

First Taste



MISTY WELLS

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Luna Is A Parasite

Luna was more than a pain in the ass. She was a parasite. Mia flicked up the volume on her iPod and pushed her earphones deeper into her ears. Down the hall, Luna and Rafe were fooling around again.

She glanced at the sketch of the new "R&M Labs" logo on her desk. Though she felt the usual flush of pride at seeing the name of her company in print, she couldn't fight the sense of dread that inevitably came with it. A new logo, to her, could only certify a new beginning. A new beginning that included Luna. The thought made her shudder.

Also amidst the clutter on her desk was a newspaper clipping, cut from the arts section of an old copy of the London Lite. Luna's face dominated the top right hand corner, her wide emerald eyes dusted with brown powder. Her gaze was magnetic, her pink lips soft and plump, her hands tiny and elegant; they all screamed deceptive innocence, only enhanced in the flesh by that soft, tinkling voice she put on. Her charm, her grace, was unrivalled. She was impossible to dislike.

At least, if you didn't know her. If you didn't know how cruel that pretty mouth could be. How those elegant fingers could pinch and bruise. How that voice could turn husky in moments, dripping with just the right amount of sex and cruelty to drive Mia insane with reluctant desire. Not that it ever went any further than hints. Threats; samples of what she claimed she was capable of. And Mia knew she revelled in the fact that she had her dangling from a thread, always guessing. Wondering. Craving. Pouring into every crevice of her being until she barely had room to breathe.

Even Mia had to admit the photograph was nothing less than enchanting. It almost distracted entirely from the article, promoting one of her exhibitions at the Proud Gallery with a short interview she didn't dare read. Mia covered Luna's face with a cup of coffee that had turned cold in its neglect and returned to flicking through files. Choosing Luna as the face of R&M Labs may have been the best move of her and Rafe's career, but in terms of their personal life, it was probably the worst decision they had ever made.

Mia and Rafe had started R&M Labs two years ago, a few months after they'd graduated the art school where they'd met. Rafe liked to fantasise that they were the modern, British version of Andy Warhol's Factory, but in reality, they were more of an agency than anything, representing all artists from writers to musicians, trying to find them the best work and protecting them from those who would take them for a ride. It wasn't a particularly lucrative business, but when she and Rafe had first set up shop, it was the happiest she had ever been; going to exhibitions, mingling with people who understood her, doing very little in the way of "Real Hard Work" and best of all, spending almost every hour of her existence with Rafe, her best friend and the one person she felt she could trust with her life. The East London building they had moved their business into had soon also become their home. It was unbelievably cheap, two floors, and almost falling down when they bought it, but some DIY

renovations had allowed them to set up, alongside a substantial office, something of a living space. They'd created their own bedrooms, installed a kitchen and bathroom and put together a "lounge" area, which doubled up as a waiting room for clients by day and a cosy living area that had seen too many parties on evenings and weekends. On quieter nights, they'd sit on the roof, gazing contentedly at the rather unglamorous view of the East End and laughing at private jokes born years ago at university as they drank £5 bottles of supermarket wine. However, those days had all but evaporated since Luna had come into the picture. *Bitch*, Mia growled in her head. *Bitch, bitch, bitch...*

"Mia!"

She cried out, knocking the cup with a flailing arm as she jumped out of her chair. The cold, murky contents splashed across her desk, devouring various documents, including the newspaper cutting of Luna, as they went. She tugged her earphones free and looked around to see Rafe and Luna behind her, looking startled and amused. "Didn't you hear me?" he said. "I must have called your name eight times."

"Sorry," she said, feeling a little flush prickling her cheeks as she snatched up the empty cup. "Oh, no..."

"I'll get a towel," Luna said, darting off towards the bathroom.

"You should give it a rest for today," Rafe said gently, rescuing a file on the edge of the desk before it became drenched. "It's past seven."

"It is? Wow." Mia's skirt had become wet in the spillage. Irritated, she tried to shake it dry. Rafe had taken over her desk and was already shutting down her computer. "Hey! I wasn't finished..."

"I saved it," he said. "Mia, leave it until tomorrow. You've been working way too hard lately."

She sighed. "All right." She hoisted herself up onto a dry part of her desk. "Rafe, why don't we go out tonight? Or rent a film or something? Just you and me."

"I'd love to, but I can't." The computer screen dissolved into darkness. He swung around on the chair to face her. "I'm going to meet that weird performance artist, remember? She wants me to go and see her show afterwards too."

He looked apologetic, but Mia couldn't suppress the resentment in her voice as she asked, "is Luna going with you?"

