

## CHAPTER 15

ROSA

Marco asked me to cook for and serve at a dinner party for his business associate's family tonight. It was only three extra people, so it wasn't too much extra work, and I was anxious to make everything perfect.

But then I hear those words from the woman called Sheena: "Will I have to deal with blood and stuff like that when I marry you?"

My lungs gasp for oxygen. But nothing reaches them.

Not able to think, I dash to the powder room and lean against the basin.

My thoughts are going at a hundred miles an hour.

I know I should be working, but I have to try to process what I've just heard.

But I still can't believe it—despite hearing them clearly all talking about it. He's going to actually be marrying that woman...?

He's never mentioned any of this to me. Not a single word. How could he do this?

I know I'm only the maid here, but the way Camillo's been with me, the way he took me to dinner, and the things he said to me... After all that, I think that his marriage to Sheena is a fairly big, huge, substantial, ginormous thing for him to forget to mention.

I choke back a sob. Looking at myself in the mirror, my colorless expression stares back at me.

I'm pale and ugly—there's nothing special about me.

While that other woman, she could be a model—she probably is in her spare time—because she's absolutely stunning.

But there's something that's even worse, and that's the part that really gets to me...

It's that she's half the size of me. No, I'm not being honest with myself. She's more like a quarter of the size of me. She's definitely a size zero.

And that means he was lying to me all along when he said—no, insisted—that he prefers his women to be curvy.

How could I have been so stupid to fall for his empty words and promises?

How could I have ever believed that he really wanted me?

The same thoughts keep going around and around, but I know I have to get back to the kitchen. Finally composing myself, I open the door.

And I run straight into...

Her. Miss Skinny Minnie. I thought my evening couldn't get any worse—but fate hasn't finished with me yet.

She looks down at me, a sneer dancing across her expression. "Stay away from him!" she hisses.

"What?" I stutter. "I'm sorry, I don't understand—"

"Of course you do. Do you think I haven't noticed the way he keeps looking at you?"

"You must be mistaken. I'm just the maid here..."

"Just the maid?" she snaps. "Stop with the stupid lies. I can tell that you're much more to him than just an employee. But he's mine, do you hear me? Mine. It's been planned for ages, and I don't need a fat girl like you waltzing in and trying to steal my man."

I open my mouth, then shut it, completely lost for words.

"Do you think he would want to be seen in public with someone like you?" she snarls. "He's rich and powerful, and he needs someone like me by his side. Someone who looks the part. Someone who doesn't stuff her face and actually bothers to look after herself."

She laughs as she looks me up and down. "You'd only make him a laughing stock. Everyone would know that he was only with you because he feels sorry for you. Why else would a man like him be seen with someone who looks like you?" she spits.

Her words slice into me. I wish I could just put them down to her being a mean girl, but I know what she's saying is true.

Because I could never fit into his life.

He can have any woman he wants. And, of course, he would choose someone like her over me—someone who's thin and skinny.

Because that's the very least a man like him deserves.

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I'm gripping the edge of the kitchen counter. Thank God, Sheena and her family have left now. I try to move, but the events of tonight just keep replaying over and over.

I can't believe that he brought that woman here. And even worse, I had to serve them dinner, pretending to be nothing more to him than the maid.

But now I realize that's what I am to him—just the maid. And I'll never be anything else.

I hear his footsteps approaching. "Hey," he says softly, stepping into the kitchen.

His voice is soft, concerned, but I don't turn around. I'm not ready to look at him, not when my emotions are still so raw.

"Hey," I murmur. I can't look at him and instead occupy myself with the dirty dishes as they taunt me about the awful dinner and everything that's just happened.

As he takes a step closer, I can feel the warmth radiating from his body, but it doesn't comfort me like it usually does. His voice is low as he speaks. "I'm sorry, Rosa." His tone is sincere and genuine, and it tugs at my heart, even though I don't want it to.

"For what?" I ask, finally turning to face him. I wish that he could say something to make this all go away. But I know that's not going to happen.

He looks genuinely pained. "You should never have been put in that position tonight. I should never have put you in that position. I'm sorry." He takes another step closer, reaching out to take my hand.

But I pull away. Because I can't let him comfort me after that.

He lets his hand drop to his side, his expression filled with regret. “I didn’t invite her to hurt you. I swear, it wasn’t like that. Marco arranged this dinner ages ago—before I’d even met you—and I completely forgot all about it until I arrived home tonight and found Sheena and her family here. It’s totally my fault. I’m so sorry, Rosa.”

I want to believe him, but then I remember the way she smiled at him—and the hurtful words and insults she said to me outside the powder room.

“It’s not like that between us,” he insists, his voice practically pleading now.

“But you’re marrying her...”

“No,” he says firmly. “It was just a dinner for us to meet and see if we would get along. It was all set up before you were hired. If I’d remembered about it, I would have called it all off. Because you’re the only one I want to get to know now.”

I’m silent for a few moments. “I felt invisible tonight,” I confess, my voice barely above a whisper. “Like I didn’t matter. Like I was watching from the sidelines.”

His eyes soften, and when he reaches for me again, he puts his hands around my face in a gentle grip.

“Rosa, you’re not invisible to me...”

Tears prick at the corners of my eyes, although I try to blink them away. I don’t want to cry in front of him.

“I’m so sorry I made you feel like you didn’t matter,” he murmurs in a gentle tone. “That’s the last thing I ever wanted.”

I nod, grateful for his explanation and believing what he says.

And that should be an end to it—we should be able to go back to getting to know one another.

But what happens next means there’s only one option left open to me—and that’s to quit.