

Controlling

By Dede Sanchez

“Miranda!” her mother said pronouncing her name in Spanish, a habit that reared its head when her mother was annoyed with her.

"Yes, Mami?" Miranda asked, her shoulders rigid.

“Did you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

Miranda realized that she hadn't heard whatever her mother had said. So, unwilling to admit that she had not heard and overall indifferent to whatever topic she was being interrogated about, she answered in a way that would hopefully end the conversation, “Ay, I don't know, Mami.”

Her mother harrumphed but didn't press her further. Gloria knew her well enough to know when she reached proverbial bedrock. As always the tension in the room was thick enough to cut with a knife. However, Miranda knew that just like every other time during the weekly dinners her mother insisted Miranda attend, that she would bring it up again.

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“Let's go to *Rhino*,” Miranda suggested loudly over the 70's rock ballad singing through the bar's speakers.

“I can't go to the *Rhino* anymore,” Angie said.

“Why?” asked Patrick.

“The Coyote Ugly incident,” Camila said.

“Oh yeah,” Patrick responded with an exaggerated roll of his eyes. “What kind of idiot dances on a bar.”

Angie stuck up her middle finger, “Listen, bitch, when Rihanna comes on I gots to dance. I’m sorry, I don’t make the rules.”

“Actually, in this case, you do,” he said making a circle with his index finger and thumb and sliding it over her middle finger lewdly.

“What about *Manic*?” suggested Camila.

“Alright, one last shot,” agreed Angie. “What are we toasting to?”

“How about we toast to freedom,” suggested Miranda.

“To freedom!” the group cheered before downing their shots.

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The alcohol buzzed through Miranda’s body like venom. Numb, she felt numb. Consumed wholly by the press of bodies crowding the dance floor, writhing and grinding in a sonic orgy. Her eyes opened to take in the dim room, flashes of light gave her quick glimpses into the sea of euphoria.

Her eyes found their way towards the bar and instantly locked with those of a handsome stranger. He smiled at her and his heated gaze burned her skin. She smiled back her body moving to the music, a silent invitation to the dark stranger across the room. He downed the contents of his glass and took the invitation. The crowd seemed to part for him, an ocean before Moses. Unobstructed, he approached.

No words were exchanged, he offered his hand to her and as she accepted, the music changed to something dark and sensual, he gently pulled her close and draped her hand around his neck, her other hand seemed to move unbidden to join its pair on the other side. With her arms wrapped around his neck, he pulled her closer still and wrapped his arms around her waist swaying along to the thrumming bass.

His scent wafted into her lungs and she buried her face in his chest, warm and lost inside his arms. Time ticked by, the crowd seemed to disappear, and they were the only two in the room. An escape she'd never before experienced in all the drinks, in all the drugs. He was the true Wonderland to her Alice.

Last call shattered her peace. She could feel it all slipping away. Their eyes met an unspoken desire, a desperate plea. He accepted this call to action, his head lowered, and his lips burned hers. Her eyes slid closed as he devoured her, a final trip down the rabbit hole. Then he pulled away and she was left cold and breathless. She opened her eyes, but he was gone.

She searched for him but only found her friends seated together at the bar. Eyes wide as they frantically waved her over.

"Who the hell was that?" asked Patrick as he handed her a shot.

"I... I don't know," Miranda said realizing she'd never gotten his name or number. She frowned as she chewed her lip. "Fuck," she said before downing the shot.

"Man, I'm hot just watching that kiss," Angie said fanning herself with a cocktail napkin. "You're saying you didn't get his number?"

"I didn't even get his name," Miranda said ordering another round of shots with a series of hand gestures.

"What?" the group said in unison.

“What?” Miranda retorted.

“You just made out with a complete stranger in the middle of a crowded club,” Patrick said, a mischievous glint in his eyes, “You little slut.”

“It’s not like that. It was, I don’t know, different.”

"You of all people have no right to slut-shame," Camila said playfully slapping Patrick on the arm. "I saw you grinding on the DJ."

Patrick grinned and winked at Camila.

Angie raised her shot glass, “To being sluts!”

“To being sluts!” the others agreed.

“So, anyone know of any after hours,” inquired Miranda.

“Well actually...” Patrick said, smiling mischievously as he tossed a flirty look at the DJ who smiled back just as flirtatiously.

The group cheered and gathered their things to follow Patrick.

“Hey,” the bartender said stopping Miranda.

"What's up, Jerry?" she asked.

“That guy you were sucking face with, he left you this,” Jerry said handing her a business card.

His name was Allister Hayes.

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The Taxi slowed to a stop in front of what had to be one of the nicest restaurants that she’d ever been invited to. Walking in she suddenly felt self-conscious. The dress she had chosen

was a simple black skater dress from forever 21, she knew every ritzy, high-class socialite in the restaurant would recognize how cheap her dress was in an instant. She smoothed her skirt and looked around, spotting him instantly.

