

Il cattivo ragazzo che voglio

(The Bad Boy That I Want)

by Giulia Besa

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Question on ask.fm: How old were you the first time you had sex?

Answer: What's the next question?

It's official: my boyfriend hates me.

He hasn't answered my calls for a week and he's been ignoring my texts and messages on WhatsApp, Messenger and on Skype. All he has to do now is ban me on Facebook and help build the Berlin wall, from Monte Mario to the Caffarella Park in Rome, just in case I should decide to pay him a visit at his house.

Tommaso hates me.

He hates me because of the way I behaved towards him and won't speak to me. I'm beginning to feel uncomfortable bombarding him with messages and phone calls; I'm progressing from fiancée level to stalker level. How could I have been such an idiot? I upset him, I know. Though, we've only been an item for a month after all, and it's not normal to do it after just a month. Or is it?

"Perhaps next time," I said to him. As if I was declining a pizza or an invitation to the cinema. It was a really stupid answer. He felt snubbed and now he hates me; his face said it all. We had been lying down, well wrapped round each other, on the back seat of his father's car, he was on top of me, and my reaction upset him deeply.

I sigh and roll onto my back on the bed. I can see the scene in every detail, projected onto my bedroom ceiling, like being at the cinema: Tommaso, who instead of reacting to my refusal, simply pushed himself up with one hand on the back of the seat and slipped the other from under my t-shirt, giving up trying to undo my bra. Then he looked at me with a mixture of sadness and irritation and said, "Ok, I'll take you home. It's best that way."

He got out of the Lancia Delta, put his sweatshirt back on; he climbed in behind the wheel, tidied his hair and started the engine. The engine was the one and only sound until the door to my apartment building closed behind me. For the first time in my life, I had had the chance to make love with a boy, to touch heaven with a finger - well, perhaps! - but instead I slipped into a silent, icy hell.

True, Alessandra is probably right, I exaggerate everything, but I can't cast off the feeling that me and sex are a thing of the past; I've wasted my only good opportunity. I'll be an old virgin maid until I die. I also realise that the idea is ridiculous, but it's got a grip on

me, like the time I put posters of Justin Timberlake up on my bedroom wall with superglue, and the slimy smelly substance stuck on my fingers.

Tommaso is nice, and he even looks a bit like Justin Timberlake, and I'm convinced that he wears his beard and hair the way he does because he's recognised the similarity. I like Tommaso, I like him a lot, even my friends like him, unconditionally; he is four years older than me, experienced ... he's perfect. Yet my damned shyness stopped me from saying yes. If I can't give myself to him, what hope do I have for the future? I'll never find anyone like Tommaso.

I roll back onto one side and pick up my mobile that lies abandoned in the folds of the Desigual bed covers. The display lights up, the screen shining in the semidarkness of the room; it's nine o'clock and the warm May sun has set.

God, it's depressing!

There's nothing sadder than a silent phone that doesn't make a sound for hours and hours. Not a thing. Not even a teeny weeny notification. Not only does Tommaso not want to speak to me, the whole world seems to have forgotten me.

Perhaps I should phone Alessandra. I could tell her for the tenth time in five days how I refused Tommaso. Every time I talk to her, new details emerge: from the smell of the back seats in the Lancia, to the lights and shadows on the windows when the wind blew the trees above the parked car. And then talking to Ale might help me; it could take some weight off my shoulders. Nothing happened the last five times, but I live in hope.

I run through the phone numbers until I get to Alessandra's. I'm just about to select it when a text notification appears in the top left corner. It must be my friend; it happens a lot: she contacts me when I'm about to call her; it's like we're synchronised. It might be because we have been best friends since we were at pre-school. I touch the icon of the new message.

Oh God, it's not Ale. It's Tommaso.

IF YOU STILL WANT TO, I'LL BE AT CIRCO MASSIMO AT ABOUT ELEVEN O'CLOCK. I'LL WAIT FOR YOU.

My heart leaps; it beats so strongly I can feel it banging in my ears. I read the message twice more. Yes, yes, yes! I can't believe he's forgiven me! We've been seeing each other at Circo Massimo every Saturday for romantic midnight picnics since we started dating. A sweet little tradition. I'd lost all hope for this Saturday, but now ...

