
NOVEMBER WEDDINGS

Campus Life Book 11

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Jenny Plumb
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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

Natalia Diaz looked at herself in the mirror and smiled. Today was November first and she always tried to start the first of the month with a positive attitude. Her new pink dress flattered her curves in all the right ways and complemented her light brown complexion. Even her black wavy hair appeared coiffed instead of wildly disarrayed this morning. She thought she could still pass for twenty-five, even though she'd turned thirty-four last month. Nodding at her reflection, she opened the bathroom door and went to the kitchen.

"Camila?" she called out when she didn't see her little sister. When she got no answer, she frowned and went down the hall. The spare bedroom had become Camila's room two months ago, when she had moved in with Natalia to attend Northern Oregon University. Natalia knocked on the closed door and opened it without waiting for a response. Scowling as she took in her sister's sleeping form, Natalia glanced at the alarm clock on the nightstand.

"Camila!" she scolded, sounding more like their mother than she wanted to admit.

The sleeping woman stirred and mumbled, "What?"

Natalia walked over to her and lightly smacked her sister's hip. "It's almost seven-thirty. We're supposed to leave in fifteen minutes."

Camila groaned. "I'm not going."

Natalia's eyebrows furrowed in worry as she sat on the edge of the bed and reached out to feel her sister's forehead. "Are you sick?" She'd only been in charge of her baby sister for two months. Their parents wouldn't have anything good to say if Camila was already ill.

Camila shoved her sister's hand away and pulled the covers up over her head. "No, I'm not sick; I'm just not going."

"What do you mean, you're not going? It's Sunday. We go to church."

Suddenly sitting up, Camila glared at her big sister. "No, *you* go to church, Natalia. You go to church because that's what Mom and Dad taught you to do."

"What?" Natalia shook her head. "No, I don't. I go because it's the right thing to do."

"Exactly," Camila responded. She flopped back down on her side and pulled the covers up over her head.

Natalia scowled, and her cheeks heated up. She slapped her sister's hip a lot harder than before. "I go because I like it there. It's beautiful, and I get to see my friends. If you don't want to go, that's fine, but you don't have to be judgmental about it."

When Camila said nothing back, Natalia stood, stormed out, and closed the door firmly behind her. She went to her room, slipped on her light pink pumps, grabbed her purse, and headed out the door, locking it behind herself.

During her fifteen-minute drive, Natalia tried to calm down, but it didn't work. She didn't understand her baby sister at all. Maybe it was the age gap. Natalia had been sixteen when Camila, the last of her five siblings, had been born. Maybe it was lingering jealousy. They were the only girls, and Camila's Quinceañera had been twice the size of Natalia's. Logically, she

knew her parents simply had more resources and money later in life, but it still irked her. Or maybe it was simply that her little sister had turned out to be a spoiled brat because their parents let her get away with anything and everything.

The two months they'd been living together hadn't gone all that well, but this was the first time Camila had flat out refused to do something. Maybe she should have seen it coming. Their arguments had escalated over the past month because Camila started coming home later and later each night. She always had some excuse, and while Natalia couldn't prove it, she often felt as though her sister was lying to her.

Two hours later, Natalia was in a much better mood. Several of her friends had complimented her new dress, and instead of judging her for not forcing her little sister to come to church, they sympathized and commented on the sad state of the younger generation's morality.

Rejuvenated, Natalia parked in the driveway of her cozy suburban home, ready to forgive her sister. Even the crisp, chilly morning air refreshed her as Natalia walked to her front door. She was about to stick her key in but found the door already unlocked. Maybe her sister had gotten up, after all, and done some repenting. She opened the door, toed off her pumps, and slid her feet into the slippers she kept by the front door. Picking up her shoes, she walked down the hall to her room to put them away and noticed that her sister's door was still shut. After putting her shoes and purse away, she knocked on the bedroom door and walked in, hoping that Camila hadn't fallen asleep yet again.

