

Their Wonder Years: Fall 98

Chapter 81: Wait... Y'all a Throuple Now?

[1,212 words]

The late morning had been perfect. Soft golden light, lazy kisses, coffee breath, tangled limbs, the occasional sleepy hand wandering somewhere it definitely wasn't supposed to wander before noon on a Sunday. The three of them had been floating in that sweet, syrupy post-storm haze where nobody needs to speak in full sentences.

And then the universe decided Sunday mornings were not allowed to stay peaceful.

BANG. BANG. BANG BANG BANG.

Violent, rhythmic, like someone was trying to knock the door off its hinges with a battering ram forged in hell.

Marisol lifted her head from Bharath's chest like a meerkat sensing danger. "Did you start a weekend breakfast club without telling us?"

Bharath, eyes still half-shut, voice gravelly with sleep, muttered, "If it's the FBI again, tell them I plead the fifth... and also that I'm very tired and they can arrest me tomorrow."

Marisol snorted, already sliding out of bed. "Feds sleep in on Sundays. This is civilian chaos."

Sarah, wrapped in Bharath's discarded t-shirt that hit her mid-thigh, called after her, "If it's Ravi, just tell him we're all dead. He'll believe it."

Marisol yanked the door open like she was ready to fight.

A human avalanche fell inside.

"YO!" Ravi bellowed, squinting into the light like a vampire who'd forgotten sunscreen. "I told you he'd be here!"

Tyrel stumbled in right behind him, yesterday's jeans sagging, beanie crooked, one eye still glued shut. "Man... y'all got ibuprofen? Forgiveness? A time machine? I'm flexible."

Jorge followed, looking annoyingly fresh despite the obvious hangover, carrying a greasy paper bag that smelled like gas station breakfast sandwiches.

Camila brought up the rear, her hair on point, lip gloss perfect, walk somehow still serving even though she was clearly also dying. She took one look at the three of them in various states of undress and half-dressed domesticity and raised a perfectly sculpted brow. "Oh. I see. You guys are slumming today. I expected better from you Mari."

Sarah appeared from the kitchen, spatula in one hand, apron tied around her waist like she'd been born to be a chaotic housewife. "Sit down, heathens. Pancakes are almost ready."

Ravi blinked so hard his beanie nearly fell off. "Wait. You cooked?"

Bharath walked up behind Sarah, slid both arms around her waist, and kissed the side of her mouth - slow, casual, completely thoughtless.

The room temperature changed.

Ravi's jaw dropped so fast it should have hit the floor and bounced.

Tyrel pointed like he'd just seen Bigfoot.

Jorge's head tilted forty-five degrees like a confused golden retriever.

Camila let out a single, delighted "Oop."

And Marisol... Marisol just casually stepped up on Sarah's other side, draped one arm around her waist, and rested her chin on Sarah's shoulder like this was the most normal thing in the world.

Silence.

Then Ravi, in the smallest, most traumatized voice imaginable: "...Wait."

Tyrel, slow-blinking: "Nah... Nah nah nah. No way dawg. Uh-uh."

Jorge finally broke first, eyes going huge. "Madre... de... dios."

Bharath looked around, genuinely baffled. "What? Why is everyone staring? Did I get syrup on my shirt?"

Ravi sat down very slowly on the arm of the couch like his legs had betrayed him. "You three..."

Tyrel finished the sentence with religious awe. "Y'all a throuple now?"

Everyone was quiet for a beat.

Then the room detonated.

" BLACK JESUS. SAVE ME!" Tyrel yelled at no one in particular.

Ravi screamed and fell backwards off the couch arm. Tyrel threw both hands up like he'd witnessed the Second Coming. Jorge started slow-clapping with genuine respect. Camila let out the most unhinged hyena laugh anyone had ever heard from her.

Marisol just grinned, smug as hell. "Yep."

Sarah, cheeks pink but eyes sparkling, shrugged like it was no big deal. "Turns out monogamy is overrated when you have two very convincing friends."

Ravi crawled back up onto the couch like a man who had seen God and was now questioning every life choice. "Bharath. Bro. Legend. Absolute legend. You didn't just pull one ten. You pulled two. At the same time. And they're both cool with it. I need to speak to your manager."

Tyrel was shaking his head so hard his beanie finally fell off. "I have seen some things in my life. I have seen men lie, cheat, steal, fight, cry, beg. I have never seen a man accidentally become the final boss of pussy in real life."

Bharath blinked. "I... still don't understand why you're all acting like I committed a war crime."

Tyrel turned to him with the solemnity of a man delivering last rites. "Brah. You beat off two dudes in an alley by yourself. Took a literal knife wound for a stranger. Walked out of the hospital with stitches like it was Tuesday. And now you wake up every morning with two goddesses fighting over who gets to spoon you harder. You are not a man anymore. You are a myth. You are the OG of OGs. Thug life ain't even in your weight class anymore."

Ravi clutched his chest. "I used to think I had game. I used to think I was the man. I used to think Savage Garden's Truly Madly Deeply would seal the deal with Sarah. I was wrong. I was so wrong."

Sarah snorted, flipping another pancake with perfect form. "You were going to sing Truly Madly Deeply to me? In public?"

Ravi nodded solemnly. "I practiced in the shower. I had choreography."

Tyrel patted his shoulder like he was consoling a grieving widow. "Respectfully, bro... you never stood a chance."

Jorge raised his coffee mug like he was toasting at a funeral. "To Bharath. The most humble man to ever accidentally become a living legend."

Everyone raised whatever they were holding.

Camila, smirking: “And to cinnamon pancakes. Because clearly that’s the real secret weapon.”

Marisol leaned over and kissed Sarah’s cheek, loud and obnoxious. “Pancakes and pussy. The ultimate combo.”

Sarah died laughing and nearly dropped the spatula.

Bharath rubbed the back of his neck, cheeks flaming. “I still don’t know what thug life means. I’ve never even been arrested.”

The room lost it again.

Tyrel wiped actual tears. “Don’t ever change, man. Don’t ever change.”

Ravi, recovering, leaned forward with desperate hope. “Okay but real talk. You got any friends? Like... cool girls? Equal to Sarah? Maybe hotter than Sarah?”

Marisol gave him the flattest look in human history. “There is no one hotter than Sarah.”

Camila sipped her coffee. “Correct.”

Tyrel groaned dramatically. “Then find us someone close. Please. We’ve evolved! We’re emotionally available now!”

Sarah snorted. “You two are hopeless.”

Ravi clutched his heart. “But hungry.”

And just like that the tension broke into chaos again—plates clattering, syrup wars, someone stealing bacon off someone else’s plate, Jorge trying to explain to Tyrel what “apsara” actually meant, Ravi attempting (and failing) to get Sarah to admit she’d ever thought he was hot, Camila filming the whole thing on her flip phone because “this is blackmail material for life.”

Somewhere in the middle of it all Bharath just stood there, spatula in hand, watching the most ridiculous, loudest, most loving group of people he’d ever met lose their minds over him and the two women who had decided he belonged to them.

And for once he didn’t feel like he had to explain anything.

He just smiled.

And flipped another pancake.

And let the noise wash over him like sunlight.

Because somehow, against every odd, against every doubt, against every single thing he'd ever been taught about how relationships were supposed to work—

This ridiculous, beautiful, impossible thing...

Was his.

And theirs.

And apparently now everybody else's problem too.

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Chapter 82: From Pancakes to Club Zero Chaos

[1,359 words]

As the last cinnamon pancake vanished and everyone began nursing their second cups of coffee, the chaotic energy of the gang settled into a warm, comfortable buzz.

Conversation wandered - from classes and caffeine addiction, to which professor might secretly be a lizard, to how many shots Jorge actually took last night before dancing on a table (Camila claimed eight; Jorge swore it was five, "and a Red Bull").

Then, as Tyrell, rummaging through the fridge for a beer, glanced at the calendar stuck to the door, froze and let out a low groan.

"Aw hell naw," he muttered.

Ravi leaned over. "What?"

"Halloween's in like... two weeks. Completely forgot about it."

Jorge raised an eyebrow. "So?"

"So, we need *costumes!*"

Bharath blinked. "Wait. Isn't Halloween for kids?"

Silence.

Every girl at the table turned their head toward him, expressions ranging from amused to outright offended.

Marisol tilted her head. "You *did not* just say that."

Sarah set her mug down with exaggerated slowness. "Oh honey..."

Camila grinned, eyes lighting up. "Oh my *God*. This is going to be *delicious*."

Bharath glanced at Jorge and Ravi, who both shrugged.

"I thought it was a thing with pumpkins and candy?" Jorge said. "You know. Kids ringing doorbells?"

Tyrel laughed. "You are so innocent."

"Oh baby," Marisol said, reaching over and patting Bharath's thigh, "you're about to learn about *adult Halloween*."

"What does that even mean?" Bharath asked.

"It means," Sarah said sweetly, "costumes. Sexy ones. Parties. Drinking. Dancing. Making out in masks. Grown-ass chaos."

"Absolute chaos," Camila echoed, grinning like a fox.

Ravi's eyebrows shot up. "Wait. Hold on. You can make out in masks? Also, will there be like... lingerie involved?"

"And fishnets," Marisol added, casually. "And leather. And glitter. And people lose clothes by midnight."

Ravi's jaw dropped. "This is a *holiday*?"

"It's a *lifestyle*," Camila corrected.

Bharath looked utterly bewildered. "You mean... people dress up in costumes just to get drunk and hook up?"

All three girls answered in unison: "Yes."

The boys sat in stunned silence.

Then Jorge leaned forward slowly. "Okay... so what are *you three* dressing as?"

