
BETWEEN KISSES &
LIES

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.
Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or
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Chapter 1

It was no secret to anyone who knew her that Adella "Della" Belmonte spent the majority of her time daydreaming. She knew, at twenty-five-years-old, she was a little too old to waste time on such a trivial thing, but she couldn't help it. Her life was quite ordinary, and daydreaming seemed to be the only way she could get a little excitement.

She daydreamed about owning a walk-in closet with every pair of designer heels imaginable, enjoying the sun while sipping a margarita at an exclusive Cancun resort, or, finally, losing her virginity to a dashing but gentle man. Yes, Della lived in her own bubble the majority of the time, but she was happy, so screw what everyone else thought.

Today, she was dreaming about getting a massage from the hot actor from her mom's favorite soap opera. What was the name again? Fuego something. She would have to ask her mom later so she could look up the show online and enjoy every romantic, drama-filled moment.

Della flinched when she heard a small beeping sound, waking her up from the massage she was currently receiving from the soap opera hottie. At first, she had thought it was an

email from Sara, the preschool director, but then she remembered it was Saturday morning. There was no school today. Della worked two jobs, but as far as everyone was concerned, she only worked one. Her first job was as a preschool teacher, which she had been doing for five years. Her second job was one no one knew about, not even her closest friend Isabel or her younger sister, Maria.

For the past three years, she'd had a second job as a romance novelist, writing under a pen name. Ever since she had published her first novel a little over three years ago, she had slowly been growing in popularity, with each of her books doing fairly well. There were many reasons no one knew about her second job. The first was she didn't want to be teased about writing romance novels when she had only had one relationship in her life, which had ended in total failure. People were bound to ask what she could possibly know about romance. The second was because she doubted her conservative and traditional Mexican parents would be happy to hear she wrote adult romance novels. They still blushed and turned away when they saw strangers kiss. If they knew their oldest daughter wrote steamy romance novels with deliciously naughty scenes, they would both have a coronary. Yes, keeping up this charade could be exhausting at times, but if it kept people from asking too many embarrassing questions, then Della was happy to continue the charade. After all, she had managed to keep her secret life hidden until now.

Della finally realized where the beeping was coming from. It was coming from her computer, reminding her that her manuscript for her latest novel was due in a month. On Valentine's Day to be exact. Ever since she was a child, Della had loved Valentine's Day. She loved the tiny chocolates in the heart-shaped boxes, the red and pink hearts, and the adorable phrases everywhere, like on teddy bears, which read, *I love you beary much!* She still loved Valentine's Day as an adult, even

though the only man who gave her something was her father. She sighed as she stared at the open document on her computer. Her novel wasn't even halfway finished, and she only had a month to complete it before her editor started looking it over for revisions.

Her phone started beeping, so she picked it up and saw a text from her twenty-year-old sister, Maria.

Maria: Get your butt over here! The tamales aren't going to make themselves you know.

Maria was currently living at home with her parents while she finished college. The two sisters had always been close, but Maria had always been bossier. Even though she had moved out a year ago, Della still missed sharing a house with her younger sister. Her novels had been selling so well, she had managed to buy a small, bungalow style house from a couple who had owned it since the 1970s. The house was painted bright pink and Della had practically filled it with plants. Maria had nicknamed the house Pepto Bismol. Her parents were happy for her, but they had been confused on how she had managed to afford it, especially in California, on a preschool teacher's salary. Thankfully, she had already had a lie prepared; she had told them she had simply saved her salary and done some tutoring gigs at the local community college.

She glanced out the window and realized it was going to be another cold January morning in Monterey, California. She couldn't wait until spring came, but at least it stopped raining around March. She stood up and went to her room to change out of the pajamas she had been wearing all morning.

Della quickly dressed in a pair of white jeans that made her butt look perky and a sky-blue sweater. She went towards her closet and hastily started opening boxes before she found the matching sky-blue flats she had been looking for. Once she finished dressing, she quickly applied her makeup and

brushed her shiny black curls, trying to make them look presentable.

As she applied some gloss over her full lips, she looked at her reflection. She was petite, like her mother, barely standing at five-foot-one. Her black, curly hair was cut at chin length and her large brown eyes sometimes seemed too big on her small face. Her tan skin was flawless, thanks to the oatmeal and honey facial masks her mother insisted she do every night to avoid pimples.

Della had just grabbed her purse when her phone started ringing again. At first, she had thought it was just Maria, but she froze when she saw the caller ID: *Unknown Caller*. She swallowed hard and a chill ran down her spine as her phone kept ringing. Della was naturally a quiet and unsociable person. The only people who called her were her family and Isabel. However, this particular person had been calling for the past six months, ever since her last novel, *The Duchess's Forbidden Kiss*, made the best-seller's list. Whoever it was, he was pretty persistent. He had been calling her every Saturday at noon for the past six months.