I jump on the bed like a twelve year-old. Then I stop and run my hand through my hair, pulling it back. No, Chiara, you're not a kid anymore. You're eighteen, and have been for two months, so behave properly. You have to be serious: face your responsibilities. If

you decide to meet Tommaso at Circo Massimo, you have to be prepared to say yes. After the pre-packed sandwiches, beer and Coca Cola light, on that rug on the grass under the shining stars, he might ask you to do it. A *real* possibility. And you will have to face last week's dilemma.

“What shall I do?” I murmured, nibbling my thumb nail, my eyes glued to the large opaque ones of the cuddly elephant sitting on my laptop. “Shall I say yes this time?” I ask Dumbo, who, unsurprisingly, doesn't reply.

I shake my head. Asking my pink elephant for help isn't exactly mature behaviour. No, no, I really must stop behaving like a little girl. Best to call Alessandra!

I open WhatsApp and send her a voice message: I want her to hear the worry in my voice; I want her to pick up on my wobbly emotional speech as I make the most important decision in my life. Ale will have to prepare herself for the most challenging job of mentor since we've known each other.

The ring tone goes off the second I send the voice message. I bring the phone up to my face. Alessandra's voice explodes in my ear.

“For fuck's sake, Chiara! Do you know how many girls would pay to be in your shoes?”

“Does anyone pay to be made deaf?”

Alessandra clears her throat, embarrassed. Perhaps she realises that she perforated my eardrum.

“I only wanted to show my enthusiasm,” she says. “And anyway, if you didn't get it, my answer to your question is: *absolutely* yes. Go and give it to him with all your heart.”

“A less vulgar answer?” Otherwise I'll feel embarrassed.

“Go and spend your first night of love, the night of your life, the night that will change you forever. And enjoy it yourself a bit too, once and for all. It's not OK to still be a virgin at eighteen.”

“I don't know if I feel ready yet.” I twist a lock of black hair around my index finger and bite my lip. “Last time I thought I was, then at the last minute I got cramp in my stomach and had to say no. I *felt* it wasn't right to do it there and then.”

“You'll be ready tonight. I'll help.”

I trust her completely in some things. She has been doing it regularly since she was fifteen; she must have some experience. It is not the moment for her to reveal all her secrets.

“I'm all ears and I'm taking notes.”

“Rule number one: you have to feel beautiful. Even the slightest suspicion that there is something wrong with your face or body will affect your courage or worse still, stop you half way. A spot, stretch mark or food between your teeth and you'll feel crap. There's not much we can do about stretch marks, apart from using foundation cream, but there is for the other things. Look in the mirror and tell me what you don't like.”

I get off the bed and feel my way along the wall for the light switch. I shiver with fear, and before going any further I hug the elephant. Dumbo gives me security. I turn on the light and sit in front of the mirror that covers the whole door of the open wardrobe.

My straight hair falls over my shoulders in disorderly strands; one unruly lock hangs in front of my face, caressing my hazel eyes, their lashes so thick they look made-up. My glossy black hair and dark eyes contrast starkly with my fair complexion: a characteristic that I've always liked about myself.

“No spots, I don't think,” I say.

“One down.”

I take off my pyjama top, push up my breasts with my hands and squeeze them together. Then I stand on tiptoe, turn round to the side, pretending that imaginary heels lift my slight figure. I pull up the already short pyjama bottoms to reveal my thighs: that's how they'd look if I wore the miniskirt I bought before Easter and still hadn't had the courage to wear.

A plunging neckline, heels, miniskirt... I wouldn't be half bad, though I'd feel a million times more comfortable in my flowery embroidered pyjamas, cuddling Dumbo the elephant. I can't help feeling more like Dora the Explorer than Belén Rodríguez.

On the other hand I doubt Tommaso would want to take Dora to bed.

I put the elephant back to guard the computer and return to the mirror. I take a deep breath. “All things considered, the body looks OK, but, I mean...,” I say. “What can I do to feel really beautiful?”

Alessandra sighs. I imagine her shaking her head woefully: I must sound like a total cretin.

“The first thing is to de-fuzz.”

“Huh?”

“You have to wax. Everywhere.”

“I have waxed!”

