ankles. Then he leaned behind her and cut the tape from around her wrists.

Celeste laid back and held out her hand. Noah grinned and moved to get on top of her. One of his legs straddled one of hers and she jerked her knee up with all her strength. Unfortunately, in her rush, she didn't make direct contact. Instead, her knee hit more of his thigh. But it was enough. The jig was up.

Celeste watched as a sinister look came over his face.

"You fucking bitch!" Noah growled. "You'll pay for that."

He backhanded her across the cheek. Celeste began to fight back in earnest. She used her nails to claw at him. But he was too strong. His rage

took over and he wrapped his hands around her throat. She clawed at his forearms.

An image of her practicing with Ty flashed before her eyes. Celeste quickly wrapped her feet around his torso, bringing him closer. She wrapped her hands across his arms and gripped his elbows. Then she lifted her feet to his shoulders, and placed them right behind his head. She jerked her hips up as hard as she could. A double crack ripped through the small hotel room as she broke both his arms.

A split second later, Noah let out an inhuman shriek. His arms flopped uselessly at his sides as he rolled back and forth.

Celeste didn't wait. She pushed off the bed and ran for the door. She ripped it open and ran out into the dark parking lot hidden in the back of the motel.

She ran blindly right into someone's arms.

Chapter Thirty-Four

“Celeste!” Dante shouted as she ran straight into his arms.

Mia practically collapsed with relief next to them.

Celeste struggled for a moment.

“Celeste, it’s me. It’s me.” Dante’s words rushed out.

As soon as she realized it was her dad and she was safe, she broke down into uncontrollable sobs.

“I’m so sorry, Dad.” She cried into his chest.

Mia heard the screams from someone inside where Celeste had run from. Bradyn and McKinnon both ran over to the door.

“Jesus Christ!” Bradyn shouted.

“Call the cops!” McKinnon called back.

They both went inside.

“Girls!” McKinnon shouted a moment later from inside.

Mia, Royal, and Kennedy ran for the door while Payton called the cops. What greeted them made them gasp in horror. The guys were trying to cut the tape from the bound girls, but rightfully so, the girls were freaking out over the large men.

Mia rushed over to one.

“It’s okay. We’re here to help you. The cops are coming. You’re safe.” Mia soothed.

The girl started shaking and sobbing the moment she realized she was safe. They all did.

Mia’s heart broke for them. And she couldn’t believe that her life had come full circle in such an insane way.

Noah laid on the ground groaning in agony. She hoped he’d choke to death on his own tongue.

“I need help here, assholes. My fucking arms are broken.” He had the audacity to shout at them.

“Shut the fuck up!” Bradyn bellowed. “Or I swear te God, I’ll rip yer

arms clean off, you godless cocksplat.”

That did the trick. Noah shut up and scowled in the corner until the police arrived and placed him in an ambulance.

As the police and medics rushed in, Mia walked back out into the chaos. Blue and red lights rotated around the parking lot. She looked around and found who she was looking for.

Slowly, she walked over to Dante and Celeste. The teen was finishing up telling what had happened to a female detective. Mia hung back until the detective walked away.

Dante looked up and Celeste followed his gaze. They stared at Mia for a moment. Then Celeste lifted her arm out from under the blanket they’d given her. She held her hand out to Mia and she quickly walked forward and took it. Celeste pulled her close and hugged her tight.

“Are you okay?” Mia whispered against her hair.

“I think so.” Celeste said shakily.

Mia pulled back, clutched the sides of Celeste’s face, and studied her to be sure.

“I mean, I’m pretty sure I’m gonna need therapy after this. But other than that. I’m okay. Thanks to you.”

“To me?” Mia frowned.

“It was as if you knew I’d need those self-defense classes. It’s what saved my life.” Celeste blinked rapidly.

Mia pulled her into the circle of her arms once more.

“Unfortunately, I know the evils in this world. I know firsthand. I just wanted to protect you. Even if your dad or I aren’t there.” Mia said and hugged her tighter.

She looked up at Dante. He mouthed the words ‘thank you.’ Mia nodded. He stepped forward and placed a hand on Celeste’s back.

“You ready to go home?”

“Yeah. I want to shower and sleep for a week.” Celeste confessed. Her exhaustion from her ordeal was evident on her face.

“I think I can arrange that. And lots of good food.” Dante smiled at her.

“Yes, please!”

“I’ll take the week off work, if you’d like.”

“Let’s not get too hasty, Dad. I do like my privacy.”

“Fine. It was only a suggestion. And I have to admit, I am a little nervous to let you outta my sight.”

“I’ll check in on her when you’re at work. How’s that?” Mia suggested.

“I’d like that.” Dante said softly.

“Me too.” Celeste added and laid her head on Mia’s arm.

Mia took in a shaky breath. She let the love she felt spread through her, instead of holding it back.

So, that’s what it feels like.

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Chapter Thirty-Five

It had been a week since the ordeal. Overnight the story had spread. Even though Celeste was a minor, it still got out within her friend group what had happened. Suddenly, she was the most popular girl and the parents who'd judged her dad and his daughter too harshly, were now sending care packages.