Natalia froze in shock. Right there in *her* house, a young man with no shirt on was kissing her baby sister. Milliseconds after the door opened, the young man jumped out of Camila's bed. Natalia could see a bulge in the young man's khaki shorts, and before her sister had time to yank the covers up, Natalia got an eyeful of her sister's naked chest.

While Natalia stood there frozen, the young man leaned down, grabbed his white tee-shirt off the floor, and yanked it over his head.

"Shut the door!" Camila yelled, holding the blankets against her chest.

The young man grabbed a button-down white and black checkered shirt and slid an arm in.

Natalia came out of her stupor and let rage take over. She bent down, grabbed the slipper off her foot, and chucked it at the young man as she yelled, "Get out of my house!"

He ducked the projectile and held his hands out in surrender. "Please, just listen."

Natalia grabbed her other slipper and held it up like a weapon.

"Natalia!"

Ignoring her sister's plea, Natalia stalked toward the young man.

His eyes opened wide, he grabbed his sneakers off the floor, and darted around Natalia out the bedroom door.

She rushed after him. "Get out of my house and stay away from my sister!" She was able to slap his shoulder and back three times with the slipper before he made it out the door and onto the lawn.

"Don't you dare come back!" Natalia shouted, brandishing the slipper at him before slamming the door and locking it.

Natalia leaned against the front door, took a deep breath, and tried to calm down. She looked at the slipper in her hand and thought about using it on her sister as well, before tossing it on the floor.

Camila came rushing out of her room, fully clothed but slightly disheveled. "How could you?" she demanded, gesturing wildly toward the door. "You had no right to kick him out!"

"I had no right?" Natalia yelled, pushing herself away from the door and taking a few steps toward Camila. "I had every

right. This is my house, Camila. You are barely eighteen, and I come home to find you half-naked with a man I've never met! Mom and Dad would never have let you move to Oregon if they thought you were going to sleep around."

"I'm not sleeping around! I don't need anyone's permission to have a boyfriend, and Alejandro loves me."

Gasping, Natalia put a hand over her mouth. She muttered a little prayer before pointing a finger at her little sister and stating firmly, "That Cholo does not love you, Camila."

Camila gulped, and her lip trembled. "Don't call him that." A tear ran down her face. "He's a good man with a legitimate job, and he loves me."

Natalia's anger went away as quickly as it had come. Who knew what that young man had said or done to get into Camila's bed. Memories of her own bad choices at eighteen flashed through Natalia's head, and guilt washed over her. She cautiously walked over to Camila, pulled her into a hug, and apologized, "Lo siento hermanita."

More tears spilled out as the younger woman tried to push Natalia away. "He *loves* me," she insisted.

"Okay, he loves you," Natalia agreed, holding her sister tighter so she couldn't get away.

"He's not a Cholo." Camila gave her one more half-hearted shove and then rested her head on Natalia's shoulder.

Natalia sighed. "Okay, he's not. *But*," she nudged her sister away so she could look into Camila's eyes, "that still wouldn't make this okay, Camila. You're living in *my* house, and you've been sneaking around dating this boy behind my back and lying to me."

More tears spilled out and Camila nodded. "I know, and I'm sorry, but I knew you wouldn't approve."

A sudden thought hit Natalia. "Did you skip church so that you could invite him over?"

"What? No! Of course not. I just didn't want to go, and then

he texted me, and I knew you'd be gone for a while so..." Camila frowned. "You're back early."

Natalia shook her head. "Service always ends at nine-thirty."

"But then you get breakfast."

"No, I take *you* to breakfast when you come to church with me."

"Oh."

Natalia used her thumb to wipe her sister's tears away and then pulled her across the room to sit next to her on the couch.

"Tell me everything," Natalia demanded.

"Everything?"

"Where you met, how long you've been dating, where he works, how old he is...everything."

