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# MAKIA'S BODYGUARD

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JOY BUSSU



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Joy Bussu  
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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
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## Prologue

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**T**wenty-four-year-old Makia Sallow-Hansen sighed as she crossed the street to the studio she shared with her sister, Sage. Her latest sketches were rolled up in the hard-sided leather sketch bag over her shoulder to protect them from the weather.

Her thigh still stung from the smack of her husband Michael's belt and she was sure he had left a bruise this time. God, she hated him! Waking up knowing he was in that house made her want to vomit. She wanted to leave so bad she could taste it but she knew she couldn't, not yet anyway.

Theirs was a marriage of convenience, no more than a business transaction negotiated by her overbearing and greedy parents and Michael Hansen's lawyers. To this day, the way they bargained and argued about her made her blood boil. The way they referred to her, never by her name, but like she was an object or a piece of land was disgusting!

Makia shook away her bad thoughts and walked into her studio, smiling. Sage was already setting up for her first photo shoot of the day while old school Tupac echoed around the room.

“Sissy! I thought you weren’t coming down here until this afternoon,” Sage called over her shoulder, moving a lounge chair into the strong beams of her circle of lights.

Makia hated her parents and hell, she hated most of her snotty, stuck up family to be honest with only two exceptions: their paternal grandmother Lola and her big sister Sage. She would do anything for ‘the two halves of her heart’, as she called them and this was exactly why she was in the situation she was in right now. For Sage and her grandmother to be safe, Makia would gladly walk to Hell and back if she had to and she knew Sage would do the same for her.

“That was the original plan before ‘Minute Man’ got on my damn nerves this morning. He is such a whiny bitch! I cannot wait until this shit is over, for real,” Makia snapped, putting down her stuff and walking over to help Sage move the iron table she wanted in her shot from the corner of the room. The sisters had nicknamed her husband the ‘Minute Man’ because he was weak as hell in all aspects of life, especially in the bedroom, but his ego wouldn’t let him just take the loss so he was known to get physical from time to time, like this morning with the belt.

“I know that weak-stroking bastard didn’t put his hands on you again, did he?” Sage stood up, put her hands on her hips, and began scanning Makia for bruises.

Michael was a big man and in most women’s eyes he was quite handsome and a catch, especially with all those zeros and commas in his bank account. However Makia was not and never had been impressed by the cars, homes and money he had, not even before she knew what type of man he was.

He was a fucking bully who intimidated people by throwing his weight and money around. However he found out very early in their marriage that even with her 5’4” stature Makia was not intimidated in the least and she could hold her own. No one but Sage knew that when her parents signed them up for ballet when Sage was seven and she was five, Makia snuck into the gym next

door and talked her way into boxing lessons instead since the ballet teacher and the boxing instructor were husband and wife and the money went to the same place anyways.

Michael had size but she had the skill and they'd had many a battle in their first two years of marriage. The only reason she continued to put up with it was because of the threats he made against Sage and her grandmother. Because of how quick she was to hit back, he kept his hands to himself for the most part and focused more on sneak attacks.

"Nothing that I couldn't handle, sis, you know how I get down. I do need you to check the back of my thigh though, it's still stinging. Did he break the skin?" Makia lifted up her long skirt and turned her back to Sage. Sage's sudden intake of breath let Makia know it was looking pretty bad back there.

"What the fuck, Makia? What did he hit you with? I swear to God, one day I'm going to kill his bitch ass for this! Why don't you just leave, Kia? Nothing is worth this kind of shit, especially since the only ones benefiting from this fucking marriage is Minute Man and Jason and Evelyn," Sage said, referring to their parents with an eye roll and a grumble. Even when she was the one who mentioned her parents' names, it still set Sage off.

Makia knew Sage didn't care about her parents pulling their financial support or disowning her since finding out about her lifestyle. She could honestly take her last breaths on earth without ever seeing or hearing from them again for all she cared and Makia was right there with her. Sage's biggest concern, though, was Makia and them using their sisterly bond and their grandmother to blackmail Makia into marrying Michael.

The day Makia told Sage that their parents had sold Michael the property that housed their condo and studio, as well as their grandmother's house to secure the marriage, they died as far as the sisters were concerned.

"It was a belt and it's only five more years, Sage or sooner if my lawyer can find a loophole to get me out of this shit. I refuse

to let us lose everything we worked so hard to build just because Jason and Evelyn went bankrupt and used me to pad their pockets,” Makia answered, closing her eyes against the sudden sting when Sage lightly touched the angry mark on the back of her thigh.