The room burst into wicked grins.

“Oh, we’ve *just* started thinking about it,” Marisol said. “But now that we’re a trio... we need a theme.”

“Sexy witches?” Camila offered.

“Cat, mouse, and cheese?” Tyrel grinned.

Sarah laughed. “Not bad. But we were thinking more iconic. Like... Cleopatra and her two bodyguards.”

“Or devil, angel, and sinner,” Marisol said, eyes gleaming as she glanced at Bharath.

Camila sighed dreamily. “God, you two are going to *slay* together.”

Tyrel raised his hands. “Okay, no. I refuse to be the only one not making out in a costume this year.”

“Same,” Ravi added. “This is *unacceptable*.”

“Fix us,” Tyrel demanded, turning to Sarah and Marisol. “You have *one week*.”

Marisol blinked. “One week to what?”

“To find us girlfriends,” Ravi said. “Minimum two. Equal or better than Sarah.”

Sarah choked on her coffee.

Marisol gave them a flat stare. “You *really* think I’m just keeping goddess-tier friends in storage for emergencies?”

Camila cackled. “Oh my god, that’s a *thought*,” she said, thinking about beautiful Barbie like girls in a storage lined up in a cupboard.

Bharath and Jorge smirked into their mugs.

“I’m serious,” Tyrel said. “We want *in*. We want shawties who are hot, smart, and into freaky costumes.”

“And emotionally available,” Ravi added. “But mostly the costumes.”

Marisol rolled her eyes. “Boys. You *barely* survived your last crushes. I’m not setting you up just so I can watch you spiral all over again.”

“Marisol,” Tyrel said dramatically, “have a heart.”

Sarah leaned into Bharath and whispered, "They're trying so hard not to sound desperate."

He whispered back, "They're failing."

Ravi pointed at them. "Don't whisper while cuddling! That's *illegal!*"

Marisol sighed. "Fine. *Maybe* we'll introduce you to *someone* before the Halloween party."

"Under *one* condition," Sarah said. "You let *us* pick the costumes."

Ravi and Tyrel exchanged a nervous glance.

"...Can we see their costumes before we agree?" Ravi asked.

"No," Camila, Sarah and Marisol said in perfect unison.

Camila leaned back and grinned. "I'm going to enjoy watching this year's Halloween spiral into insanity."

Jorge raised his mug. "Then I vote we party on *Frat Lane*. Big. Costumes. Chaos. And one more chance for Tyrel to try and twerk upside down."

Marisol choked on her coffee. "Oh my *God*, we're not doing another Tyrel-twerking emergency."

Camila threw her head back. "He almost dislocated his hip last time!"

"I *almost* had it," Tyrel said defensively. "I just needed a sturdier wall."

"You tried to twerk on a vending machine," Ravi deadpanned.

"It was *vibrating!* I thought it would help!"

Laughter broke across the table again - full-bodied, unfiltered, the kind that only came after a shared night of chaos and cinnamon pancakes. But then Camila leaned forward, her expression shifting from mischief to something more focused.

"Okay, but seriously - if we're going to do this right, we should skip *Frat Lane* this year."

Tyrel raised an eyebrow. "*Frat Lane's* tradition."

"It's also packed with freshmen, guys with fake swords, and kegs that taste like mop water," Camila replied. "I've got a better idea."

“Oh no,” Sarah said, already smiling.

Camila smirked. “Club Zero.”

Tyrel blinked. “That place in Buckhead with the steel bar cage on the second floor?”

“The one with the laser lights and dress code?” Mairsol asked.

“The one where that one girl danced on a speaker in a trench coat and nothing underneath?” Ravi added.

“That’s the one,” Camila said, smug. “If I call now, I can get our names on the guest list.”

Bharath furrowed his brow. “Isn’t that place kind of... fancy?”

“It’s not *fancy*,” Marisol said. “It’s *legendary*. It’s the kind of place where the bouncers wear sunglasses *at night*.”

Bharath was still stuck on the concept. “So... we get into costumes... and then go to a *nightclub*?”

Camila nodded. “Big crowd. Real DJ. College night on Saturdays. Girls in feathers, guys in mesh, drinks with fire in them. It’s glorious.”

“I’m going to need... like, a *full tutorial* on this,” Bharath muttered.

“Think Diwali meets Mardi Gras,” Marisol said. “But more cleavage.”

Bharath’s eyes widened. “...So we *can’t* just hang out here?”

“You *can*,” Sarah said gently. “But we’ll be there. In velvet and eyeliner. With maybe... a whip.”

Tyrel raised his hands. “Alright, alright. No further questions. Club Zero it is.”

Camila grinned. “That’s what I thought.”

“Wait,” Jorge said, still chewing toast. “That place has a two-person minimum for costume themes, right?”

“Which works out,” Marisol said, “because we already have a trio theme.”

“And we’re *maybe* setting up two of you,” Sarah added, pointing at Tyrel and Ravi.

“I want my match vetted,” Ravi said. “Someone who reads *and* dances.”

Tyrel raised a finger. "And she has to be hotter than Sarah."

"That is a *high* bar," Jorge muttered.

"Thank you," Sarah said, sipping her coffee with a grin.

Marisol sighed. "I'm not pulling women out of thin air."

"Just give us a chance," Ravi said, hands together in mock prayer. "A week. That's all we ask."

"And if you don't find us someone," Tyrel said, "we show up *anyway*, in matching *cat suits*."

Marisol stared. "You wouldn't."

"Oh, we *would*," Ravi said. "We already called Goodwill."

Bharath rubbed his temples. "Can I be excused from this entire conversation?"

"No," said everyone at once.

Sarah reached across the table and squeezed his hand. "You'll have fun. Promise."

He gave her a long look. "What if I just... come as a ghost?"

Marisol leaned in, eyes gleaming. "Only if it's a bedsheet and *nothing* underneath."

Tyrel whooped. "My man's going to be the horniest spirit in Atlanta!"

Camila pulled out a tiny notepad from her purse and started jotting. "Alright - guest list, costumes, pre-game plans, backup ride options, fake IDs for anyone under 21..."

"I've got a fake ID," Marisol said.

"I have one too. I guess you guys need one. Don't worry I know a guy," Sarah added.

"Who are you?"

Camila smirked. "Don't worry. My guy at the door owes me. Long story involving broken heels and tequila shots."

Jorge leaned toward Bharath. "Hey. You good with this?"

Bharath paused. Looked around the table. Lingered on Sarah's grin. On Marisol's smirk. The wild spark in Camila's eyes. Ravi and Tyrel's sheer commitment to getting laid.

He exhaled.

“I guess I’m going clubbing for Halloween.”

Tyrel leaned back and whistled. “From stabbed hero to dual dimepieces to nightclubs... Bharath, you the American dream brah.”

Ravi raised his mug. “To Halloween. May our costumes be tight, our drinks cold, and our dignity *optional*.”

They all clinked mugs.

And in that moment - costumes and chaos ahead - none of them realized this Halloween would be one they’d talk about for *years*.

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Chapter 83: Buzz, Touchdowns and Rookie Conversion

[1,527 words]

The Atlanta afternoon unfolded lazily, with sunbeams warming the living room floor and empty mugs gathering like trophies on the coffee table. The gang had fully migrated to Sarah’s couch, flipping through old Halloween catalogs, sketching out wild costume ideas, and taking turns debating whether Jorge would look better as a vampire or a male Carmen Sandiego.

Tyrel had just suggested a group Roman theme—complete with leather straps, foam swords, and “strategically placed fig leaves”—when his eyes lit up like someone had just whispered state secrets in his ear.

“Yo.”

Everyone turned. Marisol looked mildly alarmed. “Oh no. What?”

Tyrel was already scrambling for the remote like it was the last slice of pizza. “It’s Saturday. Game day. Georgia Tech’s playing Florida State. It’s on.”

Sarah whooped and shoved her costume notes aside so fast the papers fluttered like startled birds. “You’re right! Kickoff’s at 3:30!”

“Oh come on,” Ravi groaned, flopping dramatically onto the carpet like a Victorian lady fainting. “We were just talking about togas and nipple armor.”

Camila smirked, stretching her legs across Jorge’s lap. “Welcome to fall in the South, baby. Football season waits for no one’s costume crisis.”

Jorge sighed, long-suffering. “Is this one of those times I have to pretend I care about things being thrown across grass?”

“You don’t pretend,” Marisol said, already grabbing a giant bowl of popcorn from the kitchen like she was preparing for war. “You cheer. You chant. You scream at men in spandex who will never hear you.”

Bharath frowned, still perched on the edge of the couch like he was attending a formal lecture. “Is this like cricket but with more stopping?”

“Not even close,” Sarah said gleefully as Tyrel turned the TV on and the Georgia Tech fight song blared from the speakers at maximum volume.

Ravi narrowed his eyes at the screen. “Is that... a marching band?”

“Yes,” said three girls and Tyrel at once.

“And is that... a bumblebee mascot doing push-ups?” Bharath asked, genuinely perplexed.

“His name is Buzz,” Camila said, settling deeper into the couch like she was claiming territory. “And he’s a legend.”

Within minutes, the house transformed into a war zone of cheers, boos, and slapping high-fives as Georgia Tech took the field.

Bharath, Ravi, and Jorge sat stiffly at first—perched on the edge of the couch like foreign dignitaries unsure of the local customs.

“Why do they stop every three seconds?” Bharath asked, tilting his head like he was trying to solve a math problem.

“They’re planning strategy,” Sarah said without taking her eyes off the screen.

“It looks like they’re just... standing there having a meeting in armor. This is boring!”

