

169- Friends

Rafael could feel that they had taken more than enough time to finish their dinner. But it was a wholesome meal.

He was enjoying an evening after such a long time.

Seeing her laughing at something silly was doing strange things to his heartstrings. At least, she was opening up to him.

" And here our chicken buns were ready to be dispatched," she told him with wide eyes twinkling with mischief," and can you believe it? Akari. One of my employees. She just picked up one bun and showed it to me... almost waving it in my face... Hey! Marissa. I want to taste one!" Rafael saw her moving the napkin in her hands and he couldn't move away his eyes from her glowing face, "I warned her, no way, Akari. Put it back... she just pushed it hungrily into her mouth and oh man! Her face got like... she wanted to puke... she ran to the sink and emptied her mouth and then screamed at the top of her lungs at our rider who was supposed to deliver those buns... Stop! The buns don't have salt in them. They are sweet... we all were damned..." She kept telling him about that incident, and Rafael was having difficulty in keeping his focus on her words.

The waiters standing nearby must be there with an emotionless face, but Rafael could detect amusement in their eyes.

He knew it. He always knew it.

When he was blind, the way she used to talk, made him laugh a lot. He even remarked once how she had changed and never was this funny when they were dating.

And today her talk not only lifted his mood but also seemed to brighten the night for everyone around them.

She was so busy telling him about the past blunder she made while making chicken buns that she didn't realize his eyes were solely on her face.

With a fist under his chin, he observed her face fondly. The dining hall of a seven- star hotel, he booked for their dinner was well worth it.

Claudia in a bathing robe, wearing a pair of soft y hotel slippers, her long black hair was down, covering her back that wasn't even properly brushed.

This was the first time, he had seen a woman not ready for a date. She was just being herself and not at all conscious of her looks.

After telling about her baking error, she was now laughing like crazy, hiding her face behind her palms.

When she was done laughing, she reached out to hold the bottle of wine but then made a pout when found it empty. She gave him a silent pedaling look but he started shaking his head.

" No way. I've seen how you behave when you are drunk. So, no. No more wine." " Just one glass!" she scrunched her nose," Come on. You can afford it." " Yes, I know. I can afford it. But you can't handle it, little Greene," he picked up a napkin and stretched his arm to wipe her cheek which had a sauce stain there.**wW.NôvELwor(m).co®**

" Don't tell me!" she startled a bit, " it was there this whole time?" " Yeah. And you looked cute. Now get up," he pushed back his chair and rounded the table to get to her.

He offered her, his outstretched hand," Let's go back to the room." She glanced at his palm, then placed her hand in his, " Fine! Let's go, Mr. Richie Rich!" He chuckled enjoying the remark, " Ah! Thanks for the compliment!" She narrowed her eyes, " Oh. It was not meant as a compliment. It was sarcasm.A rich man who can't buy a woman some wine!" she said rolling her eyes.

He pulled her up and then kissed her forehead, " Nice try, smart y pants. But you aren't getting it." She made a face and started following him to the elevator area.

" Can't handle a drunk woman? Huh?" she teased, leaning closer to him with a playful grin.

"I did handle her last time just fine. Tomorrow when you'll be all tipsy in the office then I'm ready to carry you around," he threw his free hand in the air," it's you who might not like it and feel embarrassed." Marissa was aware, he was right, but she would like to die before even accepting it.

" What? Should I bring more wine for you?" he punched her shoulder playfully.

She held his fist but didn't say anything.

" Ms. Marissa Aaron," he nudged his elbow gently causing her a little to sway," Has the cat got your tongue?" Marissa took him by surprise when she placed her palms on his chest and gave him a playful push, " Get lost, Richie Rich!" Rafael looked around with a smile when she stopped and placed her hand on her hip, regarding his face with curiosity," What are you scared of? The hotel staff?" she raised a brow to confront him.

" Oh, yes. I'm very scared," he managed to put on a fake fearful expression, " After all a woman is pushing the President of MSin and there is no one here to save me." Marissa chuckled and gave him another push, " You are something!" she pinched his arm.

