

# Their Wonder Years: Fall 98

## Chapter 31: Quiet Releases, and Falling Together

[ 1,105 words ]

Bharath stepped out of Smith with Marisol's hand in his. And she didn't let go all day.

They grabbed a light breakfast at the student center café with her curled into his side, sharing bites of his bagel, his arm resting lazily around her shoulders like it belonged there. People trickled in slowly, the occasional hungover sophomore, a stray jogger, someone grabbing caffeine with sunglasses, but no one paid them much attention.

Not that they would've noticed.

They were their own planet.

By noon, the sun was warm but not oppressive. The air smelled like pine needles and freshly cut grass, and the sidewalks still held the chill of morning in the concrete. They wandered aimlessly with no agenda and no destination. Just each other.

Marisol walked barefoot in the soft grass behind the library, holding her sneakers in one hand, his fingers in the other. Bharath stopped her under a dogwood tree and pulled her in - slow, like a dance - before kissing her deeply, his hands sliding under her borrowed hoodie, fingers brushing the bare skin at her hips.

"You're going to get me in trouble," she whispered against his mouth.

"I hope so," he whispered back.

Later, he pulled her into a nearby thicket, just far enough off the path to be hidden, and kissed her again, his hand slipping between her legs, under her shorts, under her panties.

She gasped. Then bit her lip.

It was fast. It was quiet.

Her knees nearly gave out when she came. He caught her. Kissed her again. Carried her emotions like he carried her weight - like it was an honor.

She didn't speak for a while after that.

She just leaned against him as they walked, letting herself feel... everything.

It kept happening.

Outside the physics building. Behind the Civil Engineering annex. Near the little Japanese garden by the lake.

Always gentle.

Always with her permission.

Always with that look. The one that said she was more than a body to him. She was everything.

And each time he touched her like that, she fell just a little more.

Not just into pleasure.

Into him.

No one had ever made her feel like this. Strong and soft, protected and undone, adored and claimed. It made her shiver. It made her bold.

By late afternoon, they lay in the grass behind the Hill Auditorium, heads resting on Bharath's t-shirt, Marisol's leg flung casually over his thigh. Her fingers trailed along his arm in lazy circles. They didn't talk much. Just watched the sky shift from blue to gold.

"I don't know what this is yet," she said finally, voice low.

He turned toward her. "Me neither."

"But I like it."

"Me too."

She kissed him then. Not with heat. With something else.

Something that looked suspiciously like the beginning of love.

And Bharath?

He didn't run.

He just kissed her back. Deeper this time, his fingers threading through her hair, like he knew the way now.

Because maybe he did.

Maybe this was what it looked like when two people - wildly different, wildly new - stopped pretending they weren't already falling.

Hard. Fast. But together.

The door to Smith 202 creaked open around 6 PM, letting in the golden remnants of the Atlanta sunset - and with it, Marisol and Bharath were sitting on a beanbag, arms still loosely looped together, looking for all the world like two people floating in their own private orbit. Ravi had joined them a little while back looking really worse for the wear as they watched TV, flipping through channels as they caught up on the awesome party last night.

Tyrel was the first to stir, groaning from his bed like a man recovering from both battle and betrayal. He blinked once. Then again. Then grinned.

"Well, look who decided to rejoin society," he croaked, sitting up, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "Damn, y'all are still attached? You guys get married or what?"

Bharath just chuckled and raised an eyebrow. "We rejoined society? It's 6 PM"

"Ah well. You know it was a good night when you wake up in your own bed and not a campus bench."

At that moment, Jorge and Camila strolled in. Or more accurately, Jorge floated in, with Camila hanging off his arm like he'd won the lottery.

Tyrel whistled low. "Look at Jorge, out here living his telenovela dreams."

"Jealousy doesn't suit you," Jorge shot back with a grin.

Marisol and Camila exchanged polite nods - nothing more. Camila's smile was bright, dazzling even.

"Whoa," Ravi said. "That's a new face."

"Camila," she introduced herself, flipping her hair. "From Miami. And yes, I've heard all the gossip."

Ravi smirked and tilted his head. "You sure you're not here to steal our boy Jorge away to some modeling agency?"

Camila giggled and pressed closer to Jorge. "Maybe I already have."

“So,” Ravi said, slumping into Tyrel’s chair. “When did Bharath become the main character in our story?”

Tyrel grinned, pointing his thumb. “Sometime between calculus and a dancefloor dry hump, I think.”

“En serio!,” Jorge said, nudging Bharath. “I didn’t even know you had game. You been hiding it or what?”

Bharath tried to deflect with a laugh, but Marisol wasn’t having it.

“Stop it,” she said, throwing her arm proudly around Bharath’s waist. “He’s the sweetest man I’ve ever met, he smells good, he learns fast, and if I hear one more of you try to talk him down, I will throw you into the Tech fountain myself.”

“Ooooh,” Ravi crowed. “She said he smells good.”

“Must be the shampoo from the gym,” Tyrel muttered.

“I’m serious,” Marisol said, kissing Bharath on the cheek in front of everyone who hooted. “This man’s going places. I’m just getting in early.”

“Damn, girl,” Tyrel said, half-laughing. “You campaigning for First Lady or what?”

She grinned. “Just telling the truth.”

Even Camila blinked at that, her eyes flicking toward Bharath, then Marisol, just briefly.

There was more laughter, more teasing. But by now, the bonds were real. They weren’t just friends anymore. They were becoming something more - a crew, a unit, a chosen family that had somehow found each other among the chaos of college.

Eventually, someone floated the idea of a movie.

“Peachtree Cinemas is doing late night Sunday shows,” Ravi said. “Anyone up for a thriller?”

“What’s showing?” Tyrel asked.

“The Sixth Sense,” Bharath answered instantly. “I’ve been meaning to watch it. Heard great things about it.”

Camila raised an eyebrow. “The one with the twist?”

Jorge looked confused. “What twist?”

“Don’t tell him,” Marisol said. “He deserves the pure experience.”

They took the MARTA downtown, packed into the train like it was a school field trip, Jorge singing something terrible in Spanish while Tyrel added beatbox. Ravi stole someone’s popcorn on the platform. Camila kept snapping Polaroids. Marisol laced her fingers through Bharath’s under the shared flickering glow of fluorescent lights.

And for just one perfect evening, nothing else mattered.

They were young. Alive. Surrounded by laughter.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 32: He Didn’t See the Movie, But He Sensed the Danger

[ 1,185 words ]

The movie ended with a chorus of gasps and muttered “*No way*” reactions echoing through the dimmed Peachtree Cinema hall. As the credits rolled and the lights slowly came up, the group sat stunned for a beat.

“Carajo!” Jorge whispered. “He was dead the whole time?”

“Dude!” Ravi groaned. “You weren’t supposed to say it!”

“I *just* got it,” Jorge replied, eyes wide. “Like... just now.”

Tyrel stretched with a yawn, then shook his head. “Y’all need Black Jesus. I figured it out halfway through.”

“You thought the therapist was the *ghost* of his father,” Marisol pointed out.

“Details,” Tyrel replied, already on his feet.

They filed out onto the quiet Atlanta sidewalk, the MARTA ride back sleepy and full of half-finished theories. By the time they reached the all-night Denny’s across from campus - buzzing faintly under tired fluorescent lights - the group had recovered enough energy to regroup around a booth near the back.

Except Bharath and Marisol.

They slid into their own booth across the aisle, opposite the others - not quite hiding, but definitely in their own world. Marisol leaned against him, one leg casually crossed over his, whispering something that made him flush and glance away with a grin.

“Alright,” Tyrel called out, drumming a spoon against his water glass. “Pop quiz time.”

“Uh-oh,” Jorge said. “What now?”

Tyrel leaned forward, pointing his spoon dramatically. “Bharath. Explain the plot of *The Sixth Sense*.”

Bharath looked up, blinking.

Ravi chimed in. “Yeah, Professor. What was the movie about?”

Bharath opened his mouth.

Paused.

Looked sheepish.

Then said, “I saw... exactly six minutes of that movie. It was called the Sixth Sense after all.”

Marisol giggled into his shoulder.

“He was otherwise... preoccupied. He was getting rewarded for good behavior. Repeatedly,” she said, voice innocent, eyes wicked.

A fry whizzed through the air and bounced off Bharath’s jacket.

“Hey!” he laughed.

Tyrel threw another one. “You’re supposed to be the designated smart guy! You’re letting us down!”

Another piece of popcorn - stale and rubbery - sailed past Marisol’s head. She caught it midair.

“You throw one more carb at this man,” she said with mock severity, “and I’m releasing the study group solutions online.”

Ravi gasped. “You wouldn’t.”

“She would,” Jorge whispered. “She’s scary when she’s protective.”

“She’s always scary,” Camila said with a slight smirk, to which no one responded.

Bharath, still grinning, leaned into Marisol. “You do realize they’re not going to stop, right?”

“I don’t care,” she said, resting her head on his shoulder. “I got what I wanted tonight.”

“Revenge for the bush ambush?” he whispered back.

“That... and your fries,” she murmured, reaching across him to steal another fry from his basket.

“You didn’t even watch the movie!” Ravi protested from the next booth.

“Neither did he!” Marisol replied, mouth full.

The waitress came by, smiling politely at the chaos. Refills were ordered. Plates of pancakes, fries, omelettes, and milkshakes started appearing like clockwork.

The mood stayed light - laughter, banter, playful elbow jabs and conspiratorial grins.

But through it all, Bharath and Marisol remained cocooned in their own bubble. Their fingers always brushing, glances always loaded, the magnetic pull between them clear for anyone watching.

Ravi muttered, “They’re disgusting.”

Tyrel smirked. “They’re in *lust*, bro. Let ‘em have their rom-com montage. And don’t think we ain’t seeing what you’re doing with Camila here senior Jorge.”

“Still disgusting,” Jorge said, but he was smiling as he kissed a giggling Camila.

The sidewalks were quiet now, save for the occasional rumble of a passing car and the distant drone of late-night trains. The streets glowed amber under the flickering street lamps, shadows stretching long behind every step.

Bharath and Marisol walked close, arms looped, voices low. They were still wrapped in the cocoon of the weekend they had built, heartbeat by heartbeat, touch by touch.

She leaned into him with a content sigh. “I don’t want this day to end.”

“It doesn’t have to,” Bharath murmured. “We’ll just pause it until tomorrow.”

Her smile was soft, but it didn’t reach her eyes. “You promise?”

“I promise.”

They were nearing the intersection, just a few blocks from the MARTA station, when the stillness shattered.

“Get off me!” a woman’s voice screamed, sharp and panicked, echoing from the mouth of a narrow alley across the street.

Both of them froze.

Marisol’s breath caught. “Was that...”

Another shout. This time garbled. Fear-strangled. A man’s voice barked something - cruel, angry. A loud thud followed.

Without thinking, Marisol ran to a nearby phone and punched 911. “We need to go,” she said, already breaking into a run.

But Bharath was faster.

“Bharath!” she called after him.

He didn’t stop.

He turned the corner first.