"No," Luna piped up, reappearing with a big wad of paper and causing Mia to nearly jump out of her skin. How did she slink around like that? She was so good at sneaking up on people. "I'll be here, though. I thought we could have a girls' night."

"Wow," Mia said sullenly, looking at her shoes. "That sounds like a blast."

She didn't look up as an uneasy silence fell onto the three of them. A moment later, Luna began mopping up the spilled coffee. Rafe gave an awkward laugh,

squeezing Mia's knee affectionately. She looked up then, unable to help herself from smiling. "I'll be home around eleven, okay?" he said. Then, lowering his voice, he added, "let Luna stay. It might do you both good."

Mia nodded, forcing a smile. "Yeah, maybe."

If I don't kill her.

* * *

Luna had taken everything off of her desk. She hummed away to herself as she soaked up the spilled drink with the towel.

Mia hid a scowl. "Give it here," she said. "I'll clean it up."

"It's okay." Luna offered one of her full-lipped, infuriatingly kind smiles. "I've done most of it. I might as well finish up."

Her hips seemed to shimmy in her tight and sickeningly trendy dress with every small step she took around Mia's desk, her angelic blonde hair, loose around her shoulders, swinging in time. It was a little askew - wonder why *that* could be? Mia thought bitterly - but when it caught the sun through the window, it seemed to glow. And it was probably incredibly soft to the touch. Mia shook her head, annoyed at herself. Where had that thought come from?

"Hey, Mia." She looked up, seeing that Luna was holding up the spoiled newspaper cutting of herself. "Reckon this will dry out?"

"I don't know," she said coldly, returning her things to the dry parts of her desk.

"What are the chances you would have spilt your drink on that clipping?" she said with her tinkling laugh. "Anybody would think you resented me."

"You think?" Mia muttered, not looking up.

Unfazed, Luna continued: "so what do you want to do tonight? I think we still have that champagne."

We? Mia thought bitterly. The girl was taking over. She cleared her throat. "Actually, Luna, I'm really tired. I think I might just get an early night."

"Oh," she said. She tossed the sodden towel onto the floor, much to Mia's derision. "Well, that's okay. Perhaps I can make you something to eat. Then I guess I'll just hang out until Rafe gets back..."

"No, Luna." It was only when Mia's fingers started to ache that she realised she had been digging them into the desk in order to suppress her frustration. "I mean... perhaps you should get back to your place and get an early night too."

A knowing smile crossed her lips. "Why? You want Rafe to yourself for a bit?"

"No." Mia tore her eyes away, looking for something to busy herself with. Something that would help her shut Luna, and her stupid assumptions, out. "Like I said, I'm going to bed. And I want the place to myself for a bit before I do."

Luna wasn't backing down. She joined Mia on her side of the desk, with that poised walk. She caught a hint of the expensive perfume Luna wore, the trademark scent she could never so much as dream of being able to afford herself. She wondered if Rafe liked it; if Rafe's clothes smelled of it too, his pillows, his sheets...

"Let me stay." It was almost a command. Mia shuddered and almost leapt away like a startled kitten as she felt one of Luna's long fingers tracing her spine. "I've been meaning to talk to you..."

Mia turned to her. "Look. Rafe is gone, and I don't want you here. That means you're trespassing. Get out."

"Ah, Rafe." She was smirking. "Miss him already?" Mia scowled, turning away. To her dismay, Luna really did have the audacity to follow her as she skulked out of the office into the room she and Rafe had made their living area. "See, this is what I want to talk to you about. I've seen your eyes light up when Rafe asks you to do something. How you glow when he thanks you. Compliments you. You're dying for it. Do you know how irritating it is, watching you two pussyfooting around each other when it's blatantly obvious to even the stupidest fuck what you both want?" Her eyes sparkled.

Mia fought to stifle her temper. She'd heard this kind of speech a thousand times.

"He asks you to bring him a drink, you rush to do it." When Mia fell ungraciously onto the battered sofa, Luna followed suit, gracefully perching beside her. Whether she brushed her thigh with her own on purpose or not Mia couldn't be sure. "He tells you to stop working, you decide you're tired anyway. He says jump..." She smirked again, curled fingers reaching to stroke Mia's hair, loose around her shoulders. She jerked away as if Luna were on fire.

"Luna," she said. "I'm going to tell you one more time to get out..."

She persisted, placing a hand on her knee. The way Rafe had done. But this was different. Her fingers crawled up her thigh, drawing an involuntary shudder as she leaned in, her voice taking on that coarse tone again as she whispered, "really, this is driving me nuts. Let me show you what you want..."