Over the next half an hour, Natalia slowly grew to believe that her first impression of the young man had been correct. He was twenty-five, his 'legitimate' job was working at the dodgy race track on the east side of town, and he lived with two of his male cousins, who also worked at the track. Camila and Alejandro, or 'Big Al' as his friends called him, met at a frat party last month that Natalia never would have let her sister attend if she'd known about it.

After hearing the story, Natalia almost told Camila about her disastrous first love, but even fourteen years later, that was too painful for her to talk about. Instead, she laid down the law. She told Camila that if she wanted to keep living with her, there would be no more late nights. Big Al would be required to have a respectable Sunday dinner with them next week. And he'd have to pass Natalia's interrogation before they could go on another date.

Monday afternoon, Oscar Jackson walked across Northern Oregon University's campus at a brisk pace, too annoyed with

himself to casually stroll. He'd just had lunch with his good friend and fellow professor, Aaron Sherman. Normally, after lunch with Aaron, Oscar would have had a spring in his step, but not today. Today, Aaron had told him the 'good news' that he was now engaged to his girlfriend, Mia. Oscar shook his head. He *knew* he should be happy for them, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't push away the thought that their engagement was ridiculous. They'd only been dating for six months. It was sure to end in disaster.

Oscar transferred his briefcase to his left hand, stuck his right hand in the pocket of his coat to ward off the chilly November air, and sighed. Aaron wasn't ridiculous; Oscar was. Aaron and Mia truly did make a sweet couple. But it was nearly impossible for Oscar to think about marriage without thinking about divorce. Specifically, his divorce, his failed marriage, and the betrayal he still felt when thinking about his ex-wife.

He made it to the Louise Center for Social Sciences and wrenched open the door to the lobby. As he walked down to the large lecture hall, he tried to focus on the topic he'd be teaching today, History of Art in America. Talking about art always improved his mood, and American art in particular. Art was his happy place, even if he had no talent to create it himself.

Forcing a smile, he opened the door to the lecture hall. The two hundred chairs were already half filled. The room had stadium seating, with little folding desktops attached to each chair. He noticed his current favorite student, Jessie, sitting in the front row next to the red-haired woman he seemed to always be with. Oscar had first met Jessie while teaching Introduction to Art History over the summer. Oscar appreciated the lanky young man's enthusiasm for the subject and his often unique view on the artists they'd discussed. Oscar gave Jessie a small nod before setting his briefcase on the table at the front of the class.

He took out his phone to check the time—fifteen minutes to pull his head out of his personal history and focus on art history.

Jessie walked over to him as Oscar took out his lecture notes. "Hey, Professor Jackson."

"Hi, Jessie. What can I do for you?"

Jessie pointed toward his friend and said, "Olivia and I went on this tour of the Lone Fir Cemetery over the weekend. Did you know Eliza Barchus was buried there?"

"I did. Oregon is home to quite a few great American artists."

Jessie nodded. "I looked her up this morning, and I know she's not super famous, but she was famous in her time. Do you think she'd be a good subject for the paper we're supposed to write over Thanksgiving break? I don't know if I can prove that she influenced American culture or not, but I'd like to give it a shot."

"I think she's a great choice."

"Awesome. Thanks."

An hour later, Oscar wrapped up his lecture on the Civil War's influence on American Art. He then gave the students their reading assignment for the night and excused everyone.

He stuck his notes in his briefcase while the students filed out. Jessie and Olivia stayed behind as usual and came up to stand beside his desk. Before Jessie had a chance to say anything, Oscar saw movement out of the corner of his eye. There was a loud clatter as one of the last students in the room stumbled and fell down two steps onto the main floor where she lay still.

Oscar's military training kicked in, and he rushed to the fallen girl while giving orders. "Jessie, call 911. The rest of you give her some space."

He knelt beside the girl, checked her pulse and breathing, scanned her for any visible injuries or blood, and checked her wrists and neck for medical alert bracelets. He was prepared to tell Jessie what to say to the 911 operator, but to his surprise, Jessie had that handled.