Two men, shadows against the alley wall, were shoving a young blonde woman to the ground. One was gripping her jacket; the other had something in his hand - metallic, glinting.

“Hey!” Bharath’s voice cracked like a gunshot.

Both men turned.

They weren’t much older than him. One had a scar over his eye. The other grinned like this was just another Sunday routine.

“The hell you want?” Scarface snapped.

“Let her go,” Bharath said, stepping closer.

“Or what?” the grinning one jeered.

Behind them, the blonde woman whimpered, curled protectively over her knees, face streaked with mascara and dirt.

Bharath didn't answer.

He lunged.

It was messy. Untrained. Pure instinct.

He slammed into the guy with the grin, tackling him into a stack of crates. They crashed to the ground, limbs flailing. Bharath punched hard - once, twice - before a sharp pain tore through his side. He didn't even register it.

The second man came at him. Bharath scrambled, ducked just in time, grabbed a loose metal pole from the ground and swung.

It connected with a crunch.

The man screamed and stumbled back, clutching his arm. The first man was already staggering upright, lip split.

"Come on, let's go!" he barked.

The two muggers ran, disappearing down the alley like rats into the dark.

Bharath stood frozen for a moment, panting, heart hammering. The pole slipped from his hand with a metallic clatter.

Behind him, he heard the woman sobbing.

And then...

"Bharath!"

Marisol's voice - wild with panic.

He turned just in time to see her skid to a stop beside him.

"Are you okay baby?" she gasped, grabbing his face, searching his eyes, his body. "Are you... wait... oh my god."

He looked down. His shirt was wet. Dark. and it was spreading.

It took a beat before the sting hit him - a slow burn spreading from his right side.

"I..." he swayed slightly. "I think I ..."

"Jesus," she whispered, dropping her phone, catching him just as his knees gave out a little. "You're bleeding."

"I didn't... even feel it," he muttered, dazed.

"You got stabbed, Bharath. Sit. Now."

The blonde woman was now standing unsteadily, tears streaming down her face. She whispered a trembling, "Thank you," before slumping against the alley wall.

The wail of sirens split the air in the distance.

Marisol pulled Bharath down to the pavement, holding him close, pressing her palm to his wound. "You absolute idiot," she whispered, tears slipping down her cheeks. "You could've died."

"I'm fine," he tried to say, but it came out weak.

She shook her head, kissed his forehead. "Don't you ever do something that stupid again. You hear me?"

He smiled faintly. "Only if you promise to keep yelling at me like that."

"You're not allowed to joke right now."

"I'm serious. You look... beautiful when you're mad."

She laughed in a half-sob, half-kiss and held him tighter.

The sirens grew louder.

Help was coming.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## [- Chapter 33: The Hero's Price: Six Stiches and a New Friend](#)

### Chapter 33: The Hero's Price: Six Stiches and a New Friend

[ 1,609 words ]

The blue and red lights tore through the darkness like a tidal wave.

Two police cruisers screeched to a halt near the mouth of the alley, doors flying open before the engines had even quieted. Uniformed officers spilled out, shouting orders, flashlights cutting across the grimy walls.

“Drop the weapon!”

“He’s down... he’s down!” Marisol shouted, arms raised protectively over Bharath, her hand still pressed against his side.

“Ma’am, step back...”

“He’s the one who helped her! He’s been stabbed!”

One of the officers knelt beside Bharath, who was starting to slump, his skin pale and slick with sweat.

“Sir? Can you hear me?”

Bharath blinked slowly, trying to nod. “Yeah. Just... dizzy.”

Another officer jogged over to the young woman leaning against the wall. Her mascara had run down to her chin, her blonde hair was wild and tangled, but her eyes were clear now. Locked onto Bharath.

“That’s him,” she said hoarsely. “He saved me. They had a knife. They were going to...” Her voice cracked. “If he hadn’t shown up, I don’t know what would’ve happened.”

The officer at Bharath’s side looked up grimly. “It’s not a deep puncture but it looks like he’s been bleeding for longer than we thought. He needs stitches. We need EMS now.”

Marisol’s face went white. “No, no. He said it wasn’t anything. He said...”

“He probably didn’t feel it through the adrenaline,” the officer said gently. “Ma’am, he’s lucky. If this hit a little to the left...”

“Don’t,” she whispered. Her hands trembled. “Don’t say that.”

Bharath’s head lolled to the side. His eyes found hers.

“You’re not allowed to leave me,” she said, her voice cracking. “You hear me? Not after all this.”

He smiled weakly. “You’d yell at me again.”

“Damn right I will,” she breathed, tears slipping down her cheeks.

The ambulance pulled up then - lights silent, urgency in motion.

Two EMTs ran out, bags swinging. They crouched next to Bharath, assessing quickly, efficiently.

“Name?” one of them asked.

“Bharath,” Marisol replied, brushing his damp hair back from his forehead.

“Vitals are dropping,” the other EMT murmured. “BP’s low.”

“Let’s get pressure on that wound. And he needs fluids stat.”

They worked with swift precision: cleaning the wound, applying pressure, taping gauze down tightly. Bharath flinched but didn’t complain.

The blonde woman - Sarah, as the officers now addressed her - walked over, shaking slightly. “Is he going to be okay?”

Marisol looked up at her, eyes swollen with tears.

Sarah’s own were brimming. “He saved my life.”

Marisol nodded slowly.

The EMTs lifted Bharath carefully onto the stretcher. He grimaced, but said nothing.

“Hospital?” Marisol asked, already wiping her face.

“Grady,” the EMT said. “Closest ER that can do immediate stitches and imaging.”

“I’m going,” Marisol said.

“You family?” one officer asked.

“I’m his girlfriend and I’m not leaving him,” she said, fierce now, standing straighter. “That’s all that matters.”

Sarah stepped forward. “Me either. He saved my life. The least I can do is sit with him while he gets stitched up.”

The officer nodded. “Go.”

Marisol turned away, when she saw one of the officers with a cellphone. She begged if she could use it to call home. The officer consented and gave it to her. Her fingers shook as she dialed.

“Mami?” she said softly when her mother answered.

“Marisol? It’s so late. What happened...”

“I missed the train. I’m okay, I promise. I’ll be home early in the morning.”

“Que paso niñacita? You sure?”

“Yes. I’m with friends. Safe. Don’t worry. Te quiero, Mamá.”

She hung up before her mother could ask more.

By the time she reached the ambulance, they were already loading Bharath in.

Sarah held the door open.

Marisol climbed in beside him, not caring about rules or questions or anything except staying close.

Bharath looked up as they bumped over the first pothole.

“You came,” he whispered, dazed.

“Of course I came, dumbass.”

He managed a half-smile.

His hand reached out, fingers curling around hers. She took it instantly, holding tight, pressing it to her heart.

“You scared the hell out of me,” she said.

“I’d do it again.”

“Don’t,” she whispered, leaning down, pressing a kiss to his knuckles. “Don’t you ever put yourself at risk like that again.”

He closed his eyes.

“I saw her face,” he murmured. “She looked like she thought it was over.”

Marisol turned her head away, swallowing hard.

Sarah sat across from them, arms folded tight, shoulders shaking.

“I’ve never been so scared in my life,” she said quietly. “I thought... I thought that was it. Until he just ran at them like - like a movie hero or something.”

Marisol nodded, brushing away another tear. “That’s who he is.”

Sarah looked up, meeting her eyes. “Then I hope he knows how lucky he is to have someone who sees it.”

Marisol looked down at him - her sweet, stubborn, foolish boy - and kissed his hand again.

“He’ll know,” she whispered. “Even if I have to tell him every day.”

The ambulance sped through the night, a quiet hush settling between them - broken only by the gentle beep of the monitor and the soft hum of wheels against asphalt.

The hospital room was quiet, save for the soft beep of the vitals monitor and the occasional rustle of nurses passing by the door.

Bharath lay propped against a pair of starched pillows, one arm wrapped in gauze and the other hooked to a saline drip. His skin was pale but the worst of the adrenaline crash had passed. A neat row of stitches marked his left side just above the waist - six of them, precise and ugly but safe.

It could’ve been worse. Much worse.

“You’re lucky,” the attending nurse had said. “Half an inch deeper and we’d be talking internal bleeding.”

Now he just had to stay in observation for a couple of hours.

Marisol hadn’t let go of his hand since.

She sat on the small visitor couch, legs tucked beneath her, watching him with that same fierce tenderness she’d shown when he first collapsed. Her hoodie was rumpled, eyes smudged with worry and fatigue, but to Bharath she had never looked more beautiful.

Sarah sat in the corner chair. Her shoulders hunched, fingers picking at a paper cup of lukewarm coffee. Her mascara was a faded shadow now. Her sweatshirt was oversized and torn at one sleeve. The earlier gratitude had given way to something more fragile. More broken.

“You want water?” Marisol offered gently.

Sarah shook her head. "Thanks. I'm okay."

"No, you're not," Marisol said kindly, but firmly. "You don't have to pretend here."

Sarah let out a breath that was half a laugh and half a sob.

"I didn't mean to end up in the middle of the street crying for help tonight," she said. "I swear I didn't wake up thinking today's the day I get mugged and saved by a guy with zero self-preservation instincts."

Bharath chuckled weakly. "Glad to be of service."

Marisol gave his fingers a squeeze.

Sarah looked down at the crumpled cup in her hands.

"I was walking home," she said. "From... somewhere I shouldn't have been."

Neither Bharath nor Marisol said anything. They waited.

She swallowed. "I broke up with my boyfriend two nights ago. Derek. He... he wasn't a good guy."

That much had been obvious from the moment she said they were going to hurt me.

But there was more. You could hear it in her voice.

Marisol's gaze softened. "What happened?"

Sarah blinked rapidly, her voice trembling. "He cheated. A lot. Lied. Manipulated. Always made me feel like it was my fault for being 'too much' or 'too clingy'. And I knew... I *knew*... it was wrong. I wasn't happy. But I stayed."

"Why?" Bharath asked quietly.

Sarah gave a small, sad smile. "Because sometimes... being treated badly feels better than being alone."

Marisol reached for her other hand, covering it gently. "You're not alone anymore."

Sarah nodded quickly, tears slipping down her cheeks.

"I was supposed to go home. He offered to drive me. He said he wanted to talk. And stupid me, I believed him. Thought maybe we could end things like adults. Then we fought in the car. He started screaming, calling me names... and then he just pulled over, in the middle of God knows where, and told me to get out."

“Oh my God,” Marisol whispered.

“I didn’t even have money on me,” Sarah said, wiping her face. “No purse. I just started walking toward the MARTA, hoping I’d find a cab or something. And then those guys came out of the alley and...” She shivered. “If he hadn’t shown up...”

Her voice broke completely.

“I’m pathetic,” she whispered. “Who stays with someone like that for years?”

“No,” Marisol said firmly, gripping her hand tighter. “You’re *not* pathetic. You’re human. You loved someone who didn’t deserve it. That doesn’t make you weak - that makes you strong for finally walking away.”

Sarah sobbed once, nodding.

“And for the record?” Marisol added, glancing at Bharath, then back at her. “Who the *hell* cheats on a woman who looks like *you*?”