At first, she hadn't thought much of it because whenever she answered, no one responded back. She had thought they must have the wrong number, but she was soon proven wrong. A few months later, after dozens of silent phone calls, Unknown Caller began to finally have a voice. The voice had shaken Della to the core when she had finally heard it. Low, gruff, and malicious, she could tell the voice was male, but it was all she knew. She didn't have a name, phone number, or address.

In the beginning, the phone calls had been harmless enough. The first few times, he had simply asked about the weather or directions to the local pizza place, as if she was a help line. Soon Della had grown tired of the calls and had blocked the man. Unknown Caller had found his way back to

her phone and this time, he was pissed. The first few times she had answered, he called her a bunch of colorful, insulting names, relating to the books she wrote before abruptly hanging up. When she didn't answer, he left haunting messages, letting her know what she had done the previous night around the city, complimenting her on the outfit she was wearing, or what she deserved for writing such "filthy" content. Every Saturday, like clockwork, he called and made her unbearably sick to her stomach and jumpy for the rest of the day.

She let the call go to voicemail, and a few seconds later, she had a new voicemail in her inbox. Della took a deep breath before she pressed play. Immediately, she heard a loud, static sound on the other end, followed by a strong male voice.

"Not picking up again. You're thinking you're too good for me, right, bitch?" There was a low chuckle. *"Tell me, do Mommy and Daddy know you write such dirty filth? You're such a little whore, you know that, right? You are poisoning all those people who read your disgusting books. I should shut you down. Permanently."*

Della knew the obvious thing to do was to get a new phone number to stop the Unknown Caller, but she was scared. Unknown Caller obviously knew about her second job, where she lived, and her routine. If she got a new phone number, he might make his actual presence known when she was most vulnerable or hurt one of her loved ones. No, it was better to receive her weekly dose of harassment. Besides, Unknown Caller was harmless enough. Mostly.

Della refused to think about it today. She had too many things going on. It was her dad's birthday and she still had to pick up the cake and help her mother and sister make the food. Besides, she could think about creepy voicemail guy tomorrow, she thought. He had been bothering her for six months. He wasn't going anywhere anytime soon.

After picking up the cake, Della arrived back at her child-

hood home. It was a nice, cozy looking one-story house fifteen minutes away from her own home. It was painted brick red, and her mother had planted some new rose bushes near the front porch.

When Della entered the house, she immediately heard the soft Spanish music playing in the background. Her mother hardly turned off the radio, especially when she was cooking. She relaxed when she smelled the spicy chile and cooked meat coming from the kitchen.

Her mother and sister were already in the kitchen making the tamales. Her younger sister, Maria, shot her an irritated look as she spooned some masa on the corn husk. "You're late," she complained. "You were supposed to be here hours ago. *Mami* and I have been up since seven while you've been lazing around."

"Now, girls, don't fight," Mrs. Mariana Belmonte scolded. "Adella, put on an apron and let's finish these tamales so we can get everything else ready. You know your father only works half days on Saturdays."

"Sorry," Della said with a shrug, not offering an explanation. The shakiness she had felt less than an hour ago seemed to disappear whenever she entered her childhood home. She placed the cake on the counter and then kissed her mother on the cheek. "Hello, *Mami*."

"Hi, *mija*," her mom replied. "There's an apron in the drawer. Maria, stop scowling, you'll get wrinkles and then you'll really be sorry."

The Belmonte women were practically clones of each other, only looking slightly different. Mrs. Belmonte and Della were the same height, but Mrs. Belmonte was slightly plumper and her dark, curly hair was always up in a tight bun. Maria was taller than both of them, standing at nearly five-foot-seven. Her curly black hair reached her waist, and she was curvier than Della, with fuller breasts and hips. Mr. Belmonte

often said the three of them had the same smile even if they looked slightly different.

The three women spent the rest of the morning gossiping back and forth. At one in the afternoon, Della heard the familiar roar of her father's truck as he pulled in. Emmanuel came into the house seconds later, carrying his lunchbox. His clothes were dirty and dusty from his job as a construction worker. He immediately brightened when he saw his wife and daughters in the kitchen. "There are my beautiful girls!" he exclaimed.

Della kissed her father on the cheek and gave him a warm hug. "Happy Birthday, *Papi*."

Her father returned the hug and kissed her cheek. "Thank you, *mija*. I'm going to get cleaned up so I can help you get everything ready. Everyone is coming over at five."