Jessie spoke calmly and clearly into the phone. "Hi, I'm at Northern Oregon University in the Louise Center for Social

Sciences building, and one of my classmates just passed out seconds ago."

After a short pause, Jessie took the phone away from his ear and asked Oscar, "Pulse and breathing?"

"They're fine," Oscar said. "And no obvious injuries or bleeding."

While Jessie relayed that information to the 911 operator, Oscar patted the young woman's hand a couple of times with no results. He looked at the few remaining students. "Does anyone here know her?"

Olivia said, "I've said hi to her a few times. She usually sits in the row behind us, and I borrowed a pencil from her once. I think her name is Cami."

Jessie shook his head. "Camila."

"Right," Olivia nodded. "Camila."

"Any idea why she might have fainted?"

"None," Jessie said.

Oscar looked at the other students. "Anyone else know her?" When no one spoke up, Oscar waved a hand toward the door, "Okay then, everyone other than Jessie and Olivia, go about your day. We'll make sure she receives medical attention." Focusing on Jessie, he said, "Go wait by the lobby doors so you can show the EMTs where we are." Turning to Olivia, he gestured for her to kneel down on the other side of Camila. "Come hold her hand and talk to her while I get my laptop and look for her emergency contact in the system."

It only took seconds for Oscar to find it. He got out his cell phone and dialed someone named Natalia.

A female voice answered, "Office of Financial Aid and Student Resources."

"Oh... I must have a wrong number," Oscar said.

"Professor Jackson?" the female voice said.

What the hell was going on? How did she know who he was?

Before his stunned pause became too awkward, the female

voice said, "I can see your name on my caller ID. Does one of your students need an appointment for financial aid?"

Coming out of his stupor, he said, "No, I'm sorry. I was trying to reach a Natalia Diaz, but clearly I've got—"

"This is Natalia," the woman said.

The pieces clicked in his head. "You work here at NOU?"

"Yeeees," she dragged out the word as if talking to someone who was a bit slow.

He realized he'd met Natalia in passing before. More than once. She was the friendly woman with the infectious smile at the front desk at the Financial Aid office. "Do you know someone named Camila?" he asked.

"That's my sister." Her voice went from friendly to panicked in a split second. "She takes your class. Is everything okay?"

"Your sister seems to have fainted."

"What!"

Just as he was about to explain, Camila groaned. "Hold on, she's waking up." He kept the cell phone to his ear as he went to kneel next to Camila.

"Camila?" Olivia said.

Camila put a hand up to her forehead and tried to sit up. Olivia automatically tried to help.

"Try to lie still," Oscar said gently. "The EMTs are on their way."

"EMTs?" Natalia's voice was thin and high-pitched over the phone. "Is she okay?"

"As far as I can tell, she just passed out," Oscar said calmly over the phone. "But she's awake now. I don't see any external damages. The EMTs have been called."

Camila sat up all the way and stared at Oscar with confusion. "EMTs? What..." She looked around the classroom, her eyebrows furrowed. "Am I in class? Did I pass out?"

"Dios mio," Natalia muttered.

Focusing on Camila but keeping the phone to his ear, Oscar

answered her, "You did. Do you have any medical issues that could cause that?" he asked.

"No." She reached out her left arm to grab her books that had fallen and then hissed in pain and held her left shoulder with her right hand.

"Be still," Oscar reiterated. "You fell down a couple of steps; you could have internal injuries."

"But I—" Camila's eyebrows were still furrowed in confusion as she trailed off.

"She fell?" Natalia demanded in Oscar's ear. "Where are you? The Louise Center?"

Before Oscar could answer, Jessie came back in, followed by two EMTs pushing a stretcher and carrying first aid bags.

Oscar and Olivia quickly got out of the way so the EMTs could take over.

A male EMT said to Camila, "Hi, I'm Isaac, and this is my partner Sophie. Can you tell me what happened?"

"I don't know," Camila said. "I just stood up to leave class, and then I felt super dizzy and... passed out, I guess."