As she turned to walk towards him, she felt a hand roughly grasp her upper arm. She turned around and came face to face with a maître d' looking down his nose at her.

"Excuse me, young lady do you..." he looked Miranda up and down with disgust in his eyes, "have a reservation?"

She wrenched her arm free from his grasp and wound up to tear him a new asshole when she felt a warm hand on the small of her back.

"Is there a problem here, Gerard?" Allister said warmly.

The maître d' straightened to look at Allister. "Mr. Hayes. I was just asking the lady..."

"The lady is with me," Allister interjected before Gerard could finish his thought. He ran a hand along Miranda's arm and his face went dark, "You seem to have left a mark on my companion."

Miranda noted that her upper arm had grown an angry shade of red. "It's nothing," she said.

Gerard opened his mouth to say something but suddenly it snapped shut and he turned and swiftly walked away.

"Are you alright?" Allister asked.

As Miranda opened her mouth to respond she was cut off by the sudden sounds of screeching tires, glass shattering, and horrified screams from just outside the restaurant. She turned her head to see that the Maître d' had walked right into traffic. Her hand flew over her mouth as she caught sight of Gerard's mangled and bloodied body on the ground.

Allister pulled her into an embrace, hiding her face in his chest, “Somebody call the police, there’s been an accident,” he called to the others who gawked at the scene.

Soon later the police arrived and questioned every witness they could get a hold of. No one had any answers for them.

After hours of answering questions, they were finally allowed to leave.

“I am so sorry that our date ended in such tragedy. I can give you a ride home if you wish,” Allister offered.

“I don’t really feel like being alone right now,” Miranda replied.

“Well, not to be too forward, but, would you like to come back to my place? We can order food and watch movies.”

“I don’t know if I can eat, but that sounds nice.”

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Time, for them, seemed to pass quickly, like a dream. She was in deep. Her feelings for him were intense, everything with him was different than anything she’d ever experienced. Then her apartment had been broken into and she realized she didn’t feel safe anymore. He had been there to rescue her. Despite the protests and all-around judgments from her friends, she moved in with Allister after only 6 months of dating him.

Besides, her friends were angry at her because she had, in their eyes, abandoned them. They seemed wary of Allister, but it never made any sense to her. There had been arguments and disagreements. The truth was that she didn’t feel the need to forget. Didn’t want to party.

2 months into living with Allister, her friends had wanted to call a truce. She felt awful that they felt left behind, and she wanted to make amends. She decided it was time to hang out with them, if only for a few hours.

"I wanted to finish that movie tonight," Allister said.

"I know, baby, but my friends haven't seen me in months and to be honest, I kind of miss them. Besides, we can watch it tomorrow,"

"Okay, have fun, love you," he said before leaving her to get ready.

Miranda sat on the bed to put on her shoes and suddenly she felt the energy drain from her body. The world went dark and she passed out.

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"I am so happy for you two, let me see the ring," Gloria gushed.

Miranda held out her hand, "Took him long enough."

"It's only been a year and a half," Allister replied defensively before finishing his drink.

"Dinner was delicious, Gloria."

"Thank you, dear, but you can call me mom," she looked down at his cup, "Would you like some more tea?"

"That would be lovely, mom," he replied.

Gloria smiled brightly and moved to stand but Miranda stopped her, "I got it. Would you like a refill too?"

Gloria smiled and nodded as she sat back down, "Thank you, Mija."

"No problem," Miranda grabbed the two glasses and stopped to give Allister a soft peck on the lips before heading into the kitchen.

She stopped at the kitchen island and placed the two glasses on top. Suddenly she became still, her eyes distant as tears began to roll down her cheeks.

Several minutes later, Allister joined her in the kitchen. The smile on his face died as he approached Miranda. He brushed her hair aside and leaned in close to her. Lips nearly touching her ear he whispered, “Naughty girl.”

He wiped the tears from her face and fixed her hair.

“Mom, Miranda is not feeling well,” he called into the dining room, “I think I should take her home.”

Another tear rolled down her face, but Allister wiped it away.

Like a switch being flipped, Miranda composed herself, she joined her mother in the dining room, “I just need to lie down.”

“Okay, Mija, I hope you feel better,” she hugged Miranda and walked the couple out. “See you next week, call me later.”

“I will. I love you, Mami,” Miranda said as she climbed in the car.

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Allister locked their bedroom door and slipped the key necklace back into his shirt. He turned to Miranda who stood statuesque beside the bed and with a gesture of his hand, she suddenly dropped to the floor.

“You were very bad today.”

Miranda lay in a heap on the floor, crying and shaking.

“What do you have to say for yourself?”

“Fuck you,” Miranda spat.

He Frowned and with a hand gesture he made her stand and approach him, he traced a finger down her cheek and tisked, “That wasn’t very nice.”

