

Excerpt from *'Rosalie & Mika'*

In a quick, fluid movement that took Rosalie by surprise but one she found completely natural, he clasped her hand and propelled her into the cool, dim interior of the large main bar. It was quiet and still, only the odd expansive creak from the many chairs and tables and the muffled drift of the pool noise penetrated past the heavy curtains that framed the folding glass doors and kept the worst of the afternoon heat away.

He stopped and let her hand go as they reached the side end of the main bar top. Here were stacked in three columns, round black trays.

'Here,' he said lightly and gently frisbee'd one towards her.

She laughed and snatched it deftly from him, 'thanks.'

He took another from the pile, placed it centrally on top of his open palm, placed his other hand into the small of his back with his elbow at a right angle to his body and smoothly walked towards her.

'See?'

His eyes held hers with a challenging, humorous look as he came to a halt directly in front of her. So close she could have reached out and brushed a strand of honey hair that had fallen slightly over his forehead. The thought stirred a suppressed feeling in her stomach that lurched softly to and fro and tinkled gently like a bell. Rosalie knew with an old instinct that she should look away, try to wrest the situation back somehow but the air was murmuring with the crackle of attraction between them. No, she thought, no, it can't happen. She tore her eyes from his noticing that he took a quick, sharp intake of breath, almost like a release, as she did so.

'Ok, doesn't look too hard,' she muttered and placed the tray on her palm where it wobbled and slid to the floor with a clatter. 'Oh!' she bit her lip and giggled, picking the tray up and trying again.

This time it fell forward and hit the tiled floor, she tried again but each time the tray fell.

'My hand is too small,' Rosalie said holding her palm up.

'No,' he answered, shaking his head, a grin on his face, 'you're not holding it central enough, there's a knack, trust me, come here.'

He stood behind her, close enough so that she could sense the outline of his body, muscular and taut like a bowstring. She felt her own body, normally so coiled and poised, faintly quiver like a blade of grass caught in a soft breeze as he brought his arm and hand around the front of her. She tipped her head back slightly as his face came down by her shoulder. She could smell a cool, clean scent like freshly washed, crisp, linen from his skin and she fought the urge to tip her head back and rest it against his chest.

‘Here,’ his voice was low in her ear as he took her hand and turned the palm upwards so the back of her hand was covered by his palm. His hand was warm and dry. ‘Can you feel that?’ He moved her hand under his, ‘there is a tiny dot, here, feel it.’

Rosalie felt with her palm and, sure enough, there was a small raised nub in the plastic on the underside of the tray.

‘Make sure that is directly in the centre of your palm and the tray won’t fall, here, try it.’

He moved his hand slowly from hers and she rested the tray exactly as he had shown her.

‘Oh!’ she breathed, ‘you’re right...’

She held the tray out in front of her, steady on her palm, fascinated how such an inconsequential thing as millimetre of plastic could make such a difference.

Mika remained standing behind her, unwilling to move away. A spicy, musky scent came from the rich hair that spilled luxuriantly down her back and he longed to take a handful and bury his face in it. The scent was alluring and sensual and hinted at something almost forbidden. His mouth grew dry as he watched the curve of her face and the dark, feathery lashes brush her cheek. Her skin had a dusky complexion like a ripe pear. She turned suddenly, her light eyes shining up at him.

‘I think I’ve got it.’

‘I think you have.’ He responded quietly, his eyes searching her face.

Rosalie felt time slow as they stood there, facing each other. Even the sounds from the pool drifting through the doors seemed to dwindle. The air in the bar was still and heavy with the afternoon warmth that filtered through the curtains. She knew the spell needed to be broken but was unsure how to. Suddenly, an unwelcome solution was provided.

‘Well, well,’ shouted a raucous voice, ‘is this what’s meant by shadowing?!’