

Miranda

Our lips meet and part, and Dennis has just reached for my breast when he's ripped from my grasp. When I look up, Uncle Tommy has him by the collar and the back of his pants, and is hustling him toward the front door. I get up and follow them into the foyer, and once there, Uncle Tommy opens the door and lifts Dennis off his feet, and then he promptly rears back and flings him out, just like on a cartoon. He throws him with such force that Dennis flies about halfway down our flagstone path before crash landing. He gets up and looks around, dazed. My uncle points at him, no words needed, and gestures towards his car. Dennis takes the hint and gets in it, and Uncle Tommy turns to me, dusting off his hands.

"Come on," he says, hiking a thumb toward the house. "You know where to go."

I sag in dismay. "Oh, no."

"I'm afraid so. And let's make it snappy. I've got somewhere to be."

I turn and follow him into his private study. What he needs a study for, I can't tell. The last time I saw him read a book was about six months ago, and that was just because it was about Babe Ruth.

He goes and sits on the couch, and I approach him.

"Please, Uncle Tommy? Can't we—"

"No. Now quit whining and get over my lap before you make me late."

Accepting of my fate, I go ahead and crawl over his lap. He starts before I'm fully settled in, so I know he's not lying about being in a hurry.

"Miranda," he tells me, "Stop wiggling and listen to me. I'm not putting up with this whoring around anymore. It's time you got yourself a man. A real man. One who can keep you in line."

I settle into place and say, "I wish."

"So do I," he says, going for my thighs, "and we're going to start looking for this man right away."

I twist around so I can see his face.

"Oh, not some old crustor," I plead.

“No,” he says, stopping for a moment. “I’m not talking about an old man. A few years older than you should suffice.”

“Like what? Twenty-five? Twenty-six?”

“Now you’re in my wheelhouse.”

“Then why don’t you hook me up with a guy on your team? I like Bobby Sinclaire.”

“No,” he tells me, resuming the spanking. “He won’t do. We need someone to help me keep an eye on you during the season.”

“I guess. Ow.”

“I’m thinking someone in the organization,” he says. As if I have a choice. And my spanking’s starting to hurt, even through my jeans.

“As long as he’s not all stiff and full of rules. Why? You got someone in mind?”

He stops for a second.

“Maybe. Maybe this guy, Jason Weed.”

“So I’d be, what, Mrs. Weed? Our kids will be the little Weeds.”

“God damn it, Miranda, I’m trying here.”

“Sorry. What’s he do?”

“He’s our assistant pitching coach.”

“And?”

“And mostly he analyzes the information they get off the Trackman, and uses it to advise the pitching coach.”

“What’s a Trackman?”

“It’s this camera-looking thing that tracks where pitches go for TV. You’ve seen it before, where it shows if the pitch was over the plate or not.”

“And that’s an entire job?”

“Of course it is. It’s a very important job.”

“Then won’t he...wait, can I get up?”

“Go ahead.”

I sit up and snuggle beside him. My butt’s hot and sore, but not as much as normal, since he was busy blabbing instead of spanking.

“What were you going to say?” he asks.

“I was going to say, won’t he be as busy as you are during the season?”

“Yes, he will,” he tells me, “so I guess he’ll have to come down pretty hard on you.”

“Whoa. It’s not like I’m some foaming-at-the-mouth maniac, running around doing crazy stuff. I’m just...playing the field a little. And anyway, why not Bobby Sinclaire if this other guy’s going to be just as busy?”

“Because Bobby isn’t the right kind of guy for you. He’s kind of an ass-user. You don’t want that, do you?”

“No, I guess not. Not really. When can I meet this Jason guy?”

“Part of the team and staff are doing a charity golf tournament. I figure I’ll invite them back to the house after.”

“Pool party? Barbeque?”

“There are only about twenty, so how about some drinks and hors d’oeuvres instead?”

“When is it?”

“Next week, Wednesday.”

I jump to my feet.

“I’ll get right on it. Ignatius!”

I enter the kitchen, where our housekeeper, Ignatius, is busy taking inventory.

“Yes?”

“Uncle Tommy’s going to have part of the team over for drinks and appetizers next week, and he’s inviting some new guy to meet me. Do you think you can whip something up?”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I don’t know. Maybe some grilled shrimp? And hey...how about those little wonton cups with the chicken and stuff in them?”

“So you want to lean towards Asian?”

“Of course. You know it’s Uncle Tommy’s favorite.”

“Hold on. Let me open up a new document.”

He pulls his laptop closer and starts pecking away at it.

“Next Wednesday, huh? How many people?”

“Twenty.”

“Better make it forty,” he says. “You know that man always invites twice as many as he says he will.”

“Did you hear me? He wants to invite some guy from the organization to meet me.”

Ignatius glances up. “Oh?”

“Yeah. He wasn’t too thrilled when he caught me and Dennis making out on the couch.”

“Did he make you eat wood?”

“A little bit.”

“Now let’s see,” says Ignatius, getting back to the menu. “Are grilled shrimp, Asian wings, and teriyaki strips okay?”

