II

From then on, Maria would do what she could that her daughter left the house a little less often.

Sure, it was definitely for her own good. CDC guidelines, social distancing, minding occupancy limits, the old “you don’t know who they’ve talked to” speech, and all that jazz. In truth, it was good advice! But Maria had another reason to keep her daughter inside, though it fell quite short of being overtly sinister, it was for sure a little more insidious than she would have cared to admit…

“Honey, what do you think about making this tonight?”

It was a simple method, in hindsight. May was so predictable—whenever she saw something on Instagram or Facebook (really, any social media site would do) that involved baking, it took almost no work at all for her mother to gas her up into saying the five words that she had started to *love* hearing:

“I could totally make that!”

Really, it was getting it to her early in the morning. Better yet, late before they both went to bed. If Maria sprung it on her too late, she would have already made plans with her friends. But if she brought up a recipe and stayed on it, she could *usually* have May working on something like it within just a few hours. Half of the time, she didn’t even need to read the recipe! May was just as talented behind the oven as her mother was with a knife and a fork, and woe betide anyone who thought to doubt her ability to piece apart recipes with nothing more than a little extra time and a mama who could and would reinforce her thoughts on the matter!

Even though the existential dread that were the hallmark of the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic were long behind her… well, it didn’t mean that she should have had to go on without getting in some comfort food now and again, did it?!

This was a happy little compromise that meant she could ensure that, even if May *did* insist on going out with her friends (or even if she wanted to get a job—God forbid!) her poor old mother could still keep hitting that sweet sugar high that had been getting her through the days.

After all, it was the little things that had been helping everyone get through *these trying times*.

“Urp.”

Of course, they were about the only little things that Maria had been thinking about for a few months now. Living with her daughter and more or less gorging herself on sweets, cakes, cookies and pies throughout the days had meant that she had put on a fair amount of weight since the pandemic started. Which wasn’t too surprising, in hindsight, but the eyeful of her chubby belly as it lapped over the waistband of her pajama bottoms always seemed to throw her for a loop.

“Didn’t I just order these last week?”

Running a hand over the swollen belly flesh that rolled and folded over the buried elastic waistband, Maria made a face as she contemplated just where all of this extra cuddle fluff was coming from. Of course it was obvious that it was because she was wolfing down enough sweets to rent herself out as a day-olds bin, but there was a certain level of cognitive dissonance when seeing the handiwork of all those little treats and what they could do to her waistline.

Her thighs were thicker, rubbing together now with every step and wearing the insides of every pant leg thin with friction. Her arms were soft and wobbly, packing tight every sleeve that she dared to shove them through. And even though the mask had helped to hide hit for some time now, there was almost no denying the fact that she was getting an awfully noticeable double chin. Those Zoom meetings had shown her that she wasn’t the only one for sure, but she couldn’t help but think that perhaps her face was getting a little chubbier than everyone else’s… and faster too!

“Hrmmm…”

Drumming her hands on the outermost swell of her tummy, Maria weighed the pros and cons of giving into another craving for one of those cake balls that May had made for her. They were supposedly there to last her until she got home from hanging out with her friends—little pops of colorful flavor that she could treat herself to whenever she got a particularly bad craving. Combined with the batch of cookies that she had been privy to this morning before May left, you would have thought that it would have been enough to tide her over.

But it was just now two in the afternoon—she was out of cookies and down to her last two cake balls.

“I suppose *one more* couldn’t hurt.”

Maria’s footsteps made the floorboards creak beneath her as she toddled tummy-first into the kitchen, practically licking her chops at the thought of more sweets for her to eat. Grabbing the handle with one hand, whipping the fridge door open, and sticking her seat far out into the kitchen as she playfully searched for the latest in a long line of snacks for the day was all just a show. A little play acting so as to better convince herself of the argument that even *she* knew was coming…

“Should I just eat them both now?” she asked aloud, “It’s not like May would want any…”

The deliberation hadn’t even been out for a moment before she popped the first one in her mouth; whole. A not-quite bite-sized ball of cake batter, chocolate, and frosting that had been painstakingly decorated had been undone in a few seconds flat!

“What the hell.”

And there went the second one—the first not even fully chewed and swallowed before Maria had popped it past her lips.