Sarah gave a choked laugh. “Please.”

“I’m serious,” Marisol said, wiping her cheek. “You’re gorgeous. Like, stupidly gorgeous. I looked at you and said *damn*, and I don’t say that lightly.”

Bharath, still recovering from the chaos, tried not to say anything - but failed.

“She’s right,” he murmured.

Marisol glanced sideways at him, a smirk playing on her lips. “Behave.”

“I was just agreeing with you,” he said weakly.

Sarah laughed through her tears. “You guys are... unreal.”

Bharath smiled at her - soft, sincere. “You didn’t deserve what happened to you. Not Derek. Not tonight. I’m sorry.”

Sarah met his eyes, then Marisol’s.

“Thank you,” she whispered. “Both of you.”

Marisol looked back at her man. Her *boyfriend*, if she dared to call him that now - and realized something powerful.

He didn’t just make her feel safe.

He made *others* feel safe, too.

Even now - pale, bruised, stitched - he was still thinking about someone else.

She leaned down and kissed his forehead.

“We’re gonna take care of you now,” she whispered. “And you’re not allowed to play hero again without backup.”

Bharath closed his eyes and exhaled.

“Deal.”

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 34: Dawn Confessions: Tea, Tears, and Three Little Words

[ 1,747 words ]

By the time the cab dropped them off at Sarah’s rented house just off 10th Street, the sky had begun to tint blue with the slow arrival of dawn.

It was a modest place. A narrow two-storied, two-bedroom house tucked behind a row of sycamore trees. A dim porch light buzzed over the entryway. The moment the door opened, the smell of lavender fabric softener and forgotten textbooks greeted them. A stack of Engineering journals lined the kitchen counter, beside a half-eaten bag of pita chips and a lonely mug that read Caffeine & Consent.

Bharath eased himself into the comfortable couch while Marisol helped Sarah flick on a few lights. She moved like someone still getting used to the fact she was alive - slow, hesitant, every breath deeper than the last.

“You okay?” Marisol asked gently.

Sarah gave a tired nod, though her eyes were rimmed with exhaustion. “Yeah. Just... give me five minutes to shower and feel human again.”

“Take ten,” Bharath offered, slouched but alert, his side starting to ache now that the adrenaline was gone. “We’re not going anywhere.”

Sarah disappeared down the short hallway.

Marisol moved around the tiny kitchen like she'd done it a hundred times. She found a kettle, rinsed mugs, opened cabinets.

"You're making tea?" Bharath asked, smiling faintly.

"You got stabbed," she replied without turning. "You get tea. That's the rule."

He sank further into the cushions, letting the scent of mint and lemongrass steep into the quiet.

When Sarah returned twenty minutes later. Her hair was damp, face scrubbed clean, and she was draped in an oversized t-shirt and shorts. She looked like someone who had washed away more than just sweat and blood.

She smiled, small and shaky. "Thanks for staying."

Marisol handed her a steaming cup. "Thanks for not kicking us out."

Sarah chuckled, curled up in the armchair with her knees drawn to her chest, fingers wrapped tightly around the mug like it was her lifeline.

"You know," she said after a beat, "I wasn't sure I was going to come back here at all."

Marisol looked up. "What do you mean?"

Sarah's eyes shone under the soft lamp light.

"I mean... if I'd made it out of that alley by myself. If I'd gotten here and walked in alone, to this empty, quiet place? I don't know what I would've done."

Her voice cracked. "Probably something... really stupid."

Bharath sat up straighter, ignoring the twinge in his side. "Hey. You didn't. You came back. That's what matters."

Sarah nodded, then looked between them. The couple who'd saved her, held her, sat with her at the hospital like she wasn't a burden.

"You two are something else."

Marisol tilted her head. "You've had a rough time, huh?"

Sarah let out a soft laugh. "That's the nice way of putting it."

She set her mug down and began, slowly at first. But once the words came, they didn't stop.

Her parents had died in a car crash when she was nine. She went to live with an uncle who saw her more as a housekeeper than a child. The abuse started when she was eleven. She didn't talk about the worst parts. She didn't have to. The silence between words filled in the rest.

She ran away at thirteen. Got lucky. Ended up in a foster system that, for once, worked. A woman named Patrice took her in, taught her how to balance a checkbook, read a lease, say no. She still called sometimes. But by then, Sarah had learned how to smile through pain. How to fake it. How to dress the part, act the part, become the beautiful, brilliant blonde that everyone assumed had it easy.

"And yet," she said, her voice cracking again, "I still picked a guy like him. Like Derek. The kind of man who starts sweet and ends up punching walls. I can't tell you what he did to me. It's too horrific for me to recall."

Marisol scooted closer, wrapping an arm around her.

"You survived all of that," she said softly. "You're still here. That's strength, Sarah. That's not weakness."

Bharath sat silent, eyes wide, heart breaking in quiet waves.

"I look in the mirror sometimes," Sarah whispered, "and I see someone who should've figured it out by now. But I keep falling for the same story from him. Same charm. Same damage. I don't know how to stop."

"You just did," Marisol said. "You walked away."

Sarah looked down. "Not before it got really bad."

"Doesn't matter," Marisol said. "You walked away. That's your line in the sand."

They sat in silence for a few long seconds, the only sound the distant hum of early traffic and the soft clink of Bharath shifting his tea mug on the coaster.

Then Marisol, half-laughing, glanced toward him. "You ever think about how insane it is that people like her - who look like that - are the ones who get treated like crap?"

Bharath nodded slowly. "Yeah. I mean... she looks like she could be on the cover of Maxim."

Sarah rolled her eyes, but her cheeks flushed. "You guys are ridiculous."

“No,” Marisol said. “We’re real. And you’re stunning. And you still ended up with someone who made you feel small.”

Sarah blinked rapidly. “I didn’t think people like you two existed.”

“We barely believe it ourselves,” Marisol admitted with a glance at Bharath.

Bharath gave a small smile. “But maybe this is how it starts. Three survivors. Tea. A living room.”

Sarah chuckled. “A girl could get used to this.”

The apartment dimmed again after the tea was finished. The lights stayed off except for a single lamp in the corner, casting a golden spill over the small living room. They didn't speak much after that. Not because there was nothing to say, but because everything important had already been said.

Sarah curled up on the couch between them, wrapped in the fuzzy throw blanket that smelled faintly of vanilla and Tide. She was barefoot now, her long legs folded beneath her, one arm tucked around Marisol’s waist, her head resting against her shoulder.

Bharath sat on the floor at their feet, his back against the couch, his stitches starting to ache again but not enough to matter. His hand reached up and lightly rested on Marisol’s shin. Just that small point of contact grounding him.

Sarah’s breathing began to slow. Deeper. Heavier.

She murmured something soft... incoherent... and then fell completely still.

Marisol cradled her without hesitation. One hand stroking Sarah’s blonde hair. The other gently wrapped around her shoulder.

“She’s out,” she whispered.

“Good,” Bharath said. “She needs it.”

The room was still for a long time.

Outside, the city was winding back up. A stray car horn, the faint rumble of buses, the birds that always seemed too energetic for how early it was. But inside, the three of them were wrapped in a pocket of calm.

Marisol looked down at Sarah, her expression softening.

She really was beautiful.

Even in the loose t-shirt and boy shorts she'd changed into. She wore no makeup, eyes puffy from crying, bare legs curled like a child's. There was something arresting about her.

Her features were unfairly perfect: high cheekbones, pillowy lips, and lashes long enough to brush the curve of her cheek. Her skin was sun-kissed and smooth, with the kind of dewy glow that looked effortless. She could've stepped off a magazine cover. But it wasn't just her looks, it was the softness in sleep, the vulnerability etched in her jaw. The way she leaned into Marisol like she hadn't let anyone hold her in years.

"She's stunning," Marisol whispered, her voice almost reverent.

Bharath swallowed. Hard.

He'd been trying not to look. He'd really tried.

But now, watching the two of them like that—this vision of sculpted blonde curves nestled against the fierce, caramel beauty of Marisol—his body betrayed him.

Badly.

He shifted slightly, trying not to groan.

Marisol glanced down at him. Then blinked.

"Seriously?" she mouthed.

Bharath looked at her, sheepish, his face going crimson.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm not proud of it. It just... happened."

Marisol's eyes narrowed with amused suspicion. "Happened?"

"I'm injured," he hissed. "I have limited blood flow options."

She covered her mouth to suppress a laugh. The kind that made her shoulders shake.

Sarah, completely unaware, snuggled in closer with a faint sigh, her thigh sliding across Marisol's lap.

Bharath made a tiny, strangled sound.

Marisol leaned over, her lips barely an inch from his ear, and whispered with wicked delight, "You're insatiable."

“She’s half-naked,” he whispered back. “And on you. And you’re touching me. And I’m overwhelmed with eye-candy.”

“I noticed,” Marisol murmured. “So did your shorts.”

He buried his face in his hands.

Marisol pressed her cheek to Sarah’s hair, smiled indulgently, and mouthed one final jab: “Pervert.”

Then, softer, warmer, she reached out with her free hand and brushed Bharath’s hair back from his forehead.

“I love you anyway,” she whispered.

Bharath froze.

Time didn’t just stop. It folded in on itself, curled around that one breathless moment like a prayer.

The words danced in the air between them. Simple. Unadorned. Utterly shattering.

He stared up at her. At Marisol, radiant even in exhaustion, holding a broken stranger and still managing to cradle his heart like it was the most natural thing in the world.

“You what?” he whispered.

Marisol blinked, then seemed to realize what she’d said. Her lips parted, a soft tremor flashing across her face like a gust of wind through calm water.

“I...” she started. Then her throat tightened. Her gaze dropped to Sarah, asleep against her shoulder.

“I didn’t mean to say it like that. Not now. Not here. But...” Her voice cracked. “God, it’s true.”

She looked at Bharath, her eyes dark with panic and wonder and something deeper than both. “I didn’t mean to fall this hard. It’s only been two weeks. That’s crazy, right?”

Bharath shook his head slowly. “I don’t care.”

Marisol let out a shaky breath. “I don’t even know why I trust you this much. I’ve never... never given myself to someone like I did last night. Not even close. But you? You looked at me like I was a person. A whole person. You didn’t try to take anything from me. And then I wanted to give you... everything.”

Tears welled in her eyes, and she wiped them away roughly with the back of her wrist.

“Damn it,” she muttered. “I didn’t cry when I got hurt badly. I didn’t cry when I found out that my dad left and that he wasn’t on some foreign trip or in the military. But you? You make me cry and feel soft and safe and turned on all at the same time. What the hell, Bharath?”

She looked down at him, tears still clinging to her lashes, voice barely above a whisper. “I love you, Bharath. And I’m terrified... but I’m not taking it back.”

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 35: Midnight Mayhem: Divine Teases, Blushing Heroes, and Shared Cuddles

[ 1,640 words ]

Bharath stared up at her, wide-eyed, still struggling to process the whirlwind of the last twelve hours.

She was serious.

Still teasing, still smirking, but underneath it all, she was serious.

That wasn’t just mischief in her eyes. It was conviction.