“Shhh!” Tyrel hissed, eyes glued to the TV. “It’s third and long!”

“What does that mean? That sounds wrong!” Ravi whispered to Jorge.

“No idea,” Jorge replied, deadpan. “Just look intense. Nod when they nod.”

Another play. A roar erupted from Sarah. Tyrel jumped off the couch, fist-pumping like his life depended on it.

“YES! Stuffed 'em at the line! Let's go, Jackets!”

Bharath looked around helplessly. “We're cheering now?”

“Yes,” Sarah said, grabbing his hand and pulling him up. “You cheer now.”

They all stood and screamed as the crowd on TV did the same. Camila clapped in time with the band. Jorge tried to copy her but ended up clapping on the off-beat like a confused metronome. Ravi gave up pretending to understand and just waved his arms like he was conducting an invisible orchestra.

By the second quarter, they pretended to be fully assimilated.

Ravi yelled “Go Jackets!” whenever Tyrel and Sarah did, even though he still didn't know which team was which.

Jorge was yelling at the quarterback to “throw it deep” even though he didn't know what “deep” meant.

Bharath—entirely unsure why everyone was yelling—simply stood and clapped when the others clapped, booed when the others booed, and repeated, with full sincerity, “When in the US...”

When Georgia Tech scored a touchdown, Tyrel and Sarah jumped onto the couch like they'd personally thrown the pass. Popcorn flew everywhere. Camila screamed even though she wasn't really following the game. The boys—now too far gone to resist—yelled and high-fived like they'd been raised on pigskin.

Ravi, mid-celebration, accidentally elbowed Jorge in the ribs. “Ow! Watch the merchandise!” Jorge yelled.

“Sorry! I was caught up in the moment!” Ravi said, then immediately turned back to the TV and screamed, “YES! TOUCHDOWN! I LOVE THIS SPORT!”

Tyrel cackled. “Bro, you don't even know who scored.”

“Doesn't matter,” Ravi declared. “The energy is immaculate.”

Bharath, still clapping politely, leaned toward Sarah. “Is this normal? To scream at people who can't hear you?”

Sarah grinned, looping an arm around his waist. “Welcome to fandom, baby. It’s 90% screaming at strangers and 10% pretending you understand the rules.”

Camila leaned over. “And 100% snacks.”

Marisol tossed popcorn at Tyrel’s head. “You missed the last one, by the way.”

Tyrel caught it in his mouth like a trained seal. “I’m basically a pro now.”

By halftime, the living room looked like a crime scene: popcorn kernels everywhere, empty soda cans stacked like modern art, costume sketches abandoned under a pile of throw blankets.

Bharath finally sat down, looking dazed but oddly exhilarated. “I still don’t understand why they huddle so much. Are they praying?”

“Kind of,” Tyrel said, wiping his hands on his jeans. “They’re plotting world domination. Or at least the next play.”

Jorge, who had somehow acquired a Georgia Tech foam finger from somewhere, waved it solemnly. “I have decided I support this team. Mostly because Buzz is doing push-ups again.”

Sarah laughed so hard she nearly spilled her drink. “You’re officially converted.”

Ravi, sprawled on the floor with his head in Camila’s lap, sighed dramatically. “I think I’ve peaked. Nothing will ever top this. Except maybe if we all get matching Buzz costumes for Halloween.”

Tyrel perked up. “Yo. That’s actually genius. Buzz and the Yellow Jackets crew. We could be the whole mascot squad.”

Marisol snorted. “You’d look ridiculous in a bumblebee suit.”

“I’d look majestic,” Tyrel corrected. “And Ravi would be the stinger.”

“I’m allergic to bees,” Ravi said mournfully.

“Then you’re the queen bee,” Camila deadpanned.

Ravi gasped in mock horror. “I’m being typecast!”

As the third quarter started, the energy ramped up again. Georgia Tech was up by seven. Florida State was pushing hard. The room was electric.

When the Jackets intercepted a pass, Sarah leaped into Bharath's arms without warning. He caught her on instinct, spinning her once before she planted a loud kiss on his cheek.

"See?" she said, grinning. "This is why we scream."

Bharath, red-faced but smiling, set her down gently. "I'm starting to understand."

Tyrel clapped him on the back so hard he stumbled. "That's my boy! One game in and he's already catching cheerleaders."

Sarah swatted Tyrel's arm. "I'm not a cheerleader."

"You're cheering," Tyrel said. "Close enough."

By the end of the game, none of them could explain the rules with any accuracy.

But all of them felt like they'd won something.

When the final whistle blew and Georgia Tech took the victory, Tyrel wiped his forehead theatrically. "That... was beautiful."

"I think I blacked out in the third quarter," Jorge said, foam finger still clutched in his hand.

Ravi blinked at the screen like he'd just witnessed a miracle. "I don't even know what happened, but I'm invested now. Do we get matching jerseys or something? Can I wear my cricket jersey? Bharath has a matching India jersey as well."

Bharath, who had accidentally learned all the player names and was now emotionally attached to the running back, shrugged. "I still don't know how they decide who gets the ball, but I liked when that one guy jumped over the other guy."

"That's football, baby," Tyrel said proudly, handing him another soda like a ceremonial rite of passage.

Marisol looped her arms around both Sarah and Bharath, tugging them close. "You did well, rookie."

"I just copied what you did," Bharath admitted.

"And that's how we all got through high school," Camila quipped.

As the sun dipped lower and the post-game fatigue set in, the costume sketches reemerged—now joined by impassioned debates over whether anyone in the group

could realistically pull off a football player-and-cheerleader couples costume—and if Bharath should be Buzz the mascot as punishment for doubting American traditions.

He groaned, sinking deeper into the couch. “Only if Ravi dresses up as a foam finger.”

Tyrel clapped him on the back again. “Welcome to the South, brah. You one of us now. Wait till I introduce you to tailgating.”

Ravi perked up. “Tailgating? Is that where we park cars and eat?”

“It’s where we park cars, eat, drink, grill, scream, and occasionally cry when the other team scores,” Tyrel explained.

Sarah laughed. “Basically the same as this, but outside and with more charcoal.”

Jorge raised his hand like a student. “Do we get to wear face paint?”

“Absolutely,” Camila said. “Gold and white stripes. You’ll look like a very committed bumblebee.”

Bharath sighed, but there was a smile tugging at his lips. “I suppose this is what belonging feels like.”

Sarah squeezed his hand. “It is.”

Marisol leaned in and kissed his cheek, then Sarah’s. “And it’s only going to get louder.”

Ravi, sprawled on the floor again, raised his soda can. “To football. To throuples. To Buzz. And to whatever insane Halloween disaster we’re about to unleash.”

They all clinked whatever was nearby—mugs, soda cans, an empty popcorn bowl.

And in that moment—surrounded by laughter, spilled snacks, half-finished costume sketches, and the lingering echo of the fight song—none of them could imagine being anywhere else.

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Chapter 84: That Could've Been Us!

[1,138 words]

The high of the Georgia Tech victory had finally started to mellow as evening crept in. The golden hue of the sunset spilled across Sarah's living room, where scattered cushions and half-empty soda cans marked the territory of a day well spent.

Inside, everyone was doing their own thing now - the chaos giving way to little domestic rituals. Camila was painting her toenails on the floor, her Discman headphones plugged in and her head nodding to some deep house mix. Marisol was cleaning up in the kitchen with Sarah trailing behind her, the two of them occasionally giggling like co-conspirators. Jorge had taken over the stereo, gently flipping through tapes looking for something not overly romantic but still vibe-worthy. The room pulsed with soft bass and safe familiarity.

"I'm starving," Tyrel groaned from the couch, arms splayed out like he'd just finished running drills. "Didn't realize football could make a man hungry from watching."

"We should grab dinner," Ravi said, standing up and stretching with a loud pop. "And I'm not talking about Sarah's leftover hummus."

Jorge grabbed his jacket. "Rocky Mountain Pizza?"

"Obviously," Tyrel said. "It's practically illegal to live near Tech and not go at least once a week."

Bharath stood slowly, already reaching for his shoes. "I'll come. Let me just grab my wallet."

"Leave it," Ravi grinned. "You're a war hero and a romantic legend now. This one's on us."

Tyrel clapped a hand on Bharath's shoulder with exaggerated solemnity. "This is how it begins. First he gets the girl. Then he gets free pizza. Next thing you know, he's George P. Burdell, and then the president of the university."

"I still don't understand how it happened," Ravi muttered as they stepped outside. "You just... snatched Sarah from the jaws of destiny."

"The jaws of destiny?" Bharath laughed.

"I was working on a long-term strategy, man!" Ravi said. "I had jokes. I had playlists. I was gonna let her win at Scrabble next week."

“You’ve never let anyone win at Scrabble,” Jorge said, impressed.

“Exactly! That’s how serious I was!”

The air outside was cool and crisp, that perfect early-fall Atlanta evening. The city buzzed faintly in the distance, but their corner of it felt like a secret. They walked in a loose line down the sidewalk, their shadows long under the amber glow of the streetlights.

“Ravi’s not wrong,” Tyrel added, sticking his hands in his pockets. “I mean, I had a playlist too. It had Aaliyah, Tracy Chapman, and one Babyface song. That’s how you know it was real.”

“You know she doesn’t like any of those artists right?” opined Bharath knowledgeably.

“Oh my God,” Jorge groaned. “You two actually thought you had a shot?”

“O bhai, she let me carry her chem lab kit once,” Ravi said, dead serious. “That’s girlfriend behavior.”

“She laughed at my Tupac impersonation,” Tyrel countered. “That’s soul mate territory.”