"Don't be silly, *Papi*," Maria replied as she bit on a piece of chocolate. "You're the birthday boy, you don't have to do anything."

"I don't like standing around, you know that." Emmanuel kissed his youngest daughter affectionately on the cheek. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

Della returned to the kitchen and helped her mother clean up the area where they had made the tamales while Maria continued munching on chocolate. "Who's coming to *Papi's* party?"

"Oh, the usual guests," Mariana said with a shrug. "Your grandmother, your aunts, uncles, cousins. Our neighbor, Pablo, invited himself over again this year, of course." She rolled her eyes. "He promised to bring a keg and a band."

Della laughed. "Do you really think he will?"

"Of course not, he'll probably bring a CD and a six pack. You know how much he likes to exaggerate."

"Antonio is coming, too," Maria blurted out as she finished

another chocolate. An amused look danced in her brown eyes. "Tell her, *Mami*."

Della turned to face her mother, a stricken look on her face. Antonio Reyes had been her first and only boyfriend when she had been twenty and he had been twenty-seven. They had dated for a year before she had broken up with him. How had he managed to worm his way into a family event all these years later? "Oh, *Mami*, please tell me you didn't invite him. Why would you do that?"

Mariana cleaned her hands with a washcloth. "He saw me buying all the stuff for your father's birthday at the grocery store. I had to invite him; it would have been rude not to. He's always nice to me and your father whenever we run into him. Why you broke up with him, I will never understand." She threw her daughter a sympathetic look. "He might not even come and if he does, he'll probably just stay for some cake, out of politeness. Maybe you two can get back together."

"Don't start, *Mami*," she replied, irritated, as she began washing the dishes. "I just don't see why you had to invite him. You know everyone will start teasing me and it's been years since I've seen him. What am I supposed to say to him? I don't want my ex-boyfriend at *Papi's* party."

"Dude, why are you making such a big deal about this?" Maria asked with a roll of her eyes. She started fixing her bangs in a nearby mirror. "He's been your only boyfriend, so it's not like you have to worry about some other guy getting butt hurt. Why did you two break up anyway? You've never said. You broke up after my quince, remember?"

Della blushed bright pink as she remembered the particular moment when they had broken up, four years ago. She had gone to a party with her friend, Isabel, and she had gotten drunk. Really drunk. So drunk she had to call Antonio to pick her up. She hadn't wanted her parents to see how intoxicated she was.

She still remembered Antonio's face when he had come to get her from the party. It had been hard with disappointment, his brow furrowed, making him look older than what he actually was. He had been gripping the steering wheel with such force, Della was surprised he hadn't torn it off. His lips had been pressed in a thin line as Isabel helped her inside the car.

Antonio hadn't wanted to take her back home while she was like this, so he had taken her back to his apartment to sober up instead. He had given her black coffee, hoping it would do the trick, but the only thing it made her do was throw up. When he realized she wasn't getting any soberer, he had asked Isabel to call Mr. and Mrs. Belmonte and tell them Della would be staying with him. Antonio took care of her during the night, and the next morning, Della had woken up with a massive hangover and an empty stomach. The first thing Antonio had done when she woke up was scold her for what seemed like hours, lecturing her about the dangers of drinking. The next thing he had done was give her a good, old-fashioned, over-the-knee spanking.

He hadn't pulled down her panties, to preserve her modesty. However, her dress had been pretty short, so the back of her thighs had gotten quite sore. She blushed when she thought back to her first and only spanking. Antonio had draped her over his strong thighs, making her feel small and delicate. He hadn't scolded her during the spanking, and for the next few minutes, the only sounds that could be heard in his apartment were his strong hand spanking naughty flesh and her pleas for mercy. She cringed when she thought back to how her cheeks had jiggled with each hard slap and how her bottom had burned for days afterwards. After her spanking, Della had immediately announced she was breaking up with him and walked back home crying, refusing to get into his car. Antonio had tried winning her back a few times after he had spanked her, but she always refused to see him until,

eventually, he stopped calling. She hadn't seen or talked to him since.

Della swallowed hard as she looked at her younger sister who had a curious look on her face. "It doesn't matter," she stated. "We broke up years ago. We've both moved on."

"I hope he does show up." Maria giggled, not caring she was annoying her older sister. "I was with *Mami* when he said hello to her at the grocery store. Della, you should have never broken up with him. He looked so yummy in his police uniform. And his thighs, you should have seen his thighs. I just want him to—"

"Okay, that's enough." Mariana gave Maria a quick pop on the butt with her hand, scolding her, "I don't want to hear none of that talk, especially when the guests come over later. It's going to be a nice party."