He swallowed. “I... I just don’t understand how you’re real.”

Marisol’s expression softened. She shifted slightly beneath Sarah’s weight, careful not to wake her, and leaned closer to Bharath, lowering her voice to something just above a whisper.

“You want to know what I meant?” she said, her thumb tracing absent circles on the back of his hand. “When I said I could bat for the other team?”

He nodded... wordless, captivated.

She tilted her head toward Sarah’s sleeping form. “Look at her. She’s beautiful, right? I mean... she’s like someone airbrushed by a divine wind machine. All that blonde hair, those eyes, that body that makes straight girls like me question our orientation.”

Bharath's throat clicked as he nodded again, unable to tear his eyes away from either of them.

Marisol continued, her voice still soft but gaining heat. "But that's not why I said what I said. It's not just about what Sarah looks like. It's about how I feel right now."

She looked down at Sarah's head on her chest, her fingers brushing gently over her temple.

"This moment? Her needing us. Trusting me enough to fall asleep on me after everything she's been through? That... does something to me. And you..." she turned back to Bharath, gaze locking onto his like a magnetic pull, "You gave me the space to feel that. To hold another woman like this without it being weird or complicated or judged. I've never felt that free with a man before."

He blinked, stunned into silence.

Marisol smiled, a soft, secret smile. "That's what I meant. I can feel open. Safe. Brave. Even a little wild." Her fingers squeezed his hand. "Because I'm yours."

Bharath let out a long, shaky breath, his chest rising and falling like something big had just settled inside it.

"Marisol..."

"I mean it," she said, suddenly serious again. "You're not just someone I'm hooking up with. You've changed something in me. Opened a door I didn't even know I had locked."

She leaned closer, her other hand now cradling his cheek, thumb brushing the side of his mouth. "I was scared to say it. To admit how hard I was falling. But then I almost lost you tonight. And now?" Her voice trembled. "Now I don't want to hold anything back."

She kissed him... slow, deep, and full of the kind of emotion that made the air feel too thick.

It wasn't just sensual. It was intimate.

Healing.

When she pulled back, her eyes shimmered in the low light. "I love you, Bharath. And I'm not going anywhere."

Bharath's throat tightened. He touched her hand gently, reverently, his forehead resting against hers.

“I love you too,” he whispered, the words feeling both terrifying and perfect. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you, but I promise I’ll never take it for granted.”

She smiled again, this time with tears in her eyes. “Good. Because I’m already planning our wedding playlist.”

He laughed—a shaky, beautiful sound.

And then, like fate had impeccable timing, Sarah shifted again—one long, flawless leg kicking free from the blanket, her shirt riding up just a little too high, revealing even more golden skin and the peek of soft cleavage pressing into Marisol’s side.

Bharath’s breath hitched audibly.

Marisol followed his gaze.

Then smirked.

“Oh my God,” she whispered, stifling a laugh. “Again?”

“It’s a reflex!” he hissed, desperate. “I swear it’s not disrespectful, I’m just... there’s too much beauty in one place! My brain can’t process this!”

Marisol clutched her stomach, barely holding in her laughter. “You’re like a puppy trying to process a thunderstorm.”

“I’m injured!” he groaned. “I need medical attention! Not temptation!”

“You need cold water and a lecture on boundaries.”

He slumped dramatically back onto the floor.

She looked down at him and, despite herself, felt the same wild affection bloom all over again. He wasn’t perfect. He wasn’t slick or polished or smooth.

But he was hers.

And somehow, despite everything, tonight, now, always... she was his.

Sarah stirred.

It started with a small twitch, a breath catching differently in her throat. Then her lashes fluttered, her brow furrowed slightly. She shifted against Marisol, stretching one leg out and making a soft sound in her throat, almost like a purr.

Marisol had just kissed Bharath’s knuckles.

He was still looking up at her, eyes wide and heart full, when Sarah cracked one eye open.

The tiniest smirk played on her lips.

“Oh,” she said sleepily. “Did I miss a confession?”

Marisol blinked. “Sarah...”

The blonde sat up slowly, her hair a tousled halo, t-shirt riding up high on her thighs. “You said you love him, didn’t you?”

Bharath froze like someone had hit pause.

Sarah turned to Marisol, arching one perfect brow. “And here I thought I was the dramatic one.”

Marisol flushed, but her chin stayed high. “You are. But I’m the brave one.”

Sarah looked down at Bharath, then followed his line of sight to where her t-shirt had bunched up, exposing a scandalous amount of thigh. “Oops,” she said with zero remorse, adjusting it without really adjusting anything at all. “Didn’t mean to... scandalize our hero.”

Bharath turned a darker shade of crimson. “It’s okay. Really. It’s... I wasn’t... I didn’t...”

“Sweetheart,” Sarah said, laughing, “you’re still recovering from being stabbed. We should really be giving you a break.”

“Please do,” he muttered, dragging the throw pillow over his lap.

Marisol raised both eyebrows. “Wow. That didn’t take long.”

Sarah grinned wickedly. “We really did a number on him, huh?”

“I may have taught him a few things,” Marisol said with a smirk, stretching like a cat—which only made things worse.

Bharath groaned. “This is harassment.”

“Oh, honey,” Sarah teased, crawling to the edge of the couch and letting her legs dangle beside him, “you’re not being harassed until one of us sits on your lap.”

“Don’t,” Bharath said instantly, looking up in panic.

Both girls burst into laughter.

Sarah leaned sideways into Marisol's shoulder, wiping a tear from the corner of her eye. "God, he's adorable."

"Isn't he?" Marisol agreed, beaming at him. "I tell him every day."

"You're all trying to kill me," Bharath mumbled, looking at the ceiling. "I got stabbed last night. I cannot emotionally survive being flirted with by two apsaras before breakfast."

"What's an apsara?" asked Marisol quizzically.

Bharath let out a soft, helpless laugh, still half-sprawled on the couch, one arm flung over his eyes like a man barely clinging to life.

He turned his head slightly, gaze landing on Marisol and Sarah. "An apsara," he said, voice low and reverent, "is a celestial being from Indian mythology. Dancers of the gods. So beautiful they made sages lose their minds with their beauty. So graceful the skies would hush just to watch them move."

He gave a tired, crooked grin. "They're temptation, devotion, and art in one body. Basically..." He waved a hand vaguely toward the two of them. "You."

Sarah blinked. "Wait, so we're literally divine sex appeal?"

"Divine and devastating," Bharath confirmed. "And way too much for a man recovering from blood loss."

Marisol smirked, cheeks warming just a little. "Okay. We'll take that." She leaned in closer. "But next time say it with less clothes on."

Bharath groaned. "See? Killing me."

Sarah placed a hand over her heart. "Apsaras. I like that."

Marisol gave her a sidelong glance. "He called me that last night. I didn't know it meant something so special!"

Sarah's smile widened. "Then he has taste. Obviously."

Bharath peeked out from behind the pillow. "You're both enjoying this."

"Deeply," Marisol confirmed, resting her chin on Sarah's shoulder now.

Sarah added, with a mock whisper, "Should we tell him what we were talking about while he was passed out?"

"Don't you dare," Bharath said, holding up one finger.

Sarah leaned into Marisol, eyes dancing. “He’s so easy.”

“Right?” Marisol giggled. “Like poking a marshmallow.”

Bharath let out a strangled sound and flopped backwards onto the floor. “I give up. The universe has turned against me.”

Sarah stretched again and stood, walking barefoot to the kitchen. “I’m making more tea,” she called out. “Unless you need water dumped on your head first.”

“I need prayer,” Bharath muttered.

Marisol blew him a kiss. “You’ll live. Barely.”

And for a while, laughter replaced the trauma. The strange night had turned into an unexpectedly warm morning—full of teasing and affection, vulnerability and trust. They didn’t have to name what was forming between them. It was enough to feel it.

The morning light had fully arrived now, soft and golden through the thin curtains of Sarah’s apartment. The scent of mint tea still lingered in the air, and the city beyond the windows stirred like a slow heartbeat returning to pace.

Bharath shifted slightly on the floor, finally letting his body lean back against the couch where the two women rested. He could still feel the ache in his side from the night before. Not just the stitches, but the lingering ghost of fear and adrenaline, the quiet knowledge of how close it had come.

But when he looked up. At Marisol’s hand gently stroking Sarah’s hair, at her flushed cheeks and soft, sleepy smile, and at Sarah herself, safe and wrapped in warmth instead of terror, he felt something else.

Peace.

Whatever happened next, whatever complications, consequences, or chaos waited for them outside this room. It didn’t matter right now.

Right now, they were safe.

Together.

The quiet held them like a promise.

And for once, Bharath allowed himself to believe in it.

To believe that sometimes, when the world cracked open... something beautiful could come pouring through.

“So... are we all cuddling again later, or do I have to get stabbed too?” Sarah asked sweetly from Marisol’s arms.

Bharath groaned into the couch.

Marisol just smiled and said, “Only if you ask nicely.”

Both girls giggled.

Marisol glanced at the window where the first full rays of sun were breaking through, then back at Bharath with a small, knowing smile. “Rest while you can, hero. We’ve got a long day ahead... and friends who are going to lose their minds when they hear about this.”

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 36: The Hero’s Reward – Sarah Saw Everything [18+]

[ 1,829 words ]

Sarah woke to sunlight spilling across her like a warm blanket. For the first time in a long time it felt soft and forgiving.

For once, her body didn’t protest the morning. She felt no ache in her ribs, no sour pit in her stomach, no invisible weight pressing her lungs flat. She actually felt... good. Light. Almost giddy.

For a second she was astonished. Then she remembered last night - what felt like the lowest point in her life as the muggers loomed over her in the alley near the MARTA station. Then the miracle in the form of a boy - no man. Sarah smiled as she thought about him.

Bharath. The quiet, steady man who had appeared out of nowhere last night when the world had finally cracked open beneath her feet. The hero who saved her from a worse fate and got himself stabbed for it. He was so brave! And he did that for her. No one had ever done anything heroic for her before. Sarah felt a sense of wonder. He didn't even expect anything for it.

And then there was Marisol. Her second miracle. Standing beside him. The beautiful Latina with dark hair falling like silk. She had comforted her all night.

Technically, they were strangers. Complete strangers. Yet they had stayed through the worst of the sobs, through the shaking, through the ugly silence that followed. They hadn't asked for anything. Not once.

Sarah pressed both palms to her chest. Her heartbeat felt new.

She wanted to give them something back. Coffee. Warm food. Strawberries sliced neat. Something she could make from scratch... for them. A small, tangible thank-you that said: I saw your kindness. I felt it.

She slipped out of bed, and padded out of her room. She was still dressed in the plain white t-shirt and booty shorts she wore last night. She had loaned the same thing to Marisol. Sarah smirked as she remembered Bharath's face when he saw her lying on top of Marisol. It had been fun to tease him. He was such a sweetie.

Sarah already felt closer to Bharath and Marisol than she had felt to anyone else in her life. It was ridiculous. She didn't even know them for twelve hours and she was already behaving like they were her long lost friends. She smiled, remembering what Marisol and Bharath had told her last night. They were there for her. They stayed back for her.