Mia had gone over to Dante's house every day to have lunch with Celeste. She'd seen Dante in passing a couple of times, but nothing long enough to talk. She wanted to have the talk, but she also wanted to focus on making sure Celeste was truly okay. It wasn't about her at the moment. So, she kept her feelings under wraps until a more appropriate time.

It was a hot, end of summer night, so Mia put on a flirty white sundress. Dante had invited her and her inner circle to dinner at his house. He wanted to thank them for helping find Celeste with one of his incredible meals.

Mia drove over alone. She realized she was the first to arrive when she pulled into the driveway.

Dante answered the door. He looked handsome in relaxed fit jeans and an untucked white button up shirt. The sleeves were sexily rolled up his forearms. Exactly what he'd worn months ago, when they first met in his cooking class. The smells of garlic, rosemary, and other delicious scents she couldn't place, wafted outside.

"Mia." Dante said softly.

He was still acting very reserved. Not that she could blame him. But he did lean forward and kiss both her cheeks in greeting. Mia could've sworn he almost kissed her on his way to her other cheek. The near kiss was more out of habit than anything. And she could feel the heat and tension that radiated between them.

"It smells amazing, Dante." Mia said as she stepped inside.

"I'm making Fiorentina steak and roasted potatoes with a green olive tapenade. Along with Panzenella, a bread salad that goes great with ciabatta

bread. As well as a charcuterie board to nibble on while the steaks cook.” Dante listed as they walked into the kitchen. “I’m just waiting for everyone to arrive before pan searing the steak.”

“Wow! You really went all out.” Mia looked around at the spread.

Dante poured her a glass of red wine and handed it to her. Her fingers grazed over his. His eyes found hers and she pulled the glass from his fingers. He quickly cleared his throat.

“Well, it’s the least I could do. You and your friends helped save my daughter’s life.” Dante blinked rapidly and then turned away.

“Is that Mia?!” Celeste said as she rumbled down the staircase like a normal teenager.

“Yeah, it’s me.”

Celeste ran up and wrapped her arms around Mia’s waist. Mia hugged her back. She kissed the top of the teen’s head. She felt eyes on her. She looked up and saw the look of longing on Dante’s face. It was more than just for himself. It was a longing for their cozy family dynamic. Mia knew she had to tell him tonight.

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Mia and Dante waved as all her friends piled into their cars and drove off. Celeste ran upstairs to avoid cleaning up. That just left Mia and Dante.

“I’ll help you clean up.” Mia offered.

“You don’t have to do that.”

“Yes, I do. After that amazing ass dinner, I absolutely have to.”

“Well, I appreciate it.”

They worked side by side. Mia gathered and washed. Dante dried and put away. The only sounds were the water running and clanking of dishes and silverware. The weight of the impending conversation hung heavily between them.

“Would you like another glass of wine?” Dante asked when they were finally done.

“Yeah, that would be nice.”

Mia’s heart pounded in her chest. She’d never felt so nervous in all her life.

She walked around the island and sat on one of the stools. Dante remained on the other side. Probably a defense mechanism. The island between them acted as protection from her.

“Mia.”

“Dante.”

They both started at the same time.

“No, let me say what I need to say.” Mia said.

“Okay.” He said tensely.

He pulled the dry towel he’d thrown over his shoulder down. His hands unconsciously twisted it around and around.

“I’m so...so sorry for the night of Celeste’s party. Everything you said was true.”

Dante’s eyes widened and he dropped the towel.

“I was...I *am* scared. You could hurt me more than my ex.”

He started around the counter until he stood next to her. Mia turned in the stool to face him.

“Because I love you more than anyone I-”

Dante gripped her face and crushed his mouth to hers urgently, cutting off the rest of her sentence. Mia gasped and he took advantage. His tongue stroked inside and she trembled.

“YES!”

The word pulled them apart. They turned to where it had come. Celeste sat on the stairs. Her hands gripped the spindles of the railing as she peered through them.

They both smiled brightly at her. She took that as her cue to run down the steps and right into their arms.

“So, this means you two are back together, right?” Celeste asked hopefully as she looked up at them.

“Yeah, I think so. If your dad will have me, of course.”

“I thought the kiss said it all. I must be slipping.” Dante grinned. “But just in case you misunderstood... Mia, I’ve loved you for months. I saw a life together since the block party. You’re everything I’ve ever wanted.”

Dante ended his confession with another deep kiss. When he pulled back, Mia gave him a watery chuckle. Celeste pulled a gross face.

“Now, that that’s over with. I have a question for you, Mia.” Celeste said.

“Go for it.”

“Will you marry us?”

Mia’s eyes widened. She looked at Dante. He shrugged.

“Well, I mean, will you marry my dad so we can be a family. I’ve never had a normal family.” Celeste looked up at her hopefully.

“I- Uh...Dante?” Mia looked to him for help.

She didn’t know what to say. It wasn’t like he was the one asking. She didn’t want to trap him into anything he didn’t want.