Bharath snorted. “Guys…”

“No, no,” Ravi interrupted dramatically. “Let us grieve. A goddess walked among us, and one man-*one humble man*-got chosen instead.”

Jorge rolled his eyes. “You’re acting like Sarah’s dating Shiva.”

“He might as well be!” Tyrel threw his hands up. “The man’s got abs now. He’s got curls. He saved her from muggers. Has a scar. And he cooks. You want me to compete with that?”

Bharath rubbed the back of his neck, grinning sheepishly. “I figured this was coming.”

“You think?” Jorge said. “You dropped a bomb on us and then handed us pancakes like that made it normal.”

They all laughed, but it wasn’t bitter. The mock drama faded into something softer-an undercurrent of affection, curiosity, and the kind of honesty boys only allow under stars and streetlights.

“Alright,” Tyrel said, nudging him. “Real talk. What *did* happen?”

Bharath exhaled. "Okay. So... that night at the MARTA station-the mugging? You know most of it. But what you don't know is that Sarah wasn't just being mugged. She was running from something. Or rather, someone."

They stopped talking.

"She'd just escaped a... really bad situation," Bharath continued. "Abusive ex. Manipulative. Controlling. She had no one left. No ride, no wallet, no friends. She was ready to give up-and I mean really give up. If we hadn't shown up... I don't know what would've happened."

Tyrel let out a long, low whistle.

Ravi's jaw tightened. "Damn."

"We stayed with her that night," Bharath went on. "We didn't know her. But something just... clicked. Marisol could see it. She knew Sarah didn't need someone to swoop in and fix her. She needed someone to just... see *her*. Not take. Not pity. Just see."

"And you were that someone?" Jorge asked.

"I guess we both were," Bharath said. "Marisol saw her pain. I felt it too. We weren't trying to start something. We took it slow. She needed time. Space. A real foundation."

Tyrel nodded slowly. "And now it's the three of you."

"It just happened," Bharath said. "We stayed over more in the last couple of months. We talked. We healed. And somewhere in that mess... we realized we weren't just helping her. We were *falling for her*. And she was falling right back."

There was a beat of silence.

Then Ravi muttered with comic despair, "I curse the day I didn't drop Marisol at the MARTA station."

Jorge burst out laughing.

Tyrel smacked Ravi lightly on the back of the head in acknowledgement. "Same. That could've been us, bro. We were *right there*."

"You two would've scared her off," Jorge said, shaking his head. "Ravi would've opened with a chess joke. Tyrel would've played his gangster rap mixtape on a boombox. And would either of you have tried to stop the mugging unarmed?"

"Yea... probably not," mumbled Tyrel as Ravi shook his head regretfully.

“Well there you go. You dropping Marisol would have only left us with no Sarah. At least this way Sarah lives thanks to Atlanta Batman,” claimed Jorge confidently.

They were all laughing now, walking again, the easy rhythm of camaraderie taking over. There was no resentment. Only awe. And the slight sting of watching someone else get there first.

“But for real,” Ravi said, softer now. “You guys look good together. All three of you. It’s weird. But it works.”

Bharath smiled, grateful. “Thanks. It’s weird for us too sometimes. But yeah... it works.”

They reached the warm neon glow of Rocky Mountain Pizza, the familiar scent of oregano, garlic, and melted cheese already curling out to meet them.

Inside, they ordered two giant pies—one loaded with pepperoni, mushrooms, and sausage, the other piled high with olives, bell peppers, onions, and spinach. Tyrel asked for extra ranch. Jorge got nostalgic about garlic knots. Ravi demanded a liter of Coke and a side of peace for his broken heart.

By the time they left, the warmth of the pizza boxes seeped through their jackets, and the weight in the air had lifted.

They walked back in full camaraderie—four boys bound not just by shared classes or dorm walls anymore, but by something deeper.

By the strange, stupid, beautiful luck of being young and alive and exactly where they needed to be.

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

Chapter 85: We’re Still Figuring It Out

[1,167 words]

The door shut behind the boys with a faint *click*, and for a moment, the house seemed to exhale - the kind of soft sigh a home gives when its volume drops from chaos to comfort.

Sarah wiped her hands on a kitchen towel and leaned against the counter, watching Marisol pour the last of the coffee into three mismatched mugs. The soft hum of a cassette tape played from the living room - Jorge's choice, a jazzier one tonight, mellow and winding. Outside, faint laughter drifted back in from the sidewalk, Tyrel already cracking jokes.

Camila wandered into the kitchen barefoot, her curls still damp from a shower, wearing an oversized GT hoodie that may or may not have once belonged to Jorge.

She took the offered mug and perched on a stool.

"So," she said after a long sip. "You guys gonna explain what the *hell* is going on, or do I have to wait for the Lifetime movie adaptation?"

Marisol smirked. "You mean with us and Bharath?"

Camila raised both eyebrows. "Oh, is that all? The *two of you* madly in love with the same dude, and him being completely into it - *that's* all?"

Sarah chuckled softly but didn't meet Camila's eyes. She was staring into her cup like it held more than coffee.

"I thought it was a fantasy," she said quietly.

Camila's teasing smile faded a little.

Sarah continued. "When I stayed here after the... mugging. I didn't think I'd stay. I thought I'd sleep a few nights, disappear, maybe try to figure out my life again."

Marisol came up behind her and wrapped her arms around her waist, resting her chin on Sarah's shoulder. "But you didn't disappear."

"No," Sarah whispered. "Because they saw me. *Really* saw me. Not the broken girl. Not the girl with a past. Just... me."

Camila set her mug down, gently. "You told me a little. That night we stayed up. But I didn't know it was *that* bad."

Sarah nodded. "It was. I actually haven't been able to tell the worst of what happened yet. Not even to Bharath and Marisol. Maybe someday I will be in a good enough headspace to come clean. There were nights I didn't think I'd make it to the next morning."

The silence in the room thickened like honey. Not uncomfortable - just heavy with truth.

“But then this man,” Sarah said with a small smile, “this *boy*, really - he looked at me like I was something worth saving. Worth holding. And not because he wanted anything back.”

Marisol’s voice was soft but certain. “He didn’t even know what to want. Not in that way. He just... gives. All heart. No question.”

Camila leaned forward. “But how did *you* - I mean... Marisol. You’re *with* him. You *were* with him?”

Marisol met her eyes. “I still am. That doesn’t change. What changed was... seeing Sarah. Seeing how she looked at him. And how he looked back.”

Sarah spoke again, tears glinting in her eyes now. “I didn’t expect it. I didn’t want it. I fought it, even. But the way he touched me - not just my body, but my *spirit*. I started feeling like I wasn’t just surviving. I was living again.”

Camila bit her lip, nodding slowly. “You two make it sound so... sacred.”

“It is,” Marisol said without hesitation. “It’s messy, yeah. And complicated. But it’s real.”

Camila studied them both - Sarah, trembling but glowing. Marisol, fierce and protective even in her stillness.

“I’ve never seen you like this,” she said finally. “Either of you. It’s like you’re... softer. But stronger.”

Sarah smiled, a tear slipping down her cheek. “Because we have each other. And him. And even you. All of you - this whole strange, stupid, beautiful group. I didn’t have anyone before. Now I wake up in his arms, and I fall asleep knowing she’s watching over both of us.”

Marisol kissed Sarah’s cheek gently. “We’re still figuring it out. Every day. But that night - after the mugging - something changed in all of us. We didn’t fall into this. We *chose* it. And we keep choosing it.”

Camila blinked a few times, then stood up and walked around the counter.

Without a word, she wrapped both women in a tight hug - warm, fierce, unfiltered.

“I don’t get it,” she murmured. “Not completely. But I see it. And if it makes you both glow like this... then I’m with you.”

They stood like that for a long moment, holding each other in the soft hum of the house, in the breath between chaos and sleep.

Finally, Sarah whispered into Camila's hoodie, "We're going to need your help."

"With what?" Camila asked.

Marisol smirked. "We need two hot, emotionally mature, Halloween-party-ready women. Like... yesterday."

Camila groaned. "Oh God. Is this about Ravi and Tyrel?"

"They're panicking," Sarah said with a sly grin.

"And making terrible costume decisions," Marisol added.

But Sarah didn't laugh right away. Her smile softened, the lines around her mouth settling into something more reflective. She looked down at her hands, twisting the edge of the dish towel between her fingers.

"They're good guys," she said quietly. "Both of them."

Camila blinked. "Obviously. Just... incredibly dumb sometimes."

"No," Sarah said, shaking her head a little. "I mean it. They never had a real shot with me, not really. But that doesn't mean they didn't try with heart. They showed up. Made me laugh when I didn't think I could. Looked out for me in their own silly, awkward ways."

Marisol stepped in beside her, sensing the shift. "You don't owe them anything, Sarah."

"I know," Sarah said. "And I don't feel guilty for choosing what's right for me. For us. But I still care. I want them to find someone who sees them the way I get to see you two. Who sees past the jokes and the bravado and gets how much heart they're hiding."

Camila tilted her head, touched. "You mean matchmaking out of love, not pity."

Sarah nodded. "Exactly. They deserve more than just being the punchline to their own flirting disasters. They deserve something real."

Marisol reached over and squeezed her hand. "Then we find someone who sees that. Who sees *them*."

Camila sighed and picked up her coffee again, her lips curving into something thoughtful. "Well damn. Now I actually want this plan to work."

Sarah smiled, the melancholy lifting a little. "They're good men. It'd be nice if someone else saw it too."

“Alright,” Camila said, mock-resigned. “Operation Trick or Treat Hearts has officially gained moral weight.”