The guest bedroom door stood ajar.

She paused, hand on the frame.

They were still asleep.

Bharath lay spooned behind Marisol, chest to her back, one arm draped over her waist. His injured side was carefully angled away, but his other hand cupped her breast beneath the loose t-shirt. His fingers splayed, relaxed, as though even in sleep he needed the contact. Marisol's head rested on his bicep, lips parted in a faint smile. Her body looked completely at ease, curled into him like she belonged exactly there.

Sarah almost melted when she saw them. They looked adorable together. Such a lovely couple!

Suddenly she envied Marisol. Bharath was the complete opposite of Derek.

Sighing, she went downstairs to get started on breakfast. Soon, the kitchen smelled of coffee before she even started the pot. She cracked eggs, whisked them slow, butter popping in the pan. Sarah caught herself humming. She stopped in amazement. When was the last time she had done that?

She got lost in the rhythm of making breakfast - the sizzle of butter, the gentle scrape of the whisk - when a sound from upstairs broke through. Soft at first. Barely audible. She had never heard those before ... were those moans of pleasure? Even in those terrible pornographic movies that Derek watched, the women never made sounds like these!

Sarah's lip caught between her teeth. Were they...? In her guest room? Right on the other side of the wall from where she'd slept?

She heard Marisol gasp again, sharper now, laced with need.

Sarah's toes curled against the tile. Warmth spread through her belly, unexpected. She set the whisk down and quietly climbed the stairs, pausing at the top.

She heard a low, breathy moan. Marisol's voice, sleepy and thick with pleasure: "Mmm... sí, justo ahí..."

A rustle of sheets. A slow, wet sound. Skin sliding against skin.

Marisol again, softer but unmistakable: "Ay... más profundo, amor..."

Sarah's thighs pressed together instinctively. Heat bloomed low and sudden. She had never, ever, felt curious about other people's sex before. Sex had always been something endured, endured quietly, eyes on the ceiling, waiting for it to end.

This didn't sound like that. This sounded like bliss.

She bit her lip harder. Part of her screamed to go back downstairs, finish breakfast, pretend she heard nothing.

Another part, the part that had been starving for years, whispered: Just look. Just once.

Marisol's voice rose, still hushed but deliberate: "Tus manos en mis tetas... squeeze them, baby... harder..."

Sarah's nipples stiffened against the thin cotton so fast it hurt. A pulse of wetness slicked between her legs.

She tiptoed to the guest bedroom door, heart hammering loud enough she was sure they'd hear it.

The guest-room door stood ajar, more than a crack now.

She pressed herself to the frame, barely breathing.

They were still spooned, Bharath curled protectively around Marisol from behind. His injured side braced carefully, but his hips moved with slow, confident rolls. Deep, controlled strokes that made Marisol's whole body ripple.

One large hand cupped the heavy underside of Marisol's breast through the borrowed white t-shirt, thumb circling the stiff peak until it poked obscenely against the fabric. He pinched, gently at first. Then firmer when she arched and whimpered.

"Shhh," Bharath murmured against her neck, voice low and urgent. "Sarah's right next door... keep it down, baby."

Marisol let out a wicked little laugh, deliberately louder: "Then make me be quiet, mi amor... or make me louder. Fuck me harder, papi... your cock feels so good stretching my little pussy..."

Bharath groaned, and took charge, shoving the fabric up until both of Marisol's spectacular breasts spilled free. Full, round, dark nipples already pebbled and begging. He kneaded one roughly, rolling the nipple between his fingers, tugging sharply while his hips snapped deeper.

Sarah caught herself rubbing her thighs together unconsciously.

His thrusts quickened just a fraction, voice dropping to a growl: "Keep talking like that, baby... tell me how much you need it."

Marisol's moan was shameless now, pitched just loud enough to carry: "Sí, papi... pinch them harder... make my tits ache for you... I'm your good little slut, aren't I? Coming on your thick cock whenever you want..."

Sarah's hand flew to her own breast, squeezing through cotton. A tiny, involuntary whimper slipped out. She clamped her mouth shut.

Bharath's voice dropped, pleading: "Mari... please... she'll hear..."

"Good," Marisol purred, voice dripping sin. She rolled her hips back harder, taking him deeper. "Let her hear how you love this pussy, papi. How you make me soak the sheets..."

Sarah's knees trembled. She should leave. She knew she should.

But her feet stayed rooted.

Marisol shifted, pushing up onto one elbow so her breasts swayed heavy and free. Then she reached down between her parted thighs, spreading herself with two fingers so Sarah could see everything. Every slow withdrawal dragged her lips outward; every deep thrust pushed them back in, obscene and hypnotic.

She arched her back harder, ass lifting so the penetration was on full display. Her luscious bubble butt, perfectly round and firm with no extra fat, jiggling with every thrust. Bharath's cock slid in and out, thick root to swollen head, coated in her cream.

Sarah's breath hitched audibly. Desire punched through her so hard her vision blurred. She had never wanted anything the way she wanted to feel that stretch right now.

Bharath, still careful of his stitches, shifted his grip. The shy boy from last night was gone. In his place was a focused, confident lover: hips snapping with controlled power, listening to every hitch in Marisol's breath, every whispered direction.

"Faster on my clit," she begged submissively, voice trembling. "Please, papi... touch your slut's clit..."

He obeyed instantly. His fingers found her swollen bud, rubbing tight, fast circles while he fucked her deeper. But he fumbled the angle at first, too gentle.

"Harder, papi," she corrected breathlessly. "Rub it like you mean it... make me come for you..."

He adjusted, firmer and faster now, growling low: "Like that?"

Marisol shattered almost immediately. Her body locked up, pussy visibly pulsing around his cock, fresh slick gushing out. "Coming... ay dios, papi, I'm coming so hard for you!"

Sarah's eyes widened. She'd never seen a woman come like that. She'd never climaxed like that. Marisol was shaking, crying out in pure ecstasy. Never heard of it happening more than once, let alone over and over.

But Marisol didn't stop. "Again, papi... please..."

He took over, confident now, thrusting deeper while his fingers curled inside her, coaxing another climax from her trembling body.

How was this possible? Multiple times? Blissful, endless waves?

"One more, papi," Marisol pleaded, fully submissive, grinding back. "With me this time..."

Bharath's control cracked. He thrust raggedly, fingers flying over her clit. "Fuck... yes, baby... come with me..."

They peaked together. Marisol screaming his name, body convulsing as Bharath buried himself deep with a guttural groan.

Sarah's knees nearly buckled. She'd never imagined sex like this. Mutual, explosive, her coming over and over like it was effortless. This was simultaneously the most filthy and most amazing thing that Sarah had ever seen in her life.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Marisol moved. She carefully eased off his still-hard cock, mindful of his injury. She pushed him gently onto his back, straddling his thighs reverse so her ass faced the door. "Let me clean you up, papi... taste how you filled me..."

She leaned down, taking his glistening cock into her mouth. Sucking slow, thorough, moaning around him. At the same time, she arched her back, spreading her thighs wide. Sarah gasped. She was showing her everything: her swollen, dripping pussy leaking thick white streams of Bharath's come, rivulets sliding down her inner thighs in obscene trails.

Sarah almost fainted when she saw Marisol glance back at her and winked. She knew that Sarah was watching the whole time!

It was too much. Desire overwhelmed Sarah. Her body screamed for touch, for release she'd never known.

She spun and fled down the stairs, legs shaking, heart pounding.

In the kitchen she gripped the counter, panting. Her nipples ached against cotton. Every heartbeat sent another throb straight to her clit.

Sarah had never known sex could be like that.

When they finally came downstairs, Marisol in Sarah's oversized t-shirt, hair wrecked, cheeks flushed; Bharath moving gingerly but smiling soft, Sarah set the plates down with trembling hands.

Sarah blushed furiously when she saw them. Bharath didn't seem to notice. Marisol did though. She gave Sarah a knowing smile.

"Good morning guys," Sarah blurted out.

"Wow. You've made breakfast for us," exclaimed Bharath. "Thank you so much."

"It's the least I could do."

"Let's eat," said Bharath, smiling. "This looks heaps better than what we get in the dining hall."

Marisol continued to smirk at Sarah as they sat down to eat.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 37: Breakfast Revelations

[ 1,305 words ]

The kitchen smelled of butter and toast, simple and warm. Sarah had set everything down: golden slices of bread, fluffy scrambled eggs, strawberries sliced into neat fans. Bharath slid into a chair, moving gingerly, one hand pressing lightly to his side where the bandage hid his stitches. Marisol followed, her borrowed sweatshirt hanging loose off one shoulder, hair still tousled from sleep.

They ate in comfortable quiet at first. Forks scraped plates. Toast crunched. Sarah kept her eyes on her food, but her mind kept drifting upstairs. The sounds, the sight, the wink. Her cheeks stayed warm. She didn't meet Marisol's eyes after she gave her the same wink from upstairs again. Marisol smirked.

Bharath broke the silence first, voice gentle. "This is really good. Thank you, Sarah."

She looked up, fork pausing. "No... I should be the one to thank *you*. For last night. For... everything." Her voice cracked on the last word. "I don't know what would've happened if you hadn't..."

Bharath waved it off immediately, almost embarrassed. "Hey. Anyone would've done the same."

Sarah shook her head. "No. They wouldn't."

Marisol reached over and squeezed Bharath's hand. "She's right, *mi amor*. Take the compliment. You deserve it. Not everyone runs into an alley without even worrying about themselves." She turned to Sarah, eyes soft. "He's modest. But I'm proud of him. Isn't he the greatest?"

Sarah's throat tightened as she looked at Bharath again. Really looked. The quiet way he sat there, still wincing from the stitches, still checking on her first. "He is," she said softly. "He's... amazing. Gentle. Caring. He builds people up instead of tearing them down."

Bharath ducked his head, cheeks darkening. "I'm just... me."

Marisol smiled, proud. "Exactly. That's the best part about you."

Sarah swallowed. "My ex... Derek... he was the opposite. Started sweet. Then he changed. Became cruel. Controlling. He'd make me feel small, worthless. I kept thinking if I just tried harder, he'd go back to being the guy I met. But he never did."

Bharath's fork stilled. Marisol's hand tightened on his.

Sarah kept going, voice low. "Last night was the first time I stood up to him. He just... dumped me on the side of the road. In the middle of nowhere. I had no phone, no money. I walked for hours. I was... I was thinking about ending it. I didn't see a way out."

The kitchen went quiet.

Marisol stood first. She rounded the table and wrapped her arms around Sarah from behind in gentle, warm embrace. Sarah stiffened for half a second, then leaned back into the embrace, eyes stinging.

Bharath reached across the table. His hand covered Sarah's. "I'm glad you're here," he said quietly. "And I'm happy to get stabbed again if it means saving someone as wonderful as you."

Sarah's breath hitched. She turned her hand palm-up, lacing her fingers with his. "Thank you," she whispered. "Both of you."

Marisol pressed a kiss to Sarah's temple before letting go. "You're safe now. And you're not alone. We'll always be there with you. If you want us."

Sarah wiped her eyes quickly, laughing through the tears. "Sorry. I didn't mean to..."