“We would be all right, we could keep the studio and Grandma Lo’s house. We have enough in our savings and your trust to do both,” Sage mumbled, biting her bottom lip thoughtfully. She had grabbed the first aid kit and was tending to Makia’s thigh as they talked.

“How Sage? This is our life’s dream and you and I know Michael would have this place bulldozed to the ground the minute I left. Grandma Lo’s house too! And apparently the terms of my trust have been changed and tied into this sham of a marriage, so I can’t collect until I have my first child. For now he owns the properties and because of that, he owns me for five more years. You and I both know even if we took the money we’ve saved to relocate, he would just buy that property too. We can outwit the idiot but we can’t out money him, sissy,” Makia reasoned sadly, looking down into Sage’s angry scowl over her shoulder as she secured the bandage on the back of her thigh.

“I can’t watch this happen for five more years Kia, I can’t! I am willing to lose everything before I allow you to endure this any longer, it’s sick! And I will find a way to wreck all of their shit before I ever allow you to have that barracuda’s baby! Jason and Evelyn can go to hell! Fuck them and that trust fund!” Sage spat, putting everything back in the first aid kit and walking back across the studio to put it away.

“I know you would, Sage but I’m not willing to let you do that, also I’m not having a baby so don’t trip. They took everything away from you, you even had to drop out of school because of them. They are not taking away our studio or Grandma’s home, not while I’m still breathing. I can handle Michael and I

can handle our parents if they resurface again, okay? Just continue to shine so I can throw your success in their faces!"

Makia hugged her sister before picking up her stuff and heading to the second floor of the studio where her things were. She heard Sage's first client of the day arrive and soon the repetitive click of her cameras brought Makia enough peace and calm to start painting.

Despite the rough start of her morning, the subject's face that stared up at her from her unrolled canvas caused her to smile. The subject of her sketch was every woman's fantasy personified, tall and handsome with a muscular build, but it was his hair that he wore in long, perfectly maintained dreads that took her under.

Most of the time they were either braided into a style or ponytail so the first time she had the pleasure of seeing him with his crowning glory hanging over his shoulders wild and free on full display was the day she stopped fighting with herself and admitted her attraction to him. That day he became not only her one and only heart's desire, but also the accelerant that was going to burn her parents and Michael Hansen's money grabbing dreams to the ground and allow her and Sage to rise from the ashes.

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## Chapter 1

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*Four years ago*

“**Y**ou know Sage won’t agree to this without a fight,” Makia overheard her father Jason Sallow whisper to her mother Evelyn. They were talking in his office on the first floor of their mansion with the door half-closed. Makia stopped in her tracks at the sound of her sister’s name and crept closer to eavesdrop.

“So fucking what? Let her fight as long as she does it. She has no choice; she owes us, Jason!” her mother snapped. Makia could see her pacing back and forth clutching a highball glass from her vantage point. Her eyes moved from her mother to her father. His normal well-kept appearance was gone: his hair was all over his head from him running his hands through it in frustration, he wasn’t wearing a tie, his cufflinks were gone, and his sleeves were rolled up.

“But Michael Hansen, Evelyn? I know for a fact he’s not a good guy. People talk, Evelyn, there has to be someone else,” her father reasoned trying to take her mother into his arms. She



pushed him away and threw back the rest of her drink before going over to his wet bar for a refill.

Makia deduced whatever was going on was really bad, her mother never drank and now that she thought about it, her father was home way too early from work.

“We are out of time, Jason, the money is gone! It’s too late to find someone else and besides, no one is offering the amount he is. Sage is marrying Michael Hansen and that’s final! I don’t care what she says! Now get on board so we can move forward on this!” her mother whispered loudly, throwing back her second drink and slamming the glass down on his desk.

Makia barely made it to the maid’s closet to hide before her mother stormed out of his office and up the stairs to her bedroom. A few minutes after hearing the door slam, Makia snuck out of the maid’s closet and out of the house to go find Sage. She was just about to jump in her car to drive to their studio when her father appeared and came walking towards her, still looking a little worse for wear.

“Makia, just getting home? Don’t make any plans for the evening and if you have some cancel them, we are having a special guest for dinner,” her father demanded, rushing by her and climbing in his custom-made Ferrari and roaring down the driveway.

Makia glared after him before getting into her midnight blue mustang. She quickly googled the name Michael Hansen and her stomach churned with fear for her sister and disgust for her greedy ass parents. This was who they were trying to marry her sister off to? So what his net worth was 9.6 billion dollars, he was 45 fucking years old, Sage was 22!