Marisol groaned. “That name is terrible.”

Camila smirked. “And yet now we’re stuck with it.”

The boys came back with food with no apparent distress between them. Bharath and Sarah shared a look that made her feel glad. Tyrel and Ravi were ok.

Later, as the girls excused themselves to the living room, the faint sound of the boys shouting about Tekken echoed through the house.

Sarah leaned against the counter, warmth in her eyes. “They have no idea what we’re planning. Now that Camila is involved we should hopefully be successful.”

Camila sighed deeply and pulled away just enough to grab her coffee.

“Fine. But if either of them shows up dressed like Austin Powers, I’m out.”

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

Chapter 86: What Happens When The Music Stops? [18+]

[1,848 words]

The house had emptied out in a slow, laughter-filled exodus. Leftover soda cans, mismatched socks, and empty pizza boxes were all that remained of the chaos. Camila had kissed them all on the cheek before vanishing with Jorge. Tyrel had belted out an off-key verse of *No Scrubs* as he and Ravi disappeared down the street, still arguing about the best pickup line for a psychology major.

And now, finally, it was quiet.

The kind of quiet that felt serene.

Marisol curled up on the couch with her legs tucked under her, a blanket over her lap. Sarah sat beside her, leaning into her warmth. Bharath stood by the window, arms crossed as he watched the street fade into night, the last of the tail lights disappearing down the road.

He turned back to them. "You ever think about what happens when the music stops?"

Marisol raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"This," he said, motioning vaguely around them. "Us. The group. The laughter. What happens when real life kicks in?"

Sarah sighed. "You mean her mom."

Marisol groaned and buried her face in the throw pillow. "God. Don't say her name like she's Beetlejuice."

"I'm serious," Bharath said, sitting down. "She's your mom. I'm not... Latino. I'm not Catholic. And I'm definitely not someone she imagined you bringing home - let alone *with* another woman."

Marisol pulled the blanket tighter. "Yeah. She's gonna lose it."

"Does she even *know* about me?" Sarah asked quietly.

"No," Marisol said. "She's still trying to wrap her head around me dating an Indian boy. Who doesn't speak Spanish. And who doesn't eat meat. I love her, but she clings to culture and religion like it's a life raft."

Bharath rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm not trying to make things harder."

"I know," Marisol said gently, reaching for his hand. "You just... exist. And that alone is complicated in this world."

Sarah watched them, her fingers absently toying with the hem of the blanket. "What about Mia?" she asked softly.

Marisol let out a long breath. "Mia's case... is harder."

Bharath blinked. "Harder than your mom?"

"She's not judgmental," Marisol said, "just... *attentive*. Too attentive. And, lately, weirdly curious."

Sarah smirked. "You mean she has a thing for him."

Marisol looked at her. "She *definitely* has a thing for him."

Bharath let out a groan, leaning his head back against the couch. "Please no. Don't tell me your bombshell little sister has a crush on me."

Marisol elbowed him. “*Don’t* call her a bombshell.”

“She is,” Sarah said, raising a hand. “Confirmed. I’ve seen the photos on your fridge.”

“Et tu, Brutus?” Marisol muttered.

Bharath laughed, dragging a hand down his face. “What am I supposed to do? Pretend she’s invisible?”

“Yes,” both girls said in unison.

He groaned again.

Sarah slid closer, her fingers slipping under his shirt, dragging along his side. “Maybe we should remind you why you don’t need to look at anyone else.”

Marisol’s eyes gleamed, her voice low and teasing. “You think about *anyone else* when we’re here?”

Bharath blinked. “It was just-she’s your *sister!* I wasn’t-”

Marisol straddled his lap in one slow, fluid motion, silencing him with her weight and her lips brushing his jaw. “Too late. You said it.”

Sarah moved behind him, arms wrapping around his chest from the back, her lips at his neck. “Now you pay.”

He swallowed. “This seems like a dangerous game.”

Marisol tilted his chin up with two fingers. “It is. And you’re going to lose.”

Then she kissed him.

Slow. Deep. Possessive.

Sarah kissed the side of his throat. Her hands ran across his stomach and up under his shirt, nails raking just enough to make him gasp.

Marisol pulled back just long enough to whisper, “You’re ours, Bharath. Not Mia’s. Not anyone’s.”

Sarah’s breath tickled his ear. “Say it.”

His pulse pounded.

“I’m yours.”

“Both of ours,” Marisol pressed, teeth grazing his lower lip.

He nodded, breathless. “I’m *yours*.”

Marisol grinned. “Good boy.”

Her hips rolled forward, grinding against him, making him twitch beneath her in helpless response. He tried to keep some composure - but between the heat of Marisol’s body on top of him and Sarah’s soft, relentless teasing behind him, it was impossible.

Sarah tugged his shirt off with surprising precision, her lips trailing across the fresh skin she revealed, pressing kisses between his shoulder blades. “He’s already trembling,” she whispered to Marisol, nipping at the edge of his neck.

“I know,” Marisol said, licking a slow stripe along his jaw. “Let’s see how long he can last.”

Bharath groaned, his voice already ragged. “You two are insane.”

Sarah’s fingers slid lower, undoing his belt with maddening slowness. “Maybe. But we’re your kind of insane.”

Marisol leaned down, pressing her forehead to his. “You like it when we’re like this. When we claim you. When we *own* you.”

He nodded mutely, panting, his hands clenching helplessly at the couch cushions.

Then Sarah bit down lightly at the base of his neck - not hard enough to hurt, but enough to brand him with her mouth. At the same time, Marisol caught his bottom lip between her teeth and kissed him again, deeper this time, tongue flicking against his in a way that made his whole body jolt.

“I-” he tried, but Sarah’s hand slipped inside his boxers and gripped him with practiced heat, and the words disintegrated.

Marisol pulled back just enough to admire the flushed look on his face. “You were thinking about another girl,” she whispered. “Even if it was just for a second.”

“I wasn’t-” he gasped. “It was a joke-”

“We don’t like jokes,” Sarah said, licking up his spine slowly, deliberately.

“Not about that,” Marisol agreed, her hand trailing down his chest to join Sarah’s. Their fingers brushed over each other as they explored him together, syncing in rhythm, moving with the kind of knowledge that came only from nights of whispered secrets and memorized reactions.

His head fell back, resting on Sarah's shoulder now, and she wrapped one arm around his chest tightly, possessively, as if anchoring him to their shared reality.

"You're not going anywhere," she whispered into his ear.

"I wasn't trying to-"

Marisol silenced him with her lips again. "No more talking. Just feel."

They worked him over in perfect tandem - Marisol's weight grounding him, Sarah's fingers and mouth tormenting him from behind. Each kiss, each stroke, each teasing moan layered over the next until he was arching between them, completely overwhelmed.

Then Marisol lifted herself just slightly and reached for Sarah's hand. She guided her down, between them, and together, they wrapped their hands around him - slick, slow, relentless.

He groaned, his head swimming.

"You're going to come for us," Sarah said sweetly, her voice like warm honey poured into his ear.

"Right here," Marisol whispered, "right now. For us. Because you're *ours*."

And he did - shuddering hard, jaw clenched, arms clinging to both of them as wave after wave of pleasure broke through him. They held him through it, licking him and cleaning him up, stroking him, kissing his skin, whispering praise and possession into his ears until he collapsed, boneless and dazed.

He blinked up at the ceiling, heart hammering, barely breathing.

Marisol grinned down at him, brushing damp curls off his forehead. "Still thinking about Mia?"

He could barely speak, his voice hoarse. "Who's Mia?"

Sarah burst out laughing, resting her chin on his shoulder.

Marisol leaned down again, softer now, and kissed his chest. "Good answer."

Then both girls curled into him, sandwiching him with warmth and giggles, as he lay there - claimed, adored, thoroughly undone.

The laughter finally ebbed into soft, contented sighs.

Sarah rested her cheek against Bharath's shoulder, one leg draped lazily over his. Marisol lay curled against his other side, her breath warm against his chest, fingers drawing absent circles over the skin just above his heart. Their limbs tangled with his in a cocoon of warmth and scent and skin. The room was dim and silent now, the shadows long and velvety across the hardwood floor.

Bharath didn't want to move. Didn't want to speak. But the thought had been nagging at the edge of his bliss since before Sarah's mouth found his spine.

He exhaled, brushing Marisol's shoulder with a kiss before speaking.

"I don't want to ruin the moment," he murmured, "but we still need to talk about your mom."

Marisol's fingers stilled.

Bharath said. "You practically live here now. She's going to notice. If she hasn't already."

Marisol sighed, long and low. "I've been dodging her calls more than I should."

"She'll feel betrayed," Bharath said softly. "Not just because of me. Or Sarah. But because you didn't tell her."

Sarah glanced between them, her expression cautious. "Is she the kind who'd rather be lied to gently... or told the truth even if it breaks her?"

"She's the kind who already thinks I've fallen off the edge of the cultural cliff," Marisol muttered. "Dating a non-Latino guy was already pushing it. An Indian guy who doesn't eat meat? That's strike two."

"And now add a second girl to the mix," Sarah murmured. "That's a full count."

Marisol sat up slightly, pulling the blanket around her chest. "It's not that she wouldn't understand *love*. She's seen love in hard places. But she's... old school. Catholic guilt with a side of fire and chancla. She's terrified I'll get hurt. Or used. Or end up alone."

"But you're not alone," Bharath said gently. "You have us. And she deserves to know that, doesn't she? Eventually?"

"I know," Marisol whispered. "I just don't know how to tell her without breaking something between us."