While Isaac and Sophie talked with Camila, took her vitals, and assessed her injuries, Oscar finally returned his attention to the phone. "The EMTs are here. Yes, we're in the Louise Center."

"I'm the only one here in the office right now," Natalia said, sounding close to tears. "My co-worker is off sick, and my boss is on vacation. I can't leave without finding someone to cover for me. Can I put you on hold?"

"Why don't you just stay on the phone with me, and—" Oscar realized he'd been put on hold and sighed. The Financial Aid office was only three blocks away from the Louise Center, so he was going to suggest that she wait until the EMTs made a decision, but maybe this was better.

While the EMTs were taking Camila's blood pressure and

testing her blood sugar, Oscar turned to Jessie and Olivia. "Thank you for helping."

"Sure," Olivia said.

"Of course," Jessie said at the same time.

"You guys don't have to stick around," Oscar said. "The EMTs are here. There's not much else you can do."

Olivia and Jessie looked at each other, and Jessie nodded. "Yeah, all right." He gave Oscar a smile and said, "We'll see you Wednesday, in class."

"See you then."

Once they were gone, Oscar focused back on the EMTs and Camila. They had her up off the floor and into one of the lecture hall chairs and were talking to her.

"The hospital?" Camila asked, shaking her head. "No, I can't go to the hospital. I'm already late for my next class."

"When someone passes out, it's really best to get checked out by a doctor," Isaac said. "If not the hospital, you could go to the campus clinic."

Camila shook her head again. "I told you I woke up late and didn't have time to eat anything before class. It's just low blood sugar. I'll grab a bagel and some juice, and I'll be fine."

"Your blood sugar is slightly low, but within normal range. Your blood pressure is lower than average, but again, within normal range. The campus clinic is next door." Isaac pointed in that direction. "Drop ins are more than welcome, and there's no charge for your first appointment, whether you have insurance or not."

Camila bit her lip, clearly thinking that over.

Oscar said, "I could walk over there with you, keep you company while you wait."

"Oh, thank you," Camila said, "That's so nice of you to offer, but I really don't think I need to get checked out. I need to get to my next class." She stood and took a couple of steps toward the door. "If I get dizzy again today, I'll stop by the clinic tomorrow."

"Camila," Oscar said firmly, stopping her forward momentum.

"Yes, Professor Jackson?"

He showed her the phone that had been pressed against his ear, before putting it back. "I'm on hold with your sister, Natalia."

The determination evaporated from her face. "What?"

"I called your emergency contact while you were passed out. She put me on hold."

"Oh no," Camila muttered.

Oscar didn't think that was a good sign. Clearly, the sisters weren't on the best of terms. Before Camila could make any rash decisions, he used his authoritative tone to get some compliance. "I'd like you to wait here until she gets back on the line. She sounded really worried."

Biting her lip, Camila nodded and went to sit on a chair.

"Thank you," Oscar said.

Sophie had been filling out paperwork while everyone else had been talking, and once Camila sat, Sophie handed the paperwork to her. "I'd appreciate it if you could look this over and sign the bottom."

"What is it?" Camila asked.

Sophie answered, "It states that we checked you out, offered to take you to the hospital, and you declined."

Camila quickly signed it and gave it back.

Sophie tore the back copy off the two-part form and handed it to Camila. "This one is yours."

"Thanks," Camila muttered, sticking the copy in her purse.

Isaac closed his first aid bag. "We still recommend that you go to the clinic sometime today to have a few basic tests done," he reiterated. Then he nodded at his partner, and the two of them left, pushing the stretcher out with them.

Once Oscar and Camila were alone in the huge room, he went and sat next to her.

"Are you still on hold?" Camila asked.

"Yeah. She's trying to find someone to cover her shift."

"What? No." Camila leaned forward and put her face in both of her hands. "Why does she have to freak out about everything?"

"You *passed out*, Camila. If one of my siblings fainted, I'd be worried, too."

Keeping her face in her hands, she muttered, "She's going to make me go to the clinic."