*And why is my first response to worry about him not being the one asking, and not me immediately freaking out and saying no?*

Mia’s eyes widened further and her mouth dropped to the floor as she watched Dante drop to one knee in front of her.

“I...uh...I don’t have a ring, but we can shop for whatever you want later. So...Mia Ayala, will you marry me?”

“Holy shit! Oh, sorry.” She cringed at Celeste. “Yes! Yes, I’ll marry you.”

It was worth it to see the smile that spread across his handsome face.

Dante jumped up and lifted her into his arms. Once he let her feet back down, they pulled Celeste into a warm group hug.

Celeste was the one who brought up wanting a normal family. But Mia was certain that Dante craved one as well. And once she’d admitted it to herself, she wanted it too.

Three lost souls come together.

## Epilogue

Mia smiled dreamily. A soft cool breeze blew by as she took a sip of her margarita. The sounds of the ocean lulled her as she lazed on a lounge chair outside their casita in the Maldives.

It was their honeymoon. A perfect place to celebrate their love.

She thought about their little wedding at the elegant and historical courthouse in San Francisco. Celeste had been her maid of honor, since she hadn't wanted to choose between her friends. The girls hadn't cared, and Celeste had been over the moon.

Mia had worn a simple, but still beautiful, white mermaid dress. Dante had looked good enough to eat in a charcoal gray, 3-piece suit. She'd chosen yellow, her favorite color, for her girls and Celeste to wear. The guys in lighter gray suits with yellow ties to match Dante's.

It had been small and perfect. Surrounded by her chosen family with two new additions.

But now, was just for her and Dante. Celeste was staying with Bradyn and Payton, while they had their honeymoon. And they had definitely been enjoying the alone time.

Mia was certain they'd fucked on every available surface of their casita on the water. They had no qualms about how loud they were or if they could be seen fucking on their little deck. Their neighbors probably hated them.

Dante stepped out onto the deck.

"Here, amore mio." He handed her another drink. "I figured you'd almost be done with that one."

The slurp of Mia's straw answered his question. They both giggled like teenagers.

A noise from their neighboring casita reached their ears. They both looked over and a couple was waving at them. They waved back.

"Hey," The woman called out. "Um...we've...uh...heard you guys a lot over the last couple of days."

“Oh my God! We’re so sorry. We’ll try to keep it down.” Mia called out. “Honeymoon.”

Mia shrugged by way of explanation.

“Oh, no! We don’t mind at all.” The woman hesitated. “We actually thought it was pretty hot. And then we saw you both and you’re like the hottest couple we’ve ever seen. We just wondered if you’d like to come over for some drinks and see where the night goes...”

Mia and Dante looked at each other with raised brows. Matching smiles spread across their faces.

“Sure!”

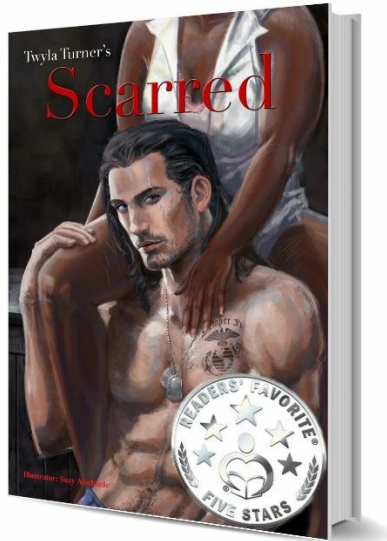
**The End**

*If you enjoyed Mia and Dante’s story, please leave a review at the retailer you purchased the book from. A few words are always appreciated.*

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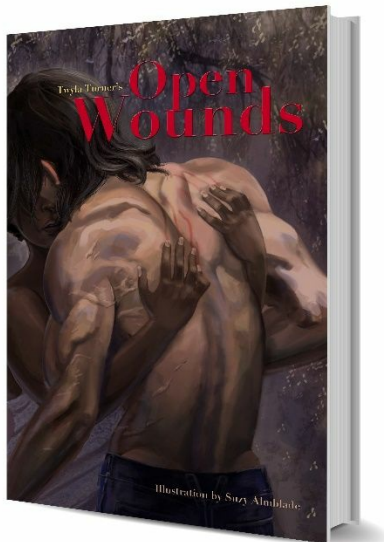
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To my loyal readers, I'm coming up on 10 years in December, since I published my first book. And the way you all have supported and rallied around me and my work has been so incredibly heartwarming. I love you all so much. You have no idea.

And to new readers, I hope you enjoy my books and stay a while. Thank you for giving me a chance.



## [About the Author](#)

Twyla Turner currently resides in Arizona. She was born and raised in Joliet, Illinois. A Midwest girl at heart, though constantly moving from place to place, and always thinking of where she wants to go next. Having been an avid romance novel reader since junior high and minoring in Creative Writing. She felt that it was finally time to start combining her love of travel and writing, as well as her life experiences and putting them down on “paper.” Which experiences, she’ll never tell...well maybe, if you ask nicely.

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