There was a beat of silence.

Sarah broke it. "What if you didn't tell her the whole truth all at once?"

Bharath raised an eyebrow. "Like... staggered disclosure?"

Sarah shrugged. "Start with him. Let her get used to the idea of you and Bharath. Let her see that he's stable. Kind. That he loves you."

"I *do* love her," Bharath said quietly, brushing Marisol's hair behind her ear.

Marisol gave him a soft look, but her eyes were troubled. "But when does Sarah come in? When I drop it like a surprise after months of lies?"

"Not lies," Sarah said gently. "Just... timing. Context. Trust."

Bharath looked between them. "We could set the stage. Maybe invite Maria over for dinner? Here. A simple night. Just the three of us. You and me cooking, Marisol, Sarah staying in the background for now. Not hiding - just easing in."

"And then what?" Marisol asked. "She asks why my toothbrush is here? Why my books are on the shelf? Why there are three pillows on the bed?"

Sarah gave a wry smile. "Tell her you've been crashing here because the dorms are loud. Midterms stress. Noise excuses everything."

Marisol leaned back into Bharath, the tension in her spine starting to soften. "She'll smell the truth eventually."

"Then when she does," Bharath said, "we make it about *love*. Not rebellion. Not shame. You've chosen something radical. But it's beautiful. She should see that."

"I want her to," Marisol whispered. "I just... don't want to lose her trying."

Sarah reached for her hand. "Then let's do it together. Softly. Carefully. But *honestly*. When the time is right."

Bharath wrapped his arms around both women, pressing them close. "Whatever happens... we face it as us."

Marisol nodded against his chest. "Okay. We start with dinner."

Sarah rested her head beside Marisol's. "I'll stay in my room."

Bharath kissed their foreheads, one after the other. "And I'll try not to be too charming."

Marisol chuckled softly. "God help us."

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

Chapter 87: Operation: Trick or Treat Hearts

[1,381 words]

The week after midterms floated by like the reward they all felt they'd earned. No stress, no drama - just quiet satisfaction and the occasional cramming hangover.

Lectures were lighter now. Professors smiled a little more. Even Jorge's Calculus TA said "*nice work*" without sarcasm for once.

At Sarah's house, life blurred into a rhythm that felt strangely like home. The couch always had a pair of mismatched socks draped on the armrest, someone's textbooks were always left open on the kitchen counter, and Bharath had all but given up trying to remember whose shampoo was in the guest bathroom. Every morning, he woke up with both Marisol and Sarah tucked into him like limpets after long love making sessions.

He wasn't complaining.

The whole group felt more *synced* now. The chaos had congealed into comfort. Tyrel and Ravi, to everyone's relief, had bounced back from their heartbreak in classic late-90s fashion: by doubling down on snacks, Sega Genesis, and communal roasting.

Their recovery started with a legendary night of board games and karaoke.

Sarah had suggested Scrabble, which turned into a one-hour debate over whether "MMMBop" was in any officially published dictionary.

Camila slammed her fist on the table. "It's obviously a word! It's onomatopoeia—like 'buzz' or 'vroom'!"

Ravi retaliated by belting out the chorus of "MMMBop" in a dramatic, off-key warble, complete with imaginary drum fills. Camila threw a handful of popcorn at him, which he caught in his mouth mid-note.

"You're avoiding the issue!" Camila yelled. "If 'za' is slang for pizza, then 'MMMBop' is slang for... for..."

Sarah nodded sagely. "The exact moment you realize your crush likes your best friend instead."

Ravi gasped. "Cruel. And that's way too specific for Scrabble!"

Sarah smirked and played "HANSONIC" on a double-word score. "Adjective. Describes anything excessively cheerful yet vaguely irritating."

Ravi, now standing on his chair, challenged them both. "Fine. But if we're allowing emotional trauma as vocabulary, then 'WHYHIMNOTME' is absolutely valid!"

The game ended when Sarah spelled "MACARENA" vertically, using all seven letters, while Ravi slow-clapped and Camila flipped the board over in defeat.

As tiles skittered across the floor, they all agreed on one thing: Scrabble was a contact sport, and Hanson had ruined their lives.

Later that week, they moved on to Monopoly. It didn't go well.

"I swear this game was invented to end friendships," Jorge muttered as he mortgaged Boardwalk to pay Tyrel's fake rent.

"That's capitalism, baby," Tyrel said, leaning back and sipping from his Coke like he was in *Wall Street*.

"Camila and I made a pact," Jorge said. "If I go bankrupt, she's taking me to Vegas to count cards."

Camila popped a grape in his mouth.

"PDA alert," Ravi muttered over his Uno cards.

"Jealousy's a bad look," Jorge shot back. "Your turn."

By Friday night, the group had established a new tradition: *Karaoke Chaos*.

They dragged out Sarah's ancient CD player and a folder of lyric booklets. There was no microphone, just a wooden spoon and a whole lot of misplaced confidence.

Tyrel opened with a heartfelt rendition of "End of the Road" by Boyz II Men, dedicating it to his "past self, who thought he stood a chance with Sarah."

Ravi followed with "Wannabe" by the Spice Girls, which he sang in a high falsetto while doing a suspiciously accurate Baby Spice twirl.

At some point, Marisol performed "No Scrubs" with so much sass that Ravi dramatically fell off the couch and proclaimed he had been "spiritually annihilated."

Even Bharath joined in—reluctantly, but under threat of peer pressure—and crooned his way through Savage Garden's "Truly Madly Deeply." He turned beet red when Sarah and Marisol sang backup, complete with synchronized hand motions.

But it wasn't just the games and songs. It was the way they started to move like a tribe. Ravi and Tyrel were around more, not as the guys who once pined for Sarah, but as *friends who belonged*. Tyrel helped Jorge fix the broken leg on Sarah's coffee table with a power drill he "borrowed" from the dorm supply closet. Ravi started teaching Camila basic chess moves, insisting it was to "elevate her trash talk with tactical substance."

They all started showing up earlier, staying later, and slowly blurring the line between hangout and home.

Camila, once fiercely independent, now leaned her head on Jorge's shoulder during movies. Jorge kissed her forehead like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Tyrel and Ravi invented a game where they narrated each other's actions like wrestling commentators from *WWF Monday Night Raw*.

"AND RAVI GOES FOR THE REFRIED BEANS—WILL HE MAKE IT TO THE MICROWAVE IN TIME?"

"TYREL COUNTERS WITH A BLOCK! OH NO! WE HAVE A CHEESE SPILL!"

Sarah nearly died laughing. Marisol recorded it on the camcorder and promised to use it for blackmail.

And somehow, in between all the nonsense and Nerf fights and microwave disasters, something beautiful settled in.

Trust.

Real, simple, chosen family trust.

Not because they were blood. Not because they'd been friends for years. But because, somewhere between heartbreak and hummus, they'd started *showing up*—for each other. Every dumb joke, every late-night walk, every apology half-wrapped in sarcasm... it mattered.

Meanwhile, Bharath and Jorge had taken their midterm confidence into the gym with new swagger. Five days a week, rain or shine, they hit the weights like men on a mission - sweaty, sore, and no longer ashamed to step into the community showers with the older frat guys and the pre-med monsters who grunted with every rep.

"You think the girls are noticing yet?" Jorge asked one afternoon, adjusting his towel as they left the locker room.

“I *know* they are,” Bharath said, trying to hide his grin. “Marisol told me yesterday she likes the way my shirts fit now. Especially when I lift things. Sarah, well I can’t tell you what she did yesterday when I was topless.”

Jorge smirked. “Camila ran her hand down my arm and said, ‘Huh. You’ve got some definition.’ That’s basically poetry.”

Back at the house, the living room looked like someone had lost a battle with a Blockbuster clearance sale—cushions on the floor, soda cans under the coffee table, *Tekken 3* blasting from the TV.

Tyrel’s thumbs moved like weapons of divine chaos as Eddy Gordo breakdanced across the screen. “Y’all can’t stop the rhythm, baby!”

Ravi shrieked from the floor. “You’re *cheating!* That’s not fighting—that’s *choreography!*”

“I fight with *flavor,*” Tyrel said, completely unrepentant.

“Bro, you’re spamming kicks like you’re coding with your feet!” Ravi wailed.

“Strategy, my dude,” Tyrel grinned. “It’s called foot-based dominance.”

On the other side of the room, Jorge lounged with Flamin’ Hot Cheetos on his chest like sacred offerings. “You’re fighting like my abuelas over bingo night.”

Bharath leaned in, blinking. “Is Ravi... sweating?”

“I have high emotional investment in King,” Ravi huffed, jamming buttons.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen alcove, a very different game was afoot.

Sarah sat on the floor with a red notebook balanced on her knees, pages filled with names, stats, and speculative astrology. Marisol leaned over the coffee table with a pen stuck in her bun like a dagger. Camila was perched backward on a chair, tearing into a bag of Cheetos like she was feeding off their chaos.

“Alright,” Sarah said, cracking her knuckles. “Boys are dumb. But lovable. And tragically single.”

“Exceptionally single,” Marisol corrected. “Ravi said *‘chaotic good’* was his ideal relationship dynamic.”

Camila snorted. “Tyrel tried to flirt with the RA last week by reciting Tupac lyrics and *then* asked if she wanted to watch *Blade.*”

“We’re doing the Lord’s work,” Sarah sighed. “Which means... matchmaking.”

Camila grinned and flipped open a folder labeled OPERATION: TRICK OR TREAT HEARTS in glitter gel pen. “Draft prep is officially underway.”

Marisol paused. “Should we even *list* Melina?”