"It's not a bad thing to get checked out," he said gently.

Natalia's voice came through his phone again. "Are you still there?"

"I'm here."

Speaking rapidly, Natalia said, "My friend from Student Affairs just arrived to take over for me. Are the EMTs still there? Did they take her to the hospital? Did you find out which one?"

"Camila is right here with me. The EMTs are gone. Would you like to speak to her?"

"Gone? What do you mean, they're gone? Why didn't they take her to the hospital?"

Instead of answering, he held the phone out to Camila.

Groaning, she took it and put it to her ear. "I'm fine, Natalia."

Oscar couldn't hear Natalia's side of the conversation, but Camila's wince let him know that her sister wasn't happy.

"It's nothing! I just got up late and didn't eat anything before coming to class."

Oscar didn't know what Natalia said in response, but he could tell it was loud, because Camila jerked the phone an inch away from her ear.

With a scowl, Camila yelled, "Because I don't need to get checked out!"

Over the next several seconds, Camila's scowl slowly went away, and her side of the conversation consisted of a bunch of little protesting 'noes' and some reluctant 'yeses'.

Eventually, she sighed and said, "They said I should go to the clinic and get checked out."

After another protest, Camila said, "I could go after my last class."

She rolled her eyes. "Fine. I said fine! What? No!" Scowling at the phone, she handed it back to Oscar. "She wants to talk to you."

"Hello?" Oscar said.

"I know it's a huge favor, but I've convinced Camila to go to the clinic. Can you stay with her until I get there? It'll only take me a few minutes to get to the Louise Center. This is a landline, and I don't have a cell phone."

Oscar said, "The clinic is closer to you than the Louise Center. Why don't you meet us there?"

"Us?" Natalia asked. "You mean you'll walk with her? I don't want her walking alone in case—"

Oscar finished for her, "—she passes out again. I get it, and yes, I'll walk with her. We'll see you in the lobby of the clinic in just a couple of minutes."

Camila shook her head beside him. "You don't have to do that, Professor Jackson. Honestly, you guys are making this way more of a problem than it needs to be."

While Camila was talking, Natalia said, "Thank you so much. I truly appreciate it. I'll see you there."

Oscar hung up, put his phone in his pocket, and turned to Camila. "She's going to meet us there."

"Great," Camila snarked, sounding more like a teen than a young woman.

Oscar had a hard time not chuckling as he stood. He grabbed his briefcase and nodded toward the doors. "Let's go."

She grabbed her books, rolled her eyes, and walked out. Once outside, she pulled her phone out of her pocket and started texting.

"Have you decided who you're going to write your paper on yet?"

Seemingly surprised to have him talking to her, it took her a few moments to put her phone away and answer. "No. I was thinking about Domingo Ulloa, but I haven't made any decisions yet."

"He'd be a good choice."

"I was kind of waiting until next week to decide, since you'll be talking about the Chicano Art Movement, see if you bring up anyone I want to research."

"If you're specifically looking for someone from the Chicano Art Movement to do a paper on, you should look up Judy Baca."

"She's the one who started the Great Wall of LA, right?"

"That's right. She's the person who inspired my mom to start painting, so in a way, she's the reason I teach Art History. Painting was always a part of life in my house, growing up. My mother loves to paint, and I didn't realize our house was different than most in that regard, until I was about eight. I went to a friend's birthday party, and I just couldn't stop staring at the walls of their home. They were just... white, like huge blank canvases that hadn't been used yet. It seemed very stark and uninviting to my eyes. The lack of art and color seemed to draw all the vibrancy and life out of the house."

They had made the quick trek to the Student Clinic while talking, and Oscar opened the door for Camila.

"Thanks," she said, walking in. The clinic itself was relatively empty, with four other students sitting in the waiting room, and a woman at the front desk below a sign that read 'Admitting!'

"Why don't you go sign in while I wait for your sister?"

"Yeah, okay." Camila went to the front desk while Oscar waited by the door.