“Yeah. And we’d better make something vegan and gluten-free for the wives and girlfriends. That fried tofu you make would probably be all right.”

“I hate those bitches, always throwing up my food after.”

“Not all of them. Amanda Rankin doesn’t do that.”

“She’s about the only one, besides you. Now what else?”

I count them off on my fingers.

“Spring rolls, crab rangoons, a couple of vegetable dishes, Onigiri filled with smoked salmon. You know. The usual. Just stock up on that Japanese beer. Those guys love that stuff. And order about six dozen of those cherry silk napkins. They look so elegant.”

“You want the plastic or the porcelain soup spoons?”

“Oh, the porcelain, for sure. And try to get everyone their own private set of enameled chopsticks, too, to take home with them.”

“I know just the place,” he tells me. “Now do you just want to hand out chopsticks, or would you like to throw together an entire goody bag for each guest?”

“Oh, a goody bag sounds fun.”

We sit and talk about the food and drinks for a little while longer, and then he turns to look me in the eye.

“Now, what’s supposed to happen with this new guy?”

“We’re supposed to fall madly in love, I guess, and he’s going to marry me and put the screws to me and make me straighten up.”

“Your uncle’s an optimistic man,” he tells me.

“I know. Like I’m going to let some new guy start bossing me around right out of the gate. Anyway, who’s to say we’ll even like each other? I want Bobby Sinclair.”

“Ooh, me too, girl. I might even wax my body for a guy that cute.”

Now, what you need to know about Ignatius is, he's a Greek gay man, and therefore kind of hairy—almost what you could call an 'otter.' When he's with a guy, he's definitely the alpha male, so he normally doesn't do things like wax his body hair or shave it all off. The most he'll consent to is shaving his face twice a day so he looks non-Cro-Magnon.

But really, once you get a look at those cool, blue eyes of his, and that screaming rock-hard body, it's tough to care how hairy his knuckles are. Even for me, and he doesn't swing that way.

"Want to go out tonight?" he asks me.

"Only if you promise not to wander off with some twink."

"You're the one who attracts them."

"I do not."

"Like a moth to a flame. I just finish them off."

"What a sweet thing to say," I tell him. "Hey, I know. Let's go out to the day spa Friday."

"Don't we need reservations?"

"Nah. It's never busy during the weekdays. Except during wedding season, that is."

"All right. What are you going to wear tonight?"

"My black dress with the white collar," I tell him. "How about you, what are you wearing?"

"Blue, of course, to bring out my eyes."

"So, does your husband know he's going to be your husband?" Ignatius asks, over the loud techno music in the club. A spot of blue light crosses his face, then red, then yellow.

"I'm sure he'll figure it out in ten seconds flat, but you know how Uncle Tommy is. He thinks he's so crafty."

"He's a good man. You should cut him a little more slack."

"He should cut me some," I say. "I'm just doing what comes naturally to twenty-one-year olds."

"Yes, but he wouldn't be a good uncle if he just let you do it."

"Now you're starting to sound like him."

He smiles and takes a sip off his drink. I see him glance up, and I know there's some guy standing behind me he wants to flirt with.

"Come, sit down," he says. "Join us."

“Thank you,” says the young man, taking the seat to Ignatius’s right. The kid’s sporting a young David Lee Roth look and nailing it, with his shoulder-length blond hair and high cheekbones. He can’t be much older than me, but there’s a jaded air about him. Probably some street hustler, I surmise.

“What’s your name, kid?” Ignatius asks the boy.

“Kevin Hand.”

“Well, Kevin, this is my young friend, Miranda Dowling, and I’m Ignatius Gallo.”

“Pleased to meet you.”

He shakes hands with each of us like he has some manners, so I figure his jaded air must be a put-on. I relax and take a drink of my Tom Collins, and the two of them start talking and flirting. I hope Ignatius remembers his promise not to disappear, but it’s not as drastic a promise as it might sound, since he can always bring Kevin back to my house, where Ignatius has an apartment over the garage. But he—and Uncle Tommy—both like their privacy, so it’s a rare thing for him to invite a stranger over.

He looks like he just might invite this one, though.

So I’m sitting there while they talk, and it’s just about what I expected, except instead of disappearing, Ignatius just pretty much ignores me.

“Come on,” I say. “Let’s go home.”

So we start for home, and guess who gets to sit in back while Ignatius’s new boyfriend sits in front?

Rude.

It was his idea for me to come out in the first place.

Anyway, we get home and I’m slightly tipsy. There are tons of cars in the driveway, so we have to parallel park out on the street.

“Ooh!” I clap. “An impromptu party.”

I barely wait for Ignatius to stop the car so I can get out. I know he knows they’re both invited, so I head for the house and I don’t even look back.

I come into the house and I immediately catch my uncle’s eye. He excuses himself from the man he’s talking to and comes to me.

“You didn’t drive like that, did you, Brat?”

“Good God, no. I went with Ignatius, and you know he never drinks more than one when we’re out. By the way, he brought a guest home, so don’t get mad.”