Camila: “She’s inevitable. Like taxes.”

“Melina is both their *dream and nightmare*,” Marisol said, circling her name twice.

“They’re gonna *fight* over her,” Camila smirked. “And she’s gonna destroy both.”

From the living room, Tyrel suddenly yelled, “BRO! You can’t roundhouse kick a *grieving man!*”

“That’s Eddy’s default move!” Ravi screamed. “It’s *canon!*”

Jorge: “You idiots are so loud, I think I heard my blood pressure go up.”

Bharath, calmly, “I believe Ravi’s playing style is... erratic.”

Marisol peeked down the hallway. “They have no idea what we’re planning, do they?”

“Not a clue,” Sarah said sweetly. “Let’s keep it that way.”

Camila slapped the folder shut with the drama of a lawyer on her closing statement. “Tomorrow, we begin the draft.”

Marisol grinned. “Let the matchmaking games commence.”

Sarah looked toward the noise spilling from the TV and the laughter that followed it. Her smile curled.

“They’re gonna regret trusting us.”

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Chapter 88: Sandwiched in Heaven [18+]

[1,360 words]

The world outside was still gray with sleep, painted in streaks of soft gold from the early morning sun. But Bharath was already awake-very awake.

He lay perfectly still, listening to the rhythm of their breathing. One breath, warm and slow against his chest. The other, faint and shallower, brushing past his neck. He blinked, vision adjusting to the soft light of dawn filtering through the gauzy curtains.

He didn't move. Not yet.

Because he was wrapped in the kind of luxury no man could ever really prepare for. Marisol was pressed flush against his right side, her bountiful chest rising and falling against his face, one thigh slung lazily over his own like she was anchoring him to the mattress. Her silky hair had taken over the pillow, a fragrant, wild mess that tickled his jaw.

On his other side, Sarah had curled up half on top of him sometime during the night. Her arm was draped over his chest possessively, one knee tucked into his hip. Her hair smelled faintly of coconut and mango shampoo, and one soft breast had found its home against his cheek.

He was sandwiched between warmth, softness, femininity. Not some fantasy-but real, tangible skin, breath, curves, and heartbeats.

And nestled against both sides of his face?

Heaven.

Two breasts, both DDs, both exquisite in their own way. Each one resting against his cheeks, his jawline, his lips if he angled his head just so. Warm, soft, grounding. Sarah's breast, to his left, had slipped free from the sheet and rested lightly against his neck. Its weight was gentler, higher, more sculpted, the kind of shape that sat snug in his palm and left him always wanting more. Her nipple-small, pink, and upturned-was already peeking through the morning chill.

To the right, Marisol's fullness rested in decadent contrast. Heavier, softer, and more generous, her breast felt like the comfortable cushion in the world. Her nipples, darker and broader, carried the kind of sensitivity that turned her voice into music if he so much as grazed them.

He didn't try to be poetic. There was no poetry here. Just awe. The raw kind.

He tilted his head slightly, brushing his nose against Sarah's breast. Her scent hit him immediately-a hint of the lotion from the night before. It was faint but unmistakable, and it made his mouth water. Slowly, reverently, he brought his lips to her nipple and gave it a soft kiss. She stirred, not fully awake, but her body responded anyway-her back arched faintly and a quiet hum escaped her throat.

His hand slid under the blanket and over her hip, fingers tracing the dip of her waist until he cupped the swell of her breast in his palm. She felt perfect. He thumbed her nipple, watching it stiffen against his touch. She whimpered softly in her sleep and squeezed her thighs around him without meaning to-her inner thigh grazing against his length with enough friction to make him grunt low in his throat.

She didn't even realize what she was doing.

He turned to his other side and inhaled deeply. Marisol's skin was warm and faintly salty, with the earthy sweetness of amber and cinnamon. He pressed his face into the generous slope of her chest, nuzzling until he found her nipple with his lips. Then he kissed it, slow and deep. She didn't move at first-just sighed-and then muttered something in slurred Spanish that he couldn't understand but made his chest tighten anyway.

His hand found her other breast under the sheets. His palm sank into it as if her body molded itself for his hands alone. When he rolled the nipple gently between his fingers, her hips shifted and her leg tightened around his.

Bharath blinked, looked down at his morning state, then sighed.

He pulled both women closer with each arm-left arm curled around Sarah, right hand still teasing Marisol. Both girls let out small sounds of contentment, unconsciously nestling into him further.

He could stay like this forever.

And then he saw them. Faint, but there.

Marks.

On Sarah's breast near the curve of her sternum-one of his love bites, nearly faded. Another, lower on Marisol's collarbone-darker, but already lightening at the edges.

He grinned. He remembered that night clearly. They had made him promise-both of them-that he'd never let their marks fade. That when one started to disappear, he'd replace it. Not out of possessiveness, they said. Out of reverence. Out of belonging.

He kissed the fading mark on Sarah first, just above the spot where her heart beat under skin. A soft, open-mouthed kiss. She squirmed lightly in her sleep, her grip on his waist tightening.

"Again..." she mumbled, barely conscious.

He smiled. "Later," he whispered, and kissed her again anyway. Then his teeth found the spot just beside it, and he left a fresh one-gently, but firm enough to make it last.

She let out a moan and pressed her hips forward into him.

He turned to Marisol next. Her clavicle was already home to a mark from the night before, but he wasn't about to leave it half-faded. He traced his tongue just below it, then bit-soft, slow, just enough pressure to make her arch and mutter, "You better be replacing the one that's fading, mi corazón..."

"I am," he said softly. "I always keep my promises."

She hummed, her leg hiking higher over his thigh. Her hips found his, rubbing sleepily against his hardness.

"Don't tease," she said, half-awake.

"Who's teasing?" he murmured, kissing across her breast again and drawing her nipple into his mouth.

Sarah stirred next, waking more fully. She blinked, rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand, then looked down at him.

"What time is it?" she murmured.

"Too early," Bharath said between licks.

"You're already up," she said, voice gravelly with sleep. "And already causing trouble."

She reached down and grabbed his hand, guiding it back to her chest. "I want one too. A fresh one."

"You got yours already."

"Doesn't count," she said. "I wasn't conscious while you did it."

Bharath chuckled and kissed her again-this time just below the curve of her underboob, teeth scraping gently. Sarah gasped. "That's better."

Marisol smirked, one eye now open. "Do me again."

He didn't argue.

He leaned into her chest again and sucked deeply, using his tongue to swirl around her already stiff nipple before biting just under the curve of her mound. This time, she let out a full moan and dug her fingers into his hair.

"You're such a good boy when you're horny," she teased breathlessly.

Sarah giggled. "He's not just horny. He's ravenous."

"Damn right I am," Bharath mumbled, still focused on Marisol's breast.

Sarah tugged his head back and guided it to hers. "Then prove it."

He was only too happy to oblige.

For the next few minutes, Bharath took turns lavishing attention on both women, cupping, licking, sucking, marking. His hands moved from breast to breast, his thumbs pressing into soft flesh, fingers trailing along ribs, massaging the weight in each palm like they were his personal prayer beads.

Marisol arched into him with abandon, murmuring encouragement between breaths.

Sarah whined when he left her for more than a few seconds. "Come back here. No favoritism."

He laughed into her chest.

Her response was to pull him deeper, breasts squishing against his face. "That's your fault if you can't breathe."

By the time the alarm finally buzzed to life, shrill and annoying from the nightstand, all three of them were tangled in a mess of limbs and flushed skin.

Marisol slapped the top of the alarm clock with a grumble. "Kill it."

Sarah whined, "Five more minutes."

"I have to go," Bharath said reluctantly, untangling himself one limb at a time.

"No," Marisol said, wrapping her arms around his waist.

Sarah clung to his forearm. "You're warm. We're cold."

"I'll come back sweaty," he teased.

"Gross," both girls said at the same time, but neither let go.

He kissed them each again, then gently pried himself loose. Marisol rolled toward Sarah and tucked her head into the crook of her neck. Sarah's arms wrapped around her automatically.

As he stood, stretching with a quiet groan, he glanced back at the bed.

Two women, tangled in sheets and hair and each other, marked with his love, glowing in the soft light of morning.

He almost crawled back in.

But instead, he pulled on his shorts, grabbed his towel, and headed to the gym-still aching. Still smiling.

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

Chapter 89: Bro Talk & Bedroom Revenge

[915 words]

The gym smelled like iron, sweat, and early morning regret.

Bharath pushed open the door to the Georgia Tech Athletic Center, towel around his neck, shirt still clinging from the Atlanta humidity. The weight of his morning-of lips, of breasts, of belonging-lingered in his bones. But this? This was a different ritual.

Inside, Jorge was already there. Alone, for once. No Discman. No chaos. Just him and the soft clink of metal as he racked a pair of dumbbells back into place.

“Early bird,” Bharath called out.

Jorge turned with a grin. “Look who survived the lionesses. I thought they were gonna eat you alive this morning.”

“They did,” Bharath said, chuckling as he dropped his gym bag. “But I’m here. Just barely.”

“Man,” Jorge said, stretching his arms behind his head, “you know people are gonna talk, right?”

“They already are.”

Jorge nodded. “Yeah, well, let ’em. You looked happy. That’s rare around here.”

There was a pause as Bharath grabbed a set of weights and joined him at the benches. The clinking of metal echoed between sets, their movements syncing in quiet rhythm—inhale, lift, lower, exhale.

“Thanks for being cool about all this,” Bharath said, wiping sweat from his brow.

“You kidding?” Jorge scoffed. “I think it’s beautiful, bro. Real talk? You didn’t just get lucky. You earned that love. They see something in you. We all do.”