"Don't apologize," Marisol said firmly. "You're allowed to feel things."

Bharath squeezed her hand once more before letting go. "Yeah. We're here."

The mood shifted slowly once Sarah became calmer. The conversation became lighter and warmer. Marisol sat back down, stealing a strawberry from Sarah's plate with a wink. Sarah laughed again, real this time.

"So," Bharath said, leaning back carefully, "This house. You rent it by yourself?"

Sarah nodded. "Yeah. I've lived here since last year."

Marisol raised an eyebrow. "Alone? How? Tech's expensive."

Sarah shrugged, modest. "I have a Scholarship. Full ride. Plus I get paid well as a TA. And my professor is generous with his grant money."

Bharath blinked. "What?"

"I'm a junior. Turned nineteen last week."

Marisol's fork froze. "Wait. You're just nineteen? And a junior?"

Sarah nodded, a little sheepish. "I got in at seventeen. Full scholarship. I'm a Chem E major."

Bharath stared. "Chem E? That's... intense. And you're a TA and you do research?"

"Yeah. I TA for Intro to Thermo. I like teaching. Helps me understand it better. And the research is just for fun."

"You do research ... just for fun?" asked Bharath disbelievingly.

Marisol let out a low whistle. "You're a genius. And you look like *that*? How are you real?"

Sarah laughed surprised. "I'm not. I just... worked hard. Had to. Grew up in foster care after my parents died when I was nine. I had no safety net. So I made one."

Bharath's expression softened. "That's incredible. You built all this yourself."

Sarah looked down at her plate. "I had good foster parents for a while. Patrice. She taught me how to survive. Balance a checkbook. I owe her everything."

Marisol reached over and squeezed Sarah's wrist. "You're not just surviving. You're thriving. And you're humble about it. That's rare."

Sarah blushed. "I don't feel rare. I just... didn't have a choice."

Bharath shook his head. "You had choices. You chose hard ones. That's strength."

Sarah met his eyes. Warm. Sincere. She could see that there was no pity in his eyes, just respect. Her chest loosened. She liked him. Not just the hero from last night. The quiet way he listened. The way he saw her. Not as a damsel, but as someone who'd fought her way here. He believed in her as a person. No one had ever done that to her before. Her heart fluttered a little.

Marisol watched them both. Her foot brushed Sarah's. Sarah pressed back without thinking.

Sarah hesitated, then spoke again, voice quieter. "I... I have to say something. About upstairs."

Bharath and Marisol looked at her.

"I saw you two. This morning. I didn't mean to, but I heard sounds and... I watched. For a bit."

Bharath's eyes widened. Marisol's lips curved.

Sarah rushed on. "I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't have. But it was... beautiful. The way he touched you. The way you sounded. So gentle. So hot. I've never seen anything like that. I couldn't look away."

Marisol's smile deepened. "You liked it."

Sarah nodded, face flaming. "Yeah. I did."

Bharath sat frozen, tea mug halfway to his mouth.

Marisol leaned forward. "I knew you were there. I was loud on purpose."

Sarah's breath caught. "You... did?"

Marisol nodded. "And I liked that you watched."

Bharath finally found his voice. "Marisol..."

Sarah looked at him with her eyes wide, honest. "It was the first time I've ever seen... that. Someone caring. Making it about pleasure. Not pain."

Bharath's expression softened. He reached across the table again, hand open. Sarah took it.

Marisol watched them, eyes bright. She didn't look jealous. She looked... intrigued. Satisfied.

The rest of breakfast passed in softer tones. Lighter questions, shared laughs. Bharath asked about Sarah's favorite lab experiment. Marisol teased him about his own freshman struggles. Sarah felt the weight lift, bit by bit.

Bharath cleared his throat. "I should probably head back to the dorm. I have classes today."

Marisol shook her head. "Ay no, señor! No classes for us today. My hero needs rest. You go to the dorm but you need to spend the full day in bed. No arguments. Entiendes?"

He opened his mouth to protest.

Marisol raised an eyebrow. "You want me to tie you down?"

Bharath's face went scarlet. "Mari!"

Sarah snorted. "You're so bad Marisol."

Marisol grinned. "I'll stay with Sarah. We need to do some girl talk. You go sleep. Ok, mi amor?"

Bharath looked between them, hesitant, but smiling. "Okay. But call if you need anything. Either of you."

Sarah nodded. "We will. But first finish your coffee and breakfast mister."

"Yes ma'am," said Bharath, with a mock salute.

Sarah giggled. "I don't remember the last time I laughed so much."

"Well. We're just getting started. Wait till you meet the gang. They are going to love you!" stated Bharath. "Just... be prepared for some attention."

Marisol smirked when he said that, "Well, that depends on what Sarah's looking for..." Marisol's eyes held hers for a beat too long. "Right, Sarah?"

Sarah just blushed as Bharath continued eating, oblivious.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 38: Morning Unveiling [18+]

[ 2,357 words ]

Bharath nursed his second cup of coffee, the mug warm between his palms. Breakfast was done, plates scraped clean, but he hadn't moved from his chair. He should leave.

Doctor's orders, Marisol's orders, common sense... all pointed toward the dorm and sleep. His side ached where the stitches pulled, a dull throb that reminded him he'd been stabbed less than twelve hours ago and participated in vigorous sex very recently.

But his legs wouldn't cooperate.

Sarah and Marisol had shooed him away from the dishes with matching stern looks. "You're injured," Sarah had said, hands on her hips. "Sit. Drink your coffee. Rest."

Marisol had kissed his temple. "Hero gets to relax. We've got this."

So he sat, sipped his coffee and watched.

And God, the view.

Both of them stood at the sink in loose t-shirts and tiny booty shorts. The morning light slanted through the window, catching the curve of their hips, the long lines of their legs. They moved together easily, shoulders almost touching, passing dishes back and forth with a rhythm that felt natural despite knowing each other less than a day.

Bharath felt heat crawl up his neck. He was staring. He knew he was staring. He should look away, should focus on his coffee or the wall or literally anything else. But his eyes kept drifting back. The way Marisol's shorts rode up slightly when she reached for a high shelf. The way Sarah's t-shirt hung loose, hinting at the curves beneath. The casual intimacy of it all.

Shame twisted in his gut. This was wrong. He shouldn't be cataloging the shape of Sarah's ass, the sway of her hips when she shifted weight. She'd just escaped an abusive relationship. She'd been crying in Marisol's arms hours ago. And here he was, admiring her like some creep.

But he couldn't stop.

The coffee was good. Strong, bitter and grounding. Sarah had made it him another cup, measuring grounds with the precision of someone who'd done it a thousand times. He took another sip, let the heat slide down his throat.

"You know," he said, voice rough from disuse, "I should figure out how to make proper filter coffee sometime. The South Indian kind. I think you'd both love it."

Marisol glanced over her shoulder, smiling. "Is that your attempt to impress us with your cultural heritage, mi amor?"

"Maybe." He managed a grin. "It's strong. Really strong. Makes this taste like water."

Sarah laughed, the sound light and surprised. "Challenge accepted. You make it, I'll judge."

"Deal."

The conversation settled back into comfortable rhythm. Water ran. Dishes clinked. Marisol rinsed a plate and handed it to Sarah to dry.

"So," Marisol said, voice casual as she scrubbed at a stubborn spot on a pan, "how are you so fit and not mobbed every day at Tech?"

Sarah laughed, short and surprised. Bubbles popped against her wrist as she worked the towel over the plate. "I'm not. I promise. Normally I look terrible."

Marisol turned her head. "Impossible."

Sarah shrugged, cheeks pinking slightly. "That's the magic of baggy clothes. I usually only wear hoodies, sweatpants with no makeup and keep my head down. I kept to myself. People didn't really notice."

Bharath's mug paused halfway to his lips. He hadn't thought about that. She was spectacular. Her curves could stop traffic. But she'd hidden it all. Deliberately. The thought made something twist uncomfortably in his chest.

Marisol handed Sarah a clean fork. "What changed?"

Sarah took the fork, towel moving in slow circles. "Nothing changed. I just didn't want to be seen. For a long time."

A quiet beat passed. Water ran steady from the faucet.

Marisol broke the silence. "But how are you so fit?"

Sarah nodded, setting the fork aside. "I did gymnastics in High school. I was good. Competed regionally. But then..." She gestured vaguely at her chest with the towel. "These got too big. Threw off my balance completely. Couldn't stick landings anymore."

Marisol's eyebrows rose. "So you just quit?"

"Had to. Switched to yoga instead. I do it every single day. I'm religious about it now. It's the only thing that kept me sane."

Marisol's eyes lit up with interest. "Teach me. Seriously. I was a cheerleader until junior high, but I couldn't stand the fakeness so I quit cold. But I still miss being flexible." She gestured at herself with a soapy hand. "My body's decent, but yours is next level."

Sarah smiled, small and pleased. "I'd like that. We could do mornings. Here, if you want."

Marisol bumped her hip against Sarah's. "Deal. Starting tomorrow?"

"Sure."

Bharath watched them from his seat, the easy way they moved together, the laughter. Sarah's shoulders had relaxed completely when Marisol spoke to her. He felt a strange warmth settle in his chest, something he couldn't quite name yet. Pride maybe. Protectiveness. He couldn't name it.

The conversation drifted to lighter things. Marisol teased Sarah about which yoga poses she'd make her do. Sarah promised to start easy and then laughed when Marisol said she didn't believe her.

Bharath felt his eyelids grow heavy. The breakfast had been huge. And so much better than the crap at the dining hall. Sarah had made them eggs, toast, and cut strawberries. It was more than he usually ate in a day. Combined with the coffee and the warmth of the kitchen and the bone-deep exhaustion from last night, sleep tugged at him insistently.

But he didn't move. Couldn't make himself leave.

Then Marisol reached for another plate but the plate had water on it and it fell on Sarah's t-shirt, right across her chest.

The thin white cotton darkened instantly, turning nearly transparent where the water hit. The fabric clung to the full curves of her breasts. Her nipples peaked visibly through the dampness, two perfect rose-colored points pressing against the material.

Bharath's breath stopped.

Marisol paused mid-rinse. Her eyes dropped to Sarah's chest and stayed there. "Dios mío," she breathed. "Look at you."

Sarah glanced down. Her breath caught audibly. Color flooded her cheeks. She started to cross her arms, instinct kicking in, but then she stopped. Her hands hovered uncertainly before dropping to her sides.

She didn't cover herself.

Bharath's mug hung frozen halfway to his mouth. He couldn't look away. The wet fabric had turned semi-transparent, clinging to every curve. Pink nipples stood taut and visible, darker and more defined through the dampness.

Marisol turned slowly toward him, eyes glinting with something Bharath couldn't quite name. "Mi amor," she said, voice low and deliberate. "Look at her."

He was already looking. Couldn't stop looking. His throat felt dry despite the coffee. His pulse hammered in his ears.

Sarah met his eyes. Her face was flushed, lips parted slightly, breathing quickening. She looked shocked, embarrassed, and something else. Something that made Bharath's chest tighten and his body respond in ways he couldn't control.