She almost wondered how the hell people as selfish as Jason and Evelyn Sallow managed to have her and her sister before she looked up at the picture of her grandmother Lola, her, and Sage from last Mother’s day hanging from her rearview mirror and remembered how her grandma had practically raised the two

while their parents attended business meetings and charity banquets. Every good part of them was owed to their grandmother.

Just when she was about to back out of the driveway, her mother came charging down the front steps and over to her car. "Makia! Thank God you're home! There is a lot to do, we are having a couple of special guests over for dinner and I need your help." Her mom opened her car door and practically snatched her out of her car. "Hurry, go put your stuff away and go help Sarah and Brin set up the formal dining room, then come and find me when you're done." Before Makia could say anything, her mother was already rushing back up the steps into the house.

"Fuck!" Makia groaned, throwing her head back and pulling her phone out of the back pocket of her shorts as she walked up to the house. Why did she have to be there for dinner? She quickly shot off a message to Sage telling her not to come home, to stay the night at Joslyn's and that she would explain later.

She had just locked her screen when her mom came back outside and snatched her iPhone from her hands. "Makia, did you not hear what I said? We have guests coming for dinner! No distractions, I'll give you your phone back later!" her mom snapped and rushed back up the stairs but waited for Makia to go inside with her.

Makia felt the tip of her ears burning in frustration, she was twenty fucking years old and her mom just took her phone like she was twelve! She couldn't wait until all of her and Sage's plans were in place so they could move the fuck away from here for good!

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"Makia!" came from the opposite end of the house in Evelyn's nasally voice, three hours later.

Makia rushed out of her room pushing her last earring in

place. While she had six piercing in her ears, three on each side, she decided to play nice and wear matching gold hoops that got smaller from top to bottom instead of the mix-and-match she usually did. Her hair was down and she had decorated herself with minimal makeup, black jeans, a dark blue short sleeved silk blouse and black suede ballet slippers. She saw no need to dress up because she saw no need for her to even be at the table. This dinner was a fucking joke.

She and Sage were both very beautiful women; they could pass for twins even though they were two years apart with their mixed heritage stemming from their Italian mother and African American father. Both were born nearly white but their skin darkened to a cinnamon brown hue by the time they were one year old. The sisters had always turned heads with their heart shaped faces with dark brown eyes and semi full lips. They were also curvy like their grandmother Lola and wore their hair long in its naturally curly state. Both were relatively short, with Sage standing just barely an inch over Makia.

“What? I’m right here, why are you yelling like that?” she asked, descending the stairs, already annoyed.

Her mother was pacing back and forth again, dressed to kill but clutching a glass looking like she could shatter it if she were anymore worked up. “Where is Sage? Where the hell is your sister?” she demanded as soon as Makia hit the landing.

Makia fought the urge to smirk knowingly at her mother, thank God her sister had listened and stayed away! “I don’t know, you took my phone, remember?” With a shrug, Makia tossed her curly hair over her shoulder and turned to walk to the dining room.

Her mother snatched her by the arm and turned her back to face her while digging her long fingernails into Makia’s arm. “If you have any idea where she might be you better tell me! She’s about to ruin everything!” Her mother yelled in her face, shaking her to emphasize the urgency of the situation. Her mother’s eyes

were shiny and glazed from the brandy she was drinking like water.

Makia pushed her mother's hands off of her and backed away from her, looking at her like she was crazy, "Mom! Calm down! Like I said, I have no idea where she is or where she might even be because *you took my phone!* Now, before these special guests of yours get here, might I strongly suggest you get it together? Sheesh!" Makia pivoted and stalked out of the foyer and towards the dining room.

She ran right into her father who looked equally stressed. "Makia, where is—"

Makia stopped him mid-sentence, already pissed off. "Dad, like I just told Mom I don't know where Sage is, okay? Mom took my phone and has yet to return it so I guess dinner is going to have to happen without her. Now if you will please excuse me, I have to go find a sweater or shrug to pull on to cover the bruises Mom just left on my arm before your guests get here!" Makia stomped off to the mud room in search of her favorite white sweater, where Sarah would put it after doing laundry.

Their cook Mattie rang the bell to announce the start of dinner just as she pushed her arms through the sleeves of her sweater. She was still annoyed with her parents but happy as hell Sage was nowhere to be found and smart enough not to answer their parents phone calls.