“I fucking hate you!” she said.

He scowled and leaned in close to her, he brushed his lips against hers then said, “You don’t mean that, right?”

“Of course not, baby, I love you,” the words not her own.

“Who do you belong to?”

“You, Allister, forever, and always.” She smiled but the tears still streamed down her cheeks.

“Kiss me,” he demanded.

She tilted her head up and stood on her tippy toes to press her lips against his, her hand twitched a few times then suddenly it flew up to connect with his cheek. Shocked, he dropped his control of her and turned his piercing dark eyes to her, “How?”

“I fucking hate you,” she hissed.

His face flushed with pain, but he masked it and stormed out of the room.

Miranda barely registered the sound of the locking door as she stared at her stinging hand in shock. She had never been able to escape his control in the past, but she’d done it twice in one day. Something was different, she just needed to figure out what. She had to if she was ever going to escape.

#

Allister’s coworkers milled around their home, chatting, drinking, and laughing. Miranda, on her best behavior, the loving cohost. She mingled and smiled, the simpering puppet. He had kept her closer after the events that had taken place weeks ago, but he was too preoccupied to notice the small strides she made in escaping his control. A twitch of a finger or toe, small things at first. She could feel his influence on her and what he wanted her body to do

so as she gained back more control she was still able to pretend. She had finally managed to completely free herself of his control.

Weeks of planning and finally her plan was in play. When he allowed her to use the restroom, she quietly searched the cabinets until she found it, the jar of sleeping pills. Just as she grabbed the jar, a knock sounded at the door. Shaky hands struggled with the cap until she finally got it open. Another knock sounded at the door as she poured a couple into her hand.

Heart racing, she put the cap back onto the bottle and replaced it in the medicine cabinet. A third, louder knock nearly made her drop the pills she was trying to hide in her bra. The knob jiggled a bit and her heart pounded in her chest. Finally, she got the pills into her bra just as she felt his control demanding she exits the bathroom. She opened the door and to her relief, she came face to face with one of his coworkers.

“Oh, I’m sorry, dear, but you didn’t respond,” said the woman.

“I apologize, I didn’t hear you,” Miranda responded placing that simpering smile back onto her face and walking away.

Allister stood with a group of his coworkers, a smile like a Venus flytrap on his face. As she got close to him he wrapped his arm around her in a way that seemed affectionate, but in reality, it was a symbol of his possessiveness. No one could see his fingers digging deeply into her hip or the bruises they left.

As the night died down and the partygoers began to leave, he sent her to get him a drink, she realized it was her chance. He jokingly announced last call to the remaining coworkers. However, she knew he was serious, after this drink, they would all leave, a subtle decision he would force upon them. He was tipsy and she knew what that meant, her stomach roiled at the thought.

When he was distracted she retrieved the pills from her bra and sit them to dissolve in the tonic water before she mixed in the gin. She stirred the drink as much as she could before she felt that familiar pull. She checked his drink and noted that everything was fine. She handed it to him, and he took it in one hand and held her in his bruising way with the other. He barely looked at his drink as he downed it quickly.

When everyone had gone, he walked her into the bedroom and locked them inside. He began stripping his clothing and she watched the key dangle down his chest. He pushed her down on the bed, climbed on top of her, and began to kiss her. She held back her revulsion as he caressed her body. Suddenly he went limp, his weight pressing down on her as he began to snore softly. She poked him gently a couple of times and then harder when he didn't move. Relieved she slipped the key from around his neck and hefted him off of her. She reached under the bed to retrieve her packed bag.

Dressed sensibly, she made her way to the door and unlocked it, as soon as she pulled it open his massive hand pushed it back shut. She looked back and found that he was wide awake and angry. He grabbed her hair and tossed her away from the door into the mirror. It shattered and she felt the sting as small shards broke the skin.

“How did you manage to drug me? I didn’t let you out of my control all night?” he raised his hand in that familiar gesture and his eyes widened when he realized he could no longer control her.

“Fuck you,” she shouted, hurling the first thing she got her hands on at him, a book. She kept hurling things at him as he approached her.

Unfazed, he grabbed her by the neck and lifted her, “I love you,”

“Yeah, well I hate you,” she gasped out as she thrashed her legs. She landed a good kick to his crotch forcing him to drop her and crumbled to the floor.

She jumped over his writhing body and ran to the door, but he managed to grab her leg and pull her down. He climbed on top of her and wrapped his hands around her neck. She struggled, scratching at his hands and grasping wildly for anything to save herself. Then her fingers grazed it, cold, smooth and jagged around the edges.

Without hesitation, she brought the shard of mirror glass up and into the side of his neck. His eyes widened and his hands covered the wound. He choked on the blood pouring through his fingers. Miranda scrambled away, gasping in hungry breaths. Shock and betrayal painted his face as he fell to the floor, dead.