Marisol stepped closer to Sarah, hands hovering near her waist. "Can I show him?" Her voice was soft, intimate, meant only for the three of them.

Sarah swallowed hard. Her eyes stayed locked on Bharath's, searching his face. Then she nodded, the movement small and quick.

Marisol's fingers slid under the hem of Sarah's t-shirt, lifting it slowly. Inch by inch. Cool air hit Sarah's stomach first, smooth and toned, her navel a shallow dip in the flat expanse of her abdomen. Goosebumps rose across her skin immediately.

Bharath's breathing grew shallow. Every rational thought in his head screamed at him to stop this, to say something, to leave. But he sat frozen, watching as Marisol's hands moved higher.

The shirt lifted further. Marisol's thumbs traced the faint lines of muscle along Sarah's ribs, gentle and exploratory. Sarah shivered, her breath hitching.

Then Marisol's hands cupped the undersides of Sarah's breasts through the damp fabric. They were full and heavy, straining against the cotton. The nipples pressed harder against the material, two dark points begging for attention.

"These are obscene," Marisol murmured, voice thick with appreciation. "As heavy as mine, but so perfect." She looked at Sarah. "Natural?"

Sarah nodded, unable to form words.

Marisol squeezed gently, testing the weight, thumbs brushing over the peaks. Sarah gasped, the sound sharp and needy. Her back arched slightly, pushing her breasts more fully into Marisol's hands. Goosebumps raced down her arms.

Bharath made a strangled noise in the back of his throat. His hands gripped the edge of the table so hard his knuckles went white.

Marisol glanced at him, eyes bright with intent. "You see this, mi amor? Imagine your mouth on them. Sucking those pretty pink nipples while she moans for you."

"Mari..." His voice cracked on her name.

She ignored him. Her hands moved again, sliding the shirt up and over Sarah's breasts completely. They spilled free, round and perfect, nipples flushed a deep rose color and visibly erect. Marisol rolled one nipple between her fingers, gentle at first, then firmer. Sarah whimpered, thighs pressing together instinctively.

"Tell him," Marisol said softly, eyes still on Bharath. "Tell him if you want me to stop."

Sarah's eyes found his. They were wide and glassy, pupils blown so dark they almost swallowed the blue. She shook her head once. No.

Marisol smiled, slow and satisfied. "Good girl."

She spun Sarah gently until she faced Bharath fully. Then her hands slid down to Sarah's hips, fingers splaying across the curve before moving around to cup her ass. It was firm and round under her palms, no give at all. She lifted slightly, let it bounce back. The shorts rode up, exposing the lower curves.

Bharath's mouth went dry. He should say something. Should stop this. Should...

Marisol hooked her fingers into the waistband of Sarah's shorts and tugged down an inch. Then lower. Sarah's breath hitched sharply, but she didn't move to stop her. The fabric pooled around her thighs.

Marisol's hand traced downward, revealing what lay beneath. Sarah's pussy was a neat coin slot, no outer labia visible, just a smooth slit framed by sparse fine hair. It was pink and glistening already, slick with arousal.

"Look at this," Marisol breathed, voice reverent. "Beautiful. Tight. Perfect." She looked directly at Bharath. "You'd love sliding into this, wouldn't you? Feeling how snug she is. How wet she gets just from you watching."

Sarah gasped, the sound half shock and half pure arousal. Her core visibly throbbed, another bead of slickness appearing.

Bharath stared, mouth open, breathing ragged. "Marisol... we can't..."

Marisol's finger grazed the very edge of Sarah's slit, light and teasing. "We can if she says yes." She looked at Sarah. "Do you want him to see you like this?"

Sarah's eyes stayed locked on Bharath's. She nodded, the movement small and trembling but unmistakable.

Marisol smiled. "See, baby? She wants you to see."

Bharath's chair scraped back an inch. He was hard, painfully hard, his cock straining against his sweatpants in a way that was impossible to hide.

Marisol's hands moved back up to Sarah's breasts, kneading them, lifting them, thumbs circling the hardened nipples. "Imagine your mouth here, mi amor. Sucking. Biting gently. Making her come just from that."

Sarah moaned, the sound soft and broken. Her thighs trembled visibly.

Bharath gripped the table harder. "This is insane."

Marisol laughed, low and wicked. "It's hot. And she's loving every second."

Sarah's whole body was covered in goosebumps now, from her arms to her stomach to her thighs. She leaned back into Marisol's touch, eyes never leaving Bharath's face.

Then Marisol stepped back. She smoothed Sarah's shorts back up gently, let the t-shirt fall back into place. The wet fabric still clung, still showed the outline of her nipples, but the moment had shifted.

Sarah stood there, breathing fast, cheeks flushed a deep red. Her nipples were still hard, pressing visibly through the damp cotton. She didn't move to cover herself, didn't cross her arms or turn away.

Bharath stared, wide-eyed and frozen and impossibly aroused.

Marisol wiped her hands on a towel and crossed the kitchen to where Bharath sat. Before he could react, she straddled his lap, ignoring his wince when her weight pressed near his stitches. Her hands framed his face and she kissed him, deep and possessive, her tongue sliding against his.

When she finally pulled back, her eyes were dark and intense. "What I just did?" she whispered against his lips. "All of it was for you."

Bharath blinked, still dazed. "For me?"

"I don't feel anything for Sarah. Not like that." Her thumbs stroked his cheekbones. "But something in me knows she belongs with us. I can't explain it. I just know."

"That's insane..."

She kissed him again, volcanic and demanding, swallowing whatever protest he'd been about to make. Her hips rolled slightly against him, feeling how hard he was. When she broke away this time, they were both breathing hard.

"Go," she murmured. "Rest. Sleep. I'll be back at your dorm tonight."

Bharath nodded numbly. He couldn't form words. Couldn't process any of what had just happened.

Marisol climbed off his lap and helped him to his feet. His legs felt unsteady as he crossed to where Sarah still stood by the sink, wet t-shirt clinging to her body.

He extended his hand awkwardly. Sarah looked at it, then at him, and took it. Her hand was warm and small in his.

"Thank you for breakfast," he managed.

"You're welcome." Her voice was soft, barely above a whisper.

They shook hands like strangers at a business meeting, which was absurd given what had just happened. Bharath dropped her hand and practically fled to the door.

Marisol followed him out onto the porch. The morning air was cool against his overheated skin. She pulled him into one more long, lingering kiss, her body pressed against his.

"Miss me," she whispered when she finally let him go. "And go to sleep. I'll give you hell if I find you playing videogames mister."

Bharath couldn't find his voice. He just nodded and stumbled down the steps, heading toward campus without looking back.

Behind him, he heard the door close.

Inside the kitchen, Sarah let out a shaky laugh. Marisol walked back in, grinning.

"Dishes aren't done yet," Marisol announced, picking up the sponge again.

Sarah laughed harder, the sound bordering on hysterical. "That's what you're thinking about? Dishes?"

Marisol's grin softened into something more serious. "We need to talk. About everything that just happened."

Sarah's laughter faded. She nodded, crossing her arms over her still-damp shirt. "Yeah. We really do."

The water ran. Outside, Bharath walked toward his dorm in a fog, his mind replaying every moment, trying and failing to make sense of what his life had become in the span of twelve hours.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 39: Uncharted Waters

[ 1,727 words ]

The water ran steady. Marisol picked up the sponge, staring at it like she'd forgotten what it was for.

Sarah stood beside her, arms still crossed over her damp shirt. Neither of them moved to finish the dishes.

"So," Sarah said finally. "That happened."

Marisol let out a breath that was half laugh, half something else entirely. "Yeah. That happened."

Silence stretched between them. The faucet dripped. Once. Twice.

Sarah uncrossed her arms and picked up a plate, drying it mechanically. "We should probably talk about it."

"Probably." Marisol dunked the sponge in soapy water and scrubbed at a pan that was already clean. "I just... I don't even know where to start."

"Start anywhere." Sarah set the plate down and reached for another. "Because I'm completely lost right now."

Marisol scrubbed harder, watching bubbles slide down the pan's surface. "I'm from a traditional Cuban family. Catholic. Church every Sunday. My mom... she has very specific ideas about what's acceptable. What's *right*." She laughed, but there was no humor in it. "And what I just did? Stripping another woman in front of my boyfriend? That's not even in the same universe as acceptable."

Sarah's hands stilled on the towel. "Then why did you do it?"

"I don't know." Marisol set the pan down and gripped the edge of the sink. "That's what's making me insane. I don't *know*."

The water ran between them. Sarah waited.

"Before Bharath," Marisol said slowly, "I was... people called me the ice princess. I had walls. Huge ones. I didn't let anyone close. Ever." She turned to face Sarah, leaning back against the counter. "I was jealous. Obsessively jealous. If a girl even looked at a guy I was interested in, I'd shut it down. I'd stake my claim and make sure everyone knew."

"What changed?"

Marisol's expression softened. "Bharath. He just... he got through somehow. Not by trying to. Not by being some smooth playboy or saying all the right things. He was just *sincere*. Kind. He didn't play games. Didn't have an angle." She shook her head. "I'd never met anyone like that before. Never trusted anyone like that before."

Sarah nodded slowly. "He's different."

"He is." Marisol's voice dropped. "And now here's the insane part. I want to share him with you."

The words hung in the air like smoke.

Sarah's grip on the towel tightened. "That's..."

"Insane. I know." Marisol laughed, sharp and incredulous. "The girl who wouldn't let another woman breathe near her boyfriend now wants to... what? Build a throuple? It makes no sense."

"Then why?"

Marisol's eyes found Sarah's. "Because of you. Specifically you." She pushed off the counter and started pacing the small kitchen. "I'm not bisexual, Sarah. I've never looked at women that way. Never wanted to. But last night when I was holding you while you cried, and then this morning when we were teasing Bharath together, something just... *clicked*."

Sarah's heart hammered. "What do you mean?"

"I mean something in me just *knows* you belong with us." Marisol stopped pacing and faced her. "I can't explain it. It's not logical. It's not something I can rationalize or make sense of. But it's *there*. This absolute certainty that you're supposed to be with Bharath and me."

Sarah's breath caught. "Marisol..."

"And I'll do anything for him." Marisol's voice was fierce now. "Anything. If that means sharing him with you because it's right, because you need him and he needs you, then that's what I'll do. I don't understand it. But I trust it."

The kitchen fell silent except for the drip of the faucet.

Sarah set down the towel with trembling hands. "Can I... can I tell you what it felt like? When you were..."

"Exposing you to him?"

"Yeah." Sarah's cheeks burned. "When that was happening."

Marisol nodded. "Please."

Sarah took a shaky breath. "I felt safe. That's the first thing. Even though I was terrified and exposed and completely vulnerable, I felt *safe*. With you. With him watching." She pressed her palms flat against the counter. "And then I felt... God, this is hard to say."

"Say it."

"I felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be." Sarah's voice dropped to barely a whisper. "Like I was supposed to be on display for him. Like I was supposed to submit to you showing me off. And that feeling... that *need* to submit... it's..."

Her voice broke.

Marisol moved closer but didn't touch her. "It's what?"