Humming to herself, Makia walked into the dining room and settled down in the chair closest to the door for a quick exit once dessert was served. She smiled at a servant named Brin as she poured Makia's sparkling water into her glass. "Sage said to tell you to meet her at the studio when all of this is over so you can tell her what's going on." Growing up, if she and Sage weren't with their grandmother they were with the servants and Sarah, Brin and Mattie were woven into all her childhood memories.

Her parents and their guests still weren't at the table yet, likely because they were in her father's office so they could

explain why Sage wasn't joining them for dinner before they sat down to eat. Minutes later, her father led her mother to her seat with a somber look on his face. Michael Hansen came next, whose face Makia remembered from her Google search, followed by another man she could only describe as remarkably beautiful.

Handsome was just not enough to describe him. He was beautiful, like a living work of art. Nothing about him seemed real, his smooth light brown skin wrapped around his muscular frame like shrink wrap. He stood about 5'11" tall, with hypnotizing light brown bedroom eyes framed in long eyelashes and an almost innocent but seductive smile.

She instantly loved everything about him, especially the way his mustache hugged his full, soft looking lips and how he looked like he had a five o' clock shadow of a beard. Her fingers tingled with the urge to grab a charcoal pencil and sketch pad to capture his likeness. In that moment she felt like he could be her muse for the next 100 years.

"Makia, I want you to meet two of my business associates, Michael Hansen and his business partner, Hayes Purcell. They're looking to acquire some of the assets my company is liquidating," her father introduced with an uncomfortable smile and a nervous glance at her mother.

Makia bit the inside of her cheek in anger at her sister being referred to as a 'liquidated asset' but plastered a fake smile on her face and extended her hand to them both. Michael's hand was sweaty and slimy and she hated the vomit-inducing way he looked down at her as he brought her hand to his mouth to kiss. His lips barely made contact with her hand when she snatched her hand away and turned to shake hands with Hayes.

Ignoring the immediate jolt of attraction that shot through her, she reminded herself he was part of the enemy camp and pulled her hand away from his grasp too. His eyes lingered on her face before pulling the napkin from his plate and placing it in his lap.

"Nice to meet you both," she mumbled before turning and moving back to her seat at the table.

"I hope you both like seafood, I had Mattie make her world-famous lobster bisque and crab cakes for dinner. For dessert, we'll have 7-Up cake and key lime pie. I have opted to forgo the salad this evening and start with the bisque," Makia's mother announced with a plastic smile.

"As I was explaining to Mr. Hansen, your sister had a last-minute opportunity she just couldn't miss, right, Makia?" her father asked her nervously with a plastic smile of his own.

Makia picked up her soup spoon and sighed as Sarah placed a bread bowl of bisque in front of her before looking at all four of them sitting at the table. With a shrug, she said, "I honestly have no idea. If that's where you say Sage is, Dad, then I guess that's where she is! I haven't talked to her since this morning." She narrowed her eyes at her mother. Hell yeah, she was still salty about her phone!

"Please forgive Makia, she told me she wasn't feeling well earlier and we insisted she still join us for dinner. I guess she still isn't feeling one hundred percent yet," her mom simpered at Michael and Hayes before giving Makia a hard look, her face tinged with embarrassment.

Makia rolled her eyes at her mother and took a drink out of her water glass. She didn't care if she was being rude, she didn't know these men nor did she want to, especially knowing the only reason why they were here was so they could basically barter Sage off to Michael. As soon as dessert was served, she was leaving and spending the night at the studio. Her parents were tripping.

"So, your parents have told me all about Sage and her photography. What is it that you do, Makia?" Michael asked her while eating his soup. Every time he paused he would look over at her, she could feel his gaze raking up and down her body.

"I'm an artist," she answered shortly, returning to her soup.

The look her mother gave her almost made her laugh, her face appearing seconds from exploding in anger. Like she cared! Why was she even here?

“Well, that doesn’t tell me shit, girl, tell me what you do,” Michael asked a little too loudly and chuckled, pushing his empty soup bowl forward before sitting back in his chair, smiling.

Pushing her own bowl away she noticed some things, his smile didn’t meet his eyes his brows were furrowed, and how Hayes was glaring at Michael who was waiting impatiently for an answer.

“I paint, draw, sculpt. I do it all, like I said I am an artist. I’m studying art at George Mason University for the time being but I’m kicking around the idea of maybe transferring to Pratt or Venice next year to complete my studies,” Makia answered, trying to remain calm by finishing off her glass of water afterwards.

“Hmm, interesting and what will you be able to do with a degree in *art*?” Michael asked, smirking at her and shaking his head like she was a joke to him.