Bharath smiled, humbled. “You ever think it’s too much? Like... all of this?”

Jorge considered it, then shrugged. “Sure. But love’s not supposed to be measured. It’s supposed to be felt. And from where I’m standing? You’re feeling it. Hard.”

Another few reps passed in silence before Bharath glanced sideways.

“What about you?” he asked. “You and Camila seem tight.”

Jorge paused mid-curl.

“Oh.”

“Oh?” Bharath grinned. “That’s the sound people make when they’re in deep.”

“Shut up pendejo,” Jorge muttered, his cheeks coloring. “It’s not like that.”

“It totally is.”

Jorge sat back, letting the weights rest on his thighs. His voice was quieter now.

“She’s... everything, man. Funny, sharp, wild. She dances like the floor’s afraid of her.”

Bharath nodded. “You smile more when she’s around.”

Jorge exhaled, laughing nervously. “Yeah. I’m thinking of asking her to be my girl. Like... officially. At Club Zero.”

“On Halloween night?”

Jorge nodded, eyes drifting.

“She loves that place. The energy, the lights, the music. I thought... maybe I’ll ask her during the last set. Something chill. Just us, you know?”

Bharath’s smile widened. “She’ll say yes.”

“You think so?” Jorge’s voice cracked slightly.

“I do. She looks at you like you invented laughter.”

Jorge laughed out loud at that. “Que saico. Are you trying to ghostwrite my vows?”

“No,” Bharath said, pressing into his final reps. “Just saying. If I didn’t already have two girls licking bite marks onto me every morning, I’d be jealous.”

Jorge clapped his back. “Proud of you, hermano.”

They finished in silence, the sweat drying over pride and something deeper-brotherhood. Not the performative kind. The real kind. The kind forged not just in reps or teasing, but trust.

As they walked out of the gym together into the morning sunlight, Jorge nudged him.

“So... your girls. Are they cool with body glitter and fog machines?”

“Why?”

“Because Camila said if you three show up as anything less than a synchronized costume trio, she’ll revoke your club privileges.”

Bharath laughed.

“Then we better bring the thunder.”

The front door creaked open.

The house smelled faintly of coffee and something sweet-maybe vanilla body mist or whatever Sarah had in that lotion she used. The air was warm, still, too quiet. A soft hum of conversation had gone silent the moment he turned the key.

Bharath stepped inside, damp towel slung around his neck, shirt clinging to his chest with the ghost of sweat. His legs were sore, but that warm ache only made him feel more alive.

And then he saw them.

In the kitchen. Barefoot. Standing at the counter like it was some kind of cursed tableau designed to destroy him.

Marisol was leaning forward slightly, sipping from a mug, wearing nothing but a clingy white tee that barely reached her belly button and a black thong riding high over her

hips. Her curls were tied up messily, exposing her bare shoulders and the hickey he'd left on her collarbone.

Sarah, beside her, was wearing a pale blue tee stretched tight across her breasts-no bra-her nipples tenting the fabric like headlights. Just a delicate, teasing jiggle every time she shifted her weight. A soft grey thong and her long, toned legs completed the ensemble. She'd twisted her hair into a clip, but a few wet strands curled at her temple.

They both turned when they heard him.

Marisol smiled first-slow, knowing, like she'd been counting the minutes.

Sarah tilted her head. "He's baaack," she murmured.

"Finally," Marisol said, setting her mug down. "We were going to start without you."

Bharath dropped his gym bag with a thud.

"Are you trying to kill me?"

"No," Marisol said sweetly. "Just punish you for leaving us hot and bothered."

Sarah crossed the kitchen, hips swaying deliberately, and reached for his towel. "You're all sweaty."

"Yeah. It was a good session."

"Mm." She lifted the towel and dabbed at his chest. "That's our line."

Bharath inhaled sharply.

"We didn't even get to say goodbye," Marisol said, coming up behind him. "Just groped us a little, got us all warm and needy, then slipped off to do bicep curls."

Her hand slid around his waist. Then lower.

"You know what that does to a girl's ego?" she whispered in his ear.

Sarah kissed his collarbone. "Or her patience?"

Bharath's breath hitched. "We have class in an hour."

"Then you'd better make it count," Marisol said, grabbing his hand and pulling him toward the bathroom as Sarah pulled his shorts down.

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Chapter 90: The Show!

[950 words]

The sun filtered through the rustling branches lining 10th Street, casting dappled light across the quiet sidewalk. It was a crisp Atlanta morning, the kind that made you feel like something important might happen - even if it was just a midterm.

Bharath felt different today.

Not because he had an exam. Not because he was sore from Jorge and his brutal gym routine that morning. But because he was walking to campus with one woman wrapped around each arm - and not in some imaginary fantasy. This was reality.

On his left, Sarah walked in a peach sundress that flattered every amazing curve she had while it fluttered around her knees, her hair bouncing gently as she looked up at him, lips already curved in a secret smile looking like Miss September in a Playboy magazine.

On his right, Marisol clung to his arm like it was her personal property. She wore his button-down shirt - open over a black tank top - and a pair of cutoff shorts that made heads turn a full block away. Her hair was tied into a messy bun, her lips still flushed from their morning bath. She looked radiant. Smug. Possessive in the most affectionate way.

They were talking about something inane - a stray cat Sarah had tried to feed last night - but none of them paid attention to the outside world.

They were a world to themselves.

And they were about to detonate it.

The gates near the College of Computing stood ahead like the mouth of a coliseum. Students trickled across campus, clutching coffee in Styrofoam cups or books underarm. Most wore bleary Monday expressions. No one expected magic before 10 A.M.

Until they saw them.

First came the subtle slowdown - a guy in a backpack who did a double take.

Then a girl crossing the quad nearly tripped on the curb, her mouth opening slightly as she tracked the trio moving confidently down the pathway.

Bharath, quiet and composed, his arms firmly held by two women.

Marisol, hugging his arm with the contentment of someone who knew exactly where she belonged.

And Sarah, head tilted toward Bharath, giving him a look that promised everything and then some.

Voices started to murmur behind them.

“Wait... is that-?”

“Are they both...?”

“No way. *No way*. Is she okay with-what?”

People were frozen like deer in halogen.

This wasn't just two girls walking with a guy. This was *the* Marisol Rivera - sharp-tongued, Latina bombshell from Calculus 101 who once made a T.A. stutter - casually snuggled against Bharath, watching the other girl kiss his shoulder like it was hers too.

And *Sarah Goldstein*, the sexy but withdrawn, older chem engineering junior who rarely smiled in class but now glowed like she'd found the cure to boredom and loneliness.

Together.

With *him*.

What in God's name was happening?

Jorge was already at the steps, lounging with his arms crossed, red Georgia Tech cap turned backward trying to rap some reggaeton song. Ravi stood next to him, balancing a textbook on one knee, his expression frozen somewhere between awe and secondhand smugness.

Ravi nudged Jorge. “They're coming.”

Jorge took a slow sip from his water bottle and smirked. “Oh yeah. Cue the shock and awe.”

As Bharath, Marisol, and Sarah stepped onto campus proper, a full circle of heads turned.

The dorm gossip mills had *nothing* on this moment.

A guy from Glenn Hall dropped his Discman.

A girl from the library steps blinked, looked at her friend, and whispered, "Is that the Rivera girl? With... *him*?"

"That's Sarah on the other side. The junior."

"No way. *No way*. What is he? A cult leader?"

And then it happened.

Just as they reached the base of the CoC stairs, Sarah turned, dropped Bharath's hand, and stepped in front of him.

Without hesitation, she kissed him.

Not a polite peck.

A *long, slow, volcanic* kiss.

And then she turned to Marisol and did the same. Then kissed Bharath again with more heat if that was possible.

There was an audible gasp from the side of the quad. A guy in a Tau Kappa Epsilon sweatshirt choked on his bagel. Somewhere behind them, a visiting parent on a campus tour murmured, "Well, this is a very... progressive university."

And what made it all worse - or better, depending on where you stood in the universe - was what Marisol did next.

She smiled.

She didn't flinch. She didn't glare. She didn't stiffen.

She just slid closer, wrapped her arm tighter around Bharath's, and watched the kiss like she was proud of it.

When Sarah finally pulled away, she gave Bharath a satisfied little sigh and adjusted his collar.

"Don't miss me too much," she said, brushing a strand of his hair back. "See you at lunch, baby."

Then she turned, tossed Marisol a wink, and walked away swaying her hips enticingly toward the biomedical building.

No one said a word.

No one *could*.

A grad student let out a long, low whistle.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said to the stunned students around them, “that was the single most incredible thing I have seen in my entire Georgia Tech life. And I once saw a guy blow up a vending machine with a home-built EMP.”

Ravi was slack-jawed. “I knew it was happening. I *knew* it. But seeing it...”

“Better than porn ese,” Jorge said reverently. “It’s art.”

Bharath and Marisol walked towards them sheepishly. “Was it too much?”

Ravi laughed. “*Too much?* Bro. You just walked through campus like Zeus on Valentine’s Day. If anything, that was not enough. I think you may have cured seasonal depression.”

Marisol just leaned in, eyes sparkling, and whispered, “Told you we’d break a few brains.”

Across the quad, a stunned group of freshmen watched the trio - now just Bharath and Marisol - climb the steps.

“Bro...” one whispered. “That was sexy Sarah. From the chem lab.”

“Yeah.”

“And she kissed him. Like. Tongue and everything.”

“*Yeah.*”

“And the *other girl* was *smiling.*”

A pause.

“I gotta start lifting.”

“Word.”

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