“As long as you didn’t bring a guest home, I guess I’m all right.”

Our glances meet, and I know he’s thinking about Dennis.

“I still owe you the rest of your spanking,” he tells me.

My glance darts around to make sure nobody hears him say that, but everybody’s busy with their own conversations.

“Shush,” I tell him.

“Well, I do.”

“There’s gratitude for you. I’m planning a whole party for you, and that’s how you want to do me?”

He grabs my hand and lifts it to his lips.

“You silly girl. You know that party’s for you.”

“Yes, but do I really need that...you know? I’ve already agreed to meet this guy you’re inviting.”

He drops my hand and looks at me.

“Well, if you’ll help me entertain these guys, I just might let you off.”

“Okay. Are you sure I can’t have Bobby Sinclair? There’s still time to call this other guy off.”

“Forget about Bobby Sinclair. The party’s next week. Hey, I like that dress. Why don’t you wear it to the party?”

“Why don’t I wear white, remind him of weddings and all?”

“Nah. Too blatant. Besides, you look cute.”

“Thanks. It kills them at the club.”

In the morning, I’m a little hung over, but I head down to the kitchen anyway. Ignatius is there frying up some eggs and bacon for Uncle Tommy. They get along all right, but they never have a whole lot to say to each other, since Ignatius isn’t into sports and Uncle Tommy’s into women. Mostly when they do talk, it’s about me or something to do with the house. This time, it’s about the party.

“That’s what I like about you, man,” Uncle Tommy’s saying when I arrive. “You keep this house running like a top. If this party comes off the way I’m hoping, I’ll give you a raise.”

“Uncle Tommy.”

He laughs. “Just screwing around. I’ll give you a raise anyway. You deserve it.”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Wright.”

“After all these years? Call me Tommy, like everybody else does.”

“Mr. Tommy.”

“Close enough. How are you this morning, Miranda?” he asks, turning his attention toward me.

“Fine. Can I have some bacon and eggs, too, Ignatius?”

“But of course. You’re too skinny anyhow.”

“Can’t help it,” I say, pouring myself a glass of juice. “I have the metabolism of a racehorse.”

“Yeah, you do,” says Uncle Tommy. “What do you have today?”

I stick out my bottom lip, thinking about my classes. “Algebra and Business Ethics.”

Uncle Tommy looks at me.

“You’re not enjoying Business at all, are you?”

“I told you. It’s boring. I wish I could drop out. I fucking hate quadratic equations.”

“It won’t kill you to finish out the semester. And quit cussing.”

“Yes, Uncle Tommy,” I answer, but then I turn my attention back to Ignatius. “So, how’d things go with Kevin last night?”

“Excellent.”

“Is he still here?”

He throws a glance at Uncle Tommy, but nods his head.

“Invite him down for some breakfast,” I tell him.

We both look at Uncle Tommy, but he has his coffee cup to his lips, so he’s not objecting. Ignatius finishes up our plates and hands them to us, and then he slips out the back door to go get Kevin.

“Who’s Kevin, by the way?” Uncle Tommy asks.

“A guy Ignatius picked up. He’s really nice, though.”

We eat in silence until Ignatius gets back with Kevin. I pat the seat next to me and he sits. I introduce him to my uncle while Ignatius makes him something to eat. Uncle Tommy asks him

a few questions about himself, but Kevin's only half-mindful of them. He's busy watching Ignatius flip his eggs and then slide them onto a plate.

"He's good, isn't he?" I ask Kevin. He nods, his eyes practically glued to Ignatius.

I glance at my watch.

"Well, I've got to get going. Nice seeing you again, Kevin. The rest of you...have a good day. See you tonight, Uncle Tommy."

"See you, Brat."

I grab my keys and backpack and head out the door to the pink car Uncle Tommy bought me for turning twenty-one, thinking how awesome it'll be if things work out between Kevin and Ignatius. I know my poor housekeeper gets lonely a lot and needs a boyfriend, so I wish him the best.

My classes are boring, of course, but the time seems to go by pretty quickly. Out in the hallway after, I run into Dennis, who looks like he fell off a skateboard.

"Hi, Dennis."

"Hey, babe. Busy right now? Want to go get some lunch?"

"What do you have in mind?"

"The Taco Shack has two-for-one right now."

"Okay. Just let me stash my books in my car. I'm in Lot C." We get rid of my books, and then I turn to him. "You didn't get hurt, did you? When Uncle Tommy put you out?"

"Just scraped the heels of my hands. And my nose. Yeah. What's that dude's problem?"

"He feels you disrespected our home."

"You know I would never do that."

"I know."

He turns to me and pulls me close.

"Want to go make out somewhere after this?"

"I can't," I say. "I have to go home and plan one of Uncle Tommy's parties."

We eat our tacos and Dennis walks me back to my car. Before he leaves, I give him a sweet little peck on the cheek, instead of the deep, slow kiss I'd normally give him, because the truth is, I feel funny making out with Dennis now, knowing Uncle Tommy's arranging a husband for me, so I get in my car like a good girl and drive home.