“Whatever I choose to, Mr. Hansen. You see, unlike you, Mr. Purcell, and my parents here, my passions are not driven by the all-mighty dollar.” She thanked Brin for refilling her water glass and refused her main course. “Don’t get me wrong, I like money just as much as the next person, just look at how comfortably I am able to live because of it, but I’m not willing to sell my soul for it.” She glared over at her parents as she pushed her chair back and stood up from the table.

“Now, as nice as this conversation and dinner has been, I believe it’s past time I excuse myself. That illness my mother spoke of earlier has suddenly come back in full force and right now I am suddenly fighting the urge to puke,” Makia snapped, tossing her napkin on the table and leaving the dining room.

She heard rapid footsteps behind her and stopped walking.

She turned around quickly ready to have an argument with her mother, but to her surprise, it was Mattie.

“Here, I don’t want you leaving the house without it. She is so fit to be tied right now because Sage no showed for dinner that she won’t even notice we snuck it out of her room. Now hurry up and go before she comes looking for you,” Mattie said, handing Makia her phone and hugging her quickly before rushing back to the kitchen.

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Makia must have broken every speed limit from Princess Anne Hills to their studio a mile past Virginia Beach. She felt like bugs were crawling on her skin, remembering how gross and nasty everything about Michael Hansen felt. Her grandmother was right, old men really do give you worms!

She parked two blocks over in the art supply store’s parking lot and took the back entrance to their studio, just in case one of her parents did a drive-by past the studio looking for her or Sage. She didn’t see Sage’s car so she assumed she left her car at Joslyn’s and had Joslyn drop her off.

“Sage? Sage are you still here?” Makia called out, coming up the backstairs.

“Oh, thank God! Kia, what the hell is going on?” Sage rushed over to her, hugging her close for a few seconds.

Tears she didn’t even realize she was holding back spilled from Makia’s eyes. Sage helped her sit down and grabbed a bottle of water from their kitchenette. “Sage, Mom and Dad are tripping, like really tripping! They’ve lost their fucking minds!” Makia cried, trying to catch her breath.

“Okay, Sissy, I need you to calm down and just tell me what’s going on.” Sage sat next to her, taking her hands in her own.

After Makia drank half of the bottle of water she felt calm enough to talk. “I overheard Dad and Mom talking about you



when I got home from my classes this afternoon. They didn't know I was there and Mom was drinking, Sage. I mean like hardcore drinking and Dad looked crazy and stressed. I heard her say you owed them and you had to marry this Michael Hansen guy they were bringing to dinner because the money was gone!" Makia told Sage before she started crying again.

"What? No way, Kia, you had to have heard wrong. Our parents are assholes but they're not 'marry my daughter off to the highest bidder' assholes!" Sage said, actually trying to convince herself even more than Makia. She could hear her heartbeat pounding loudly in her ears.

"Oh, really? Then tell me why I stormed out of dinner with this Michael Hansen prick and his business partner after Mom and Dad kept trying to get me to lie about where you were tonight? I know they've both been blowing your phone up too, huh?" Makia argued, getting heated with her sister for taking things so lightly.

"Still Makia, that doesn't mean they wanted me there to marry the dude, just for me to meet him probably," Sage insisted, biting a small piece of loose skin on her bottom lip nervously.

Makia finished her water and stomped across the room to throw her bottle away. "Yeah, okay, and how many dinners have Mom and Dad insisted this strongly that we attend to meet his business partners? Not one, Sage! He called you a fucking asset he was going to liquidate!"

Sage covered her mouth to keep from screaming. She had always known her parents were relentlessly money driven but even they wouldn't stoop this low, would they?

"Sage, Michael Hansen is worth 9.6 billion dollars. Just let that sink in for a minute. Mom and Dad could pretty much name their damn price and he will gladly pay it for you. I heard Dad say he wanted to find someone else but Mom said there was no time and it had to be him because he could afford it. I heard her say no matter how much you fight this, in the end you are

marrying Michael Hansen.” Makia grabbed Sage by the shoulders to make her look at her and see that she was serious.

“I just can't believe they would do something like this! I'm not marrying someone I don't know! I would rather die!” Sage screamed and stormed off to go get her own bottle of water. She stood there seething in anger and disbelief when she heard Makia sigh sadly, looking down at her phone.

“Looks like you don't have to, I have a date with Michael Hansen on Thursday. If I don't go they are pulling their monetary support, if I do go they will pay for me to study in Venice next year.” Makia held up her phone so Sage could see the message from their mother as tears began to roll down her face again.