" Ouch! Marissa!" he screamed, his voice echoing in the hallway. Marissa was aware that it didn't hurt him that much.

" Whoa!" Marissa laughed more. The last time she pinched him, his chest skin was too tight. For her, the arm seemed to be a better choice.

" You enjoy hurting me. Don't you?" he was rubbing his arm while she held his hand and started dragging him to the elevator area.**wW.(n)er@W@tm.Co®**

" Shut up! We both know a pinch isn't going to faze you!" controlling his smile he looked down at her hand that was gripping his.

For a moment, he wished that she could keep holding it forever.

Once a teacher told him that trust couldn't be imposed. It needed to be earned.

She spent five years without him and bore every hardship without his support.

Now when she was with him, he wanted her to forget everything and come to him. That wasn't possible.

She would never let him touch her until and unless he took a stand for her.

The plan was to build her trust in him, but his mom and Valerie didn't give him enough chance. Now he needed to tackle them too.

He was pulled back into the real world when a loud ping reached his ears.

For some funny reason, Marissa was staring at the elevator buttons, " Feeling tipsy?" he tried to tease her in the empty lift.

" Excuse me!" she shot him a glance, "I'm not at all tipsy," her eyes were narrowed in mocked offense, " Just because I giggled too much doesn't mean..." she trailed off and then looked at his face carefully, " You also laughed a lot. You sound more drunk!" putting her index finger on his hard chest, she gave it a little push.

Rafael got her intention and stepped back into the empty space pressing against the wall, " Oh, Lord! How you managed that? Your fingers... How a single finger managed to push me?" Before he could say more, the doors opened, and an elderly couple came inside.

Marissa tried to stifle her giggle and looked on the opposite wall. Rafael had also straightened and was now looking at the ceiling of the elevator. The elderly couple looked between them and walked out quietly to the next floor.

The moment the elevator doors closed behind them, they couldn't handle it anymore and started laughing like crazy.

" Oh, God!" Marissa held her tummy, " you should have looked at your face." " How could I?" Rafael wore a serious expression, "I was drunk like hell!" They both burst into laughter.

When they stepped inside the penthouse, Jenna looked up from the magazine and picked up her purse, "I hope you both had a great time," she walked to the elevator, " Bye!" When she was gone, Rafael eyed Marissa with a grin, " This is the best dinner I ever had in my life!" he said sincerely.

The praise caught her off guard, " Th- Thank you. I also enjoyed our time, Rafael." Holding the lapels of the bathing robe together, she looked down at her feet, "I guess, I need to run home in the morning to get something decent to wear to the office." " George will take you!" he said, and she nodded.

" Thanks," She was turning away to walk towards the guest bedroom when he hurriedly held her elbow, "I know you want time to walk back to me, Marissa. I'm ready to accept all your conditions. B-but..." looking into her eyes, he was almost forgetting what he wanted to talk about," Can ... can we... be friends till then?" when he saw her opening her mouth, he quickly closed it with his hand, "I know it's too impractical and a little ... umm... filmy too... but.... I would really like us to become good friends, Marissa." Marissa thought for a moment and then a beautiful smile broke on her lips, "I thought we were friends," she said softly.

He wished they could stand there forever, looking into each other's eyes.

" Ahan!" he shrugged, " So, We're friends? You don't have any problem with it?" she slowly shook her head.

" No. I don't have any problem. Just remember. Being my friend isn't easy, Rafael. Sophia was made of steel and did one hell of a job." "I agree," He nodded again, "I'll remember that." He said gently.**wW.n(o)VéLw@tm.côm**

With a smile, she compressed her lips," Goodnight, Rafael." She must have taken hardly one step when he stopped her again. She sighed," Yes, Rafael? Now what?" "Y- you just said we are friends."

" Yes. So?" Marissa's brows knitted in confusion.

" If we are friends, why are you going to the guest room to sleep? My bed is big enough to accommodate two." Marissa blinked her eyes in shock. Was he serious?