Swishing her hips happily back and forth like the cat that ate the canary, Maria’s wide bottom sloshed from side to side as she backed her heft out from the cold cavern of her fridge. Hip-checking the door shut, her whole body rippled with impact as she stifled a chipper little burp.

“scuse me.”

And then she started wiggle-waddling back towards her spot on the couch.

The whole day off and nothing to do except wonder what she would order for dinner tonight? The whole house to herself? It sounded like as good of an excuse as any to queue up Hulu and start binging some of her favorite oldies…

Maybe she could call up that bakery downtown and see if they delivered? She could swear that she saw in listed in the DoorDash options…

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It hadn’t been the first time that Maria had gone a little overboard in the name of “Quarantine Rules”, and it almost certainly wouldn’t be the last.

“Oogh…”

Laying with her back to the cushions of her couch as the TV blared in front of her, Maria was a dull, glassy-eyed mess of contentment. Her long brown hair was frazzled with the constant tossing and turning of her gluttony-induced nap, her cheeks still dotted and speckled with the remains of whatever hadn’t made it to touch her tongue. Her heavy stomach swelled far out from the depth of the couch, packed taut with the night’s overindulgence.

She ran one thick-fingered hand sleepily over the dome of her gut, the crease between her belly rolls airing out thanks to its volume and position laying presented out for all to see. Her chubby toes clenched in agony as she struggled to keep her eyes open for the remainder of her *Frasier* marathon—so full that she could hardly see straight, let alone contemplate whether or not she had it in her to take even a single bite more.

Maria could hear the contents of her stomach sloshing and bubbling beneath her hand, groaning in a painful pleasure as her body struggled to contend with the truly heroic amounts of food that she had put away over the course of the day…

“I think I ate too much…”

The sound of the knob to the front door jiggling slightly had barely registered to the overstuffed sow until it was too late. May had come home with a bag under her arm and the smell of whiskey on her breath—she and her friends had no doubt hit the bar once more that night and, like always, May had been the good girl that she always had been and brought her mother a little something to apologize for not being home to make her one of her favorite treats.

“Jesus Christ, mama.” She whistled, “You feelin’ alright?”

“Feelin’—URRRRP—fine…”

Maria rubbed her stomach with a wince in her eyes as she tried her best to keep her eye on May. As much as she *wanted* to play the part of a good mother to a twenty-something, asking how her night was or if she had fun, Maria was *really* fucking full. If she hadn’t woken up in the middle of the night to back pain from sleeping on the couch once before, she would have just let herself drift off then and there some few hours ago!

“You sure?” May asked with a scrunch of her face, “You look kinda sick…”

“M’good, I swear…” Maria’s voice was thick and heavy, even as her eyes slowly began to focus on the paper bag that her daughter was holding underneath her arm, “Whatcha got for me?”

“This?” May had seemed shocked by the question, visibly skeptical that her mother could even be *thinking* of food in her obviously stuffed state, “Oh, well I didn’t know if you’d had dinner yet, so I ordered a couple of extra boneless wings…”

“ooogh…”

Consciously, she knew that she shouldn’t. Consciously, she had known that she couldn’t even *attempt* to eat something that heavy. At least, not if she wanted to keep it all down. But there was a greedy little part of her that knew that she wanted to at least try. Maybe smell it a little before it got put in the fridge.

“Do you… want me to put it in the microwave or the fridge?” May asked with some trepidation.

Putting it in the microwave meant that her mother would be eating it earlier than the morning. It’d be ready with just the pop of a few buttons. Putting it in the fridge meant that she wasn’t in any hurry to try and test the limits of her stomach any further than she already had. Thankfully for all those involved, Maria opted for the latter choice.

“Fridge, please.” She burbled out, “I’m stuffed.”

“I can tell.” May laughed a little as she kicked a Zaxby’s bag out of the way, “Well, I’m glad that I told you not to wait up on me at least—did you have a good night?”

Maria’s sausage fingers drummed slyly on the taut surface of her gut, her mouth still wet with desire as she contemplated whether or not she had told May the right answer as to where she should have put those wings—even now they were calling her from the inside of the fridge.

“I had a great time, hun.” She said with a slow purr, “Now… do you think you could help your mama up?”