I

As Maria and May settled into the “new normal” that everyone seemed to always be talking about—in and of as far as this whole “living life during a pandemic” thing—both found themselves making more and more changes to suit these uncertain times that they found themselves in.

Whether or not these changes had been for the best depended on who you asked.

In order to cut down on potential exposures to the virus, most of the staff at Maria’s job had been reassigned to remote workstations. The nuts and bolts of her responsibilities at the company could be done from behind *any* computer rather than just the ones located in the central office and, thankfully, could also be done without any pants. Aside from the biweekly Zoom meetings that the upper echelons of the supervisory team had to endure, Maria barely had to worry about anything more than going over data, punching in numbers, and making sure that everything lined up with what everyone else was doing from their own workstations—most of whom were, undoubtedly, working without pants as well.

The real treat for her, aside from not having to get up and go to work every day in the traditional sense, had been having her daughter home for the duration of however long this “new normal” seemed that it would last. May’s decision to take a year off from college had been a long time coming after a particularly stressful first year away from home, but it was better late than never as far as her mother was concerned. Having an empty house to come home to had been so depressing!

Now that her little girl was home for the foreseeable future (at *least* until next fall) things felt like they were back to the way that they should have been… with the added bonus of May’s semi-professionally honed skills behind and oven and a new-and-improved deadly aim with a frosting gun.

“Hey mama—what do you think about these?”

May unveiled her confectionary creations, having spent most of the morning thus far working on her frosting skills. The Pink Vanilla had become a staple in the household, on May’s Instagram, and in Maria’s diet. And while she never thought much about ways that her daughter could *improve* the recipe or the look of everyone’ favorite treat, she was always happy to encourage her to try.

“Ooh~” Maria’s chubby fingers wiggled as she peeled her eyes away from her computer screen, “Those look *divine*~”

Before Maria could snatch up one of the delectable treats from their place on the decorative platter May whipped back around towards the kitchen, much to the confusion and ire of her sweets-addled mama. Her momentum almost sent her rocking out of her chair, forcing her to steady herself quickly against the desk.

“You know I’ve got to take a picture first!” May laughed as she placed the dish on the kitchen’s island, “How is anyone gonna know how good everything looks if I let you eat it all?”

Maria grumbled slightly to herself at having to wait for even just a moment longer. Despite having been a grown woman and the one who had preached patience and “all good things come to those who wait” for the majority of May’s life, it was a little difficult to be denied that sugar high that she’d gotten so used to. Even if it *was* only for a couple of minutes. Add into the fact that she had to *work* in the first place and… *ugh*.

She needed a little something sweet to help her get through the day sometimes—was that *so* wrong?

“Alright mama, how many did you want?” May asked with a little laugh after she was sure that she’d gotten the right shots in

“Just leave the tray over here, and I’ll pick off of ‘em while I work.” Maria had practically been salivating, “Whatever I don’t eat, you can have—deal?”

But both women knew that there wouldn’t be so much as a crumb left when it came to those cupcakes. Or, for that matter, if it had been anything else that May had whipped up in the kitchen! Just as it hadn’t mattered when she tried her hand at sticky buns, or that cake recipe. The profiteroles, cookies, and ice cream balls had gone down much the same… come to think of it, there hadn’t been a time since this whole thing had started that Maria hadn’t found herself practically licking the plate clean by the end of one of her little indulgences!

*What can I say, my daughter’s a real whiz in the kitchen?*

It had certainly left its impact on Maria—and in more ways than one.

Since May had been home for the duration of her college’s quarantine, and now the added time that had elapsed since she had decided to take the year off, her mother had grown quite accustomed to having a steady stash of sweets around whenever she deemed fit to pilfer from it! Her already thickset figure had filled out into a chunky, matronly figure that filled out the seat of her sweatpants and the cushion on her couch. Her hips broadening and her tummy growing fuller meant that almost every week or so harkened the Amazon delivery truck with a new addition to her wardrobe in tow.

Thankfully, she hadn’t minded it *too* much. Her social media feed showed that just about all of her friends were filling out in one way or another since the pandemic, and it wasn’t like it was *that* bad. Sure her tummy had started to hang a little lower and her chest was getting flabbier, but it wasn’t like it was her fault! Honestly, what would have anyone else have done when they were cooped up with a stress-baker like May? Someone who was capable of creating sweet, gooey, *delicious*…

“Wow, were they *good* mama?” May’s laugh came back through the living room before her mother had known what hit her, “I ain’t even changed all the way yet!”