"It's why Derek had so much control over me." The words tumbled out in a rush. "I think I'm submissive, Marisol. Actually submissive. And Derek... he figured that out and he used it and twisted it and turned it into something ugly and harmful. He made me hate myself for it."

"Sarah..."

"No, listen." Sarah's eyes were glassy now. "When you were touching me, when you were showing me to Bharath, I felt that same urge to submit. To please. To be what you wanted me to be. But it felt completely different. It felt *good*. It felt like I was being treasured instead of used."

Marisol's expression softened. "You were being treasured. That's exactly what I was doing."

"I know." Sarah wiped at her eyes roughly. "And that's what's making me lose my mind. Because I felt something with you two. This spark, this connection that makes no sense. We barely know each other. It's been less than twenty-four hours. But I *felt* it."

"So did I."

"But I'm a mess, Marisol." Sarah's voice cracked. "I'm so fucked up. I just got out of an abusive relationship. I don't even know who I am without Derek telling me who to be. And now I'm here having these feelings for both of you and I don't know if they're real or if I'm just latching onto the first people who showed me kindness."

Marisol reached out slowly and took Sarah's hand. "What do you need?"

"I don't know." Sarah's tears spilled over. "I don't know anything right now. Everything feels too big and too fast and too much."

"Then we slow down." Marisol squeezed her hand. "We stop."

"But what if I lose you both?" Sarah's voice was small. "What if I step back and this connection disappears and I never get it back?"

"You won't lose us." Marisol's voice was firm. "Sarah, look at me."

Sarah raised her eyes.

"You will *never* lose us. Bharath and I. We're in your life now. Whether this becomes something more or whether we're just friends, we're *here*. We're not going anywhere."

"You don't know that."

"I do." Marisol pulled her into a hug. "I know it the same way I know you belong with us. I can't explain it, but I know it."

Sarah buried her face in Marisol's shoulder and sobbed. Great, wrenching sobs that shook her whole body. Marisol held her through it, one hand stroking her hair.

When the tears finally subsided, Sarah pulled back. "I need time. I need to figure out who I am without Derek. Without anyone."

"Okay."

"But I don't want to lose you."

"You won't." Marisol wiped a tear from Sarah's cheek. "Take all the time you need. Bharath and I will be here. As friends, as... whatever you need us to be."

They finished the dishes in companionable silence. The rhythm of wash, rinse, dry became meditative. Grounding.

The afternoon passed slowly. They talked about safer things. Yoga poses. Past crushes. Classes. Sarah's major in Chemical Engineering. Marisol's in Computer

Science. Marisol regaled her with the tale of how she finally got Bharath to realize that she really liked it. She laughed over the antics of Tyrel and Ravi and Jorge.

But underneath the casual conversation, something heavier lingered. Questions neither of them could answer. Feelings neither of them could name.

As evening approached, Marisol grew restless. She checked the clock for the third time in ten minutes.

Sarah smiled. "Missing him?"

Marisol looked up, caught. "Is it that obvious?"

"Very."

"I've never been like this before." Marisol sighed. "Never *missed* someone after a few hours. But I just... I want to see him. Make sure he's okay. Make sure his stitches are fine and he's actually resting like he's supposed to."

"You love him."

"I do." Marisol's voice was soft. "More than I thought possible."

"Then go." Sarah stood. "Go be with him."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure." Sarah walked Marisol to the door. "I need to think anyway. Process everything."

They stood on the porch as the sun dipped below the trees. The air had cooled, carrying the scent of pine and damp earth.

Marisol turned to face her. "However long you need, Sarah. Weeks. Months. Years. We'll be here."

Sarah's throat tightened. "Thank you."

"And if you decide this isn't what you want. If you decide we're better as friends. That's okay too. We'll still be here."

"I know." Sarah pulled her into one more hug. "Thank you. For everything."

Marisol squeezed her tight, then pulled back. "Call me if you need anything. And I mean *anything*. Three in the morning, doesn't matter."

"I will."

Marisol walked down the steps, then turned back. "Oh, and Sarah? That thing you said about being submissive?"

Sarah tensed.

"There's nothing wrong with that. Nothing to be ashamed of. The right people will treasure that part of you. They'll never use it against you."

Sarah's eyes burned with fresh tears. "How do you know?"

"Because I see the way Bharath looks at you. And I know how I feel about you." Marisol smiled. "You're precious, Sarah. Start believing that."

She turned and walked into the gathering dusk.

Sarah watched until she disappeared around the corner. Then she went inside, locked the door, and leaned against it.

The house felt enormous and empty.

She needed time. Space. Clarity.

But God, she already missed them both.

Sarah pushed off the door and headed upstairs. She needed a shower. Needed to wash away the sweat and arousal and confusion of the day.

As the hot water poured over her, she let herself think about the morning. About Bharath's eyes on her. About Marisol's hands. About the way her body had responded.

She thought about Derek. About the fear and the shame and the way submission had been weaponized against her.

And she thought about the difference. The gulf between being used and being treasured.

When she finally climbed into bed that night, Sarah stared at the ceiling for a long time.

She had no answers. Only questions.

But for the first time in years, those questions didn't feel like threats. They felt like possibilities.

And maybe that was enough for now.

She closed her eyes and let sleep take her, dreaming of kind brown eyes and strong hands and a voice that made her feel safe.

Tomorrow she would start figuring out who Sarah really was.

Tonight, she would let herself rest - in peace.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 40: We Cried Like We'd Been Gone Forever

[ 1,155 words ]

Marisol hurried across campus as the early evening sky turned the color of bruised peaches. The path from Sarah's house to Smith Hall felt longer than it should have, even though she was practically running. Her sneakers slapped against the concrete, her backpack bounced against her spine, and her heart kept insisting that every second away from Bharath had been too many.

She had left Sarah only a little while ago, but the quiet of the walk had given her thoughts too much room. In just a few weeks Bharath had become the center of her world. She could not believe how completely he had taken up residence inside her chest. The idea of spending even one full day apart from him now seemed impossible. She missed the way his voice softened when he said her name, the steady warmth of his hand on her back, the small crinkle at the corner of his eye when he smiled at something only the two of them understood.

When she reached Smith 202 she stopped for a moment to catch her breath. Her knuckles rapped against the door, quick and impatient.

Inside, Bharath had been deeply asleep. The knock pulled him up through layers of dreams. He rubbed his eyes, swung his legs over the side of the bed, and shuffled to the door in his rumpled gray t-shirt and basketball shorts. His hair stood out in every direction. He expected Jorge or Tyrel, probably coming to drag him out for food or study group.

He opened the door and froze.

Marisol stood there, cheeks flushed from the run, eyes bright and shining.

For a heartbeat neither of them moved.

Then Bharath stepped forward and pulled her into his arms so fast she gasped. She wrapped herself around him, face buried in the crook of his neck, and the tears came without warning. His own eyes stung. They clung to each other as though months had passed instead of a single afternoon.

“I missed you,” she whispered against his skin. “I missed you so much it hurt.”

“I missed you too.” His voice cracked. “God, Mari, I missed you.”

They stood in the doorway crying like fools, laughing through the tears, holding on tighter every time one of them tried to pull back. It was ridiculous. It was beautiful. It was them.

Eventually he guided her inside and shut the door. They sank onto the narrow bed together. She curled into his side, head on his chest, listening to the steady thump of his heart while he stroked her hair.

“I love you,” she said quietly. “More than I knew I could love anyone.”

He pressed his lips to the top of her head. “I love you too. Always. No matter what.”

They stayed like that for a long time, breathing together, letting the words settle between them like a vow renewed.

After a while the tears dried and laughter bubbled up again.

“This is insane,” she said, wiping her eyes. “We’re crying like we’ve been separated for years.”

“I know.” He grinned, sheepish. “But I felt every minute you were gone.”

She laughed and kissed the corner of his mouth. “Me too.”

They shifted so they were lying properly now, legs tangled, her head tucked under his chin. The room was quiet except for the distant hum of campus life outside the window.

Marisol traced slow circles on his chest. “I talked to Sarah.”

Bharath’s hand stilled in her hair. “Yeah?”

She nodded against him. “She told me things. About Derek. About how he used her submission against her. About foster care and losing her parents young and building everything by herself. She’s been so alone, Bharath. No one has ever loved her the way she deserves.”

Her voice thickened. Tears slipped down her cheeks again.

Bharath pulled her closer. "I'm sorry she went through all that."

Marisol swallowed. "I cried when she told me. I kept thinking how unfair it is. She's brilliant and kind and beautiful and she's never had anyone protect her heart. Not really."

He kissed her forehead. "We can be that for her. Not in a rush. Not pushing. But if she wants us, if she ever wants us, we'll be her anchors. No conditions. No expectations. Just there. I don't about any relationship other than friendship."

Marisol lifted her head to look at him. "You mean that?"

"Completely."

She smiled through fresh tears. "I told her the same thing."

They lay quiet for a moment.

Then Bharath cleared his throat. "So. About this morning."

Marisol propped herself up on one elbow, eyes sparkling with mischief. "You're still mad about how loud I was?"

"Mad?" He raised an eyebrow. "You practically announced it to the whole house."

She laughed. "I couldn't help it. You feel too good."

He groaned and covered his face with one hand. "You're impossible."

"Admit it. You loved it."

"I did." He dropped his hand and met her gaze. "But seriously, Mari. Sarah. I'm attracted to her. I won't lie. She's stunning and smart and the way she's fought her way through everything... it's incredible. But you are my world. That hasn't changed. Not even a little."

Marisol leaned down and kissed him softly. "I know."

He cupped her cheek. "It's happening too fast. For all of us. Sarah especially. The way she responded to you this morning... it was beautiful, but it came from a place that's still raw. She needs time to heal. To figure out who she is when no one is telling her who to be. Jumping into anything with us right now would be bad for her."

Marisol nodded slowly. “I told her the same thing. That we’ll wait. As long as she needs.”

“Good.” He exhaled. “Now you. Tell me the truth. Why were you okay with it? With showing her to me? With any of this?”

Marisol settled back against his chest. “I told Sarah this too. I’m not attracted to women. I never have been. But when I was holding her last night while she cried, and then this morning when we were all together... something shifted. It wasn’t about wanting her body. It was this bone-deep feeling that she belongs with us. That she’s part of whatever future we have. I can’t explain it. I just know it the way I know I love you.”

Bharath was quiet for a long moment.

“That’s a lot to carry,” he said finally.

“I know.” She traced the line of his collarbone. “But I’m not scared of it. I’m only scared of losing either of you.”

“You won’t.”

They curled tighter together. Outside, the campus lights began to flicker on. Voices drifted up from the quad. Students heading back from late classes, laughter echoing off brick walls.

Marisol yawned against his shoulder. “The gang will be back soon. Jorge will probably try to drag you to play some silly game again.”

“Let him try.” Bharath pulled the blanket over them both. “I’m not moving.”

She smiled into his neck. “Good. Stay right here.”

He kissed the top of her head. “Always.”

They lay wrapped in each other, listening to the building come slowly alive around them, content to wait for whatever came next—together.

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