“Chngd?” Maria repeated with a mouthful of cupcake, “Whr yu gng?”

“I told you, I’m gonna meet up with the girls—it’s been so long since we’ve all gotten to get together, what with everything going on.”

May had changed out of her pajamas and slipped into her best casual wear. High-waisted, flare-legged jeans and a pastel frilly top, her long blonde hair down. The only thing that was missing was her makeup, which she was busy applying in the hallway mirror as they spoke. It had been so long since she’d dressed up, Maria had almost forgotten about the fact that they *could* dress up. Much less, that May would still be able to fit into her old clothes…

*Because, you know, she hasn’t gotten as tubby as you have.*

Maria made a small noise sounding her discontent as May continued to doll herself up in the mirror. She had plenty to be ill at ease about, given the current state of… *everything*… but there were some things that she found herself fretting about more than others. While she was concerned with her daughter going out and being safe, wearing a mask and all that, and whether or not her friends were going to be conscientious about where they’d been and who they’d been in contact with (which, judging by at least a few of her friends, they most definitely wouldn’t be). But perhaps most importantly was the fact that it was getting *dangerously* close to eleven ‘o’ clock in the morning and May had spent all of her time on *one* measly cupcake dish. Baking it, frosting it, and making sure that it looked and tasted excellent for sure, but this was about the time that she normally put in…

Well, to put it bluntly, something else that Maria would wind up snacking on.

And it may have been a selfish concern on Maria’s part, but she couldn’t help but get just a *little* bit squirrely at the idea that her daughter hadn’t mixed up some batter or grabbed her mixing bowl—she hadn’t even so much as looked at a recipe yet! Didn’t she know how much her mama depended on that sugar high to get her through her days?

“Are you… sure that’s a good idea?” Maria asked with a little hairiness to her tone, “I mean… you know, do you even *know* where your mask is?”

“It’s right here, mama.” May laughed as she held up the stylish polka-dot one that her mother had ordered for her a few days ago (*ungrateful*), “Don’t worry, I’ll definitely be back before dinner.”

*Before dinner*?! That was so many hours away! How did she expect her poor mother to make it that far without something sweet in the house?!

“And if I think that we’re gonna be out a little longer, I’ll give you a call.” May continued, much to her mother’s horror, “You know, a lot of bars and stuff have opened back up again, and if we all head back to Ginger’s apartment, we won’t be violating the—”

“You’re thinking of staying out *later*?”

She had used her best “mom” voice to get her point across, and make a point she had. May stopped dead in her tracks with a look that wouldn’t have been out of place on a deer crossing the road late at night! May’s eyes widened as her stance switched to something a little more defensive.

“What, you don’t want me to go out?”

And here, Maria faltered. Of *course* she wanted her daughter to go out. She wanted May to have all of the fun that she could—she’d known firsthand just how crazy it could feel when you were cooped up in the house all day with nothing to do. What she *wanted* was for May to go out after she’d put something in the oven for her dear, devoted mother before she left!

…that was horrible selfish of her, wasn’t it?

“No… of course I do.” Maria took a step back and realized that she was being a little needy, “I just… you know, want you to be safe. Okay?”

“Of course, mom.” May softened back up with a smile on her face, “And don’t think that I forgot about you—there’s a cheesecake in the fridge that’s cooling, should be ready by one or two.”

A wet, hurried kiss on her mother’s forehead and May was already at the door.

“Love you!”

With a slam of the door, Maria was almost hesitated to shout after her daughter *well why didn’t you say so?!*

Honestly, getting so worried about not having anything to eat. She should have known that her daughter wouldn’t have let her starve. And with *cheesecake* no less, it was almost like May had been keeping it in her back pocket in case her mother had objected to her going out with her friends tonight!

*Oh me of little faith*…

Pushing off from her desk with a grunt, Maria toddled hungrily towards the fridge and opened it just to make sure that the cake was there. Sure enough, right there on the top rack was the unmistakable “cheesecake pan” that May had brought back with her from her dorm back in Charleston. The graham cracker crust had crumbled a bit to where she could see the telltale brown particles just over the plastic lid.

“Have to wait until one or two, though…”

She had said it to herself with a little pout that only she could hear, testing the still liquid-y batter with a probing finger just to make sure that this wasn’t just more of her daughter’s culinary red tape. All of that anxiety over whether or not she would have gotten a snack in the first place had made her hungry, and the fact that she was going to have to postpone her cheesecake until *after* lunch instead of before, well…

Maria knew that she was going to have to make sure that *this* little fiasco never repeated itself.