“You have to wax like never before. Before I did it the first time with Daniele, I put contacts in, shut myself in the bathroom and examined every square centimetre of my body in search of the most elusive hair. And it was worth it! I'd forgotten to wax behind my calf and there was a whole row of hairs. Just think? What if Daniele had touched them?”

“He would have got over it, I think.”

“Don't take it for granted. When it's hairs you're talking about, boys are as fussy as we are.”

Alessandra's advice, however, isn't exclusive to my skin, which in addition to being as smooth as a baby's bottom also has to be moisturised, scented and massaged with the right creams; my friend also explains the right height my heels should be, the colour of my skirt, how many buttons I have to leave undone to show off my neck and chest, and how to wear my hair because, if it's carefully gathered, it won't cover my neck. I write everything down and then I move into action.

First I spend a good half hour under the shower in search of rebel hairs, and then I start trying various outfits. I get changed and send photos on WhatsApp to Alessandra, who has the final word. I experiment with a selection of blouses, jeans of varying tightness, push up bras, skirts of all sizes, fishnet tights with varying degrees of hole size, pumps with no heel, and shoes with very high heels.

In the end, after an interminable process of matching and trying and sarcastic remarks from Alessandra, I opt for black leggings and a sweatshirt with plunging neckline that slightly reveals the lace on my bra. My hair is loose as usual, and my make-up is no more than a line of kohl. Ah, my shoes are sneakers. Alessandra can insist all she likes, but Circo Massimo is a park, and if I go in heels, the only possible outcome could be that, instead of spending the night in bed with Tommaso I spend it in A&E with a broken ankle.

“You look fantastic. Have fun!” Alessandra concluded. “And when you get back, call me straight away, it doesn't matter what time it is, I'll stay up. It'll be our first conversation adult to adult. And I want to know all the details!”

I look in the mirror for the last time, turn off the light, and tiptoe out of my room. I creep down the corridor towards the front door. I hold my breath as I walk in front of the living room. I can't hear the television; perhaps mum isn't home yet. I could pop into the kitchen to pilfer a bite from the fridge. There's nothing in my rucksack other than a towel to spread on the ground. Unless Tommaso brings some food, it'll be the fastest picnic in history. But that might not be such a bad thing...

“Isn't it a bit late to be going to school?”

Mum is standing in the kitchen doorway; behind her, the fridge is open and she is holding a glass full of ice cubes that are soaked by an amber coloured liquid. Judging by the smell I'd say it was brandy. Mum takes a sip. She is still dressed to the nines in her highly fashionable pale-coloured suit, her hair is perfectly coiffed and her make-up is flawless. As always her lips are coated with glossy lipstick, an intense colour that would suit no one but her. Blast the railway: when I wait for a train it's always late, but today the *Frecciarossa* from Milan is early, would you believe. So, mum is home promptly to nag.

"Where are you going with that backpack?" she asks me.

"To study at Alessandra's."

Mum raises an eyebrow, and I feel like a mouse cornered by a cat. My excuse is far too poor and clearly isn't going to pass. I'd best put it straight.

"No, ok, I'm going out with a friend."

Mum sips her brandy and places the glass on the free-standing marble worktop at the centre of the kitchen. "What time are you planning to come home?"

My mother is incredible. With my marks at school, an average of 80% I would like to point out, she should let me stay out until three in the morning, without batting an eyelid. Instead, I get the third degree every single time: have I done all my homework? Will I be back to get enough sleep? Am I ready for the next oral exam? God almighty! Bloody hell, it's Saturday night! But when she gets into *give me a hard time* mood, the best strategy is sweetness.

I go over and give her a big kiss on the cheek – she's wearing heels and I have to stand on tip-toe.

"I'll be no later than midnight, I promise." I walk backwards. "I'm going out with Tommy!"

Now I've mentioned my boyfriend, my mother's expression seems no more relaxed than before. Though she likes him, too. "Have you got your phone with you?"

"Of course, bye!" I hastily reach the front door and run down the stairs before mum has a chance to decide I don't deserve a night out. I can't allow myself to be stopped tonight. This date is too important, the most important in my life.

Tonight I'm saying goodbye to virginity.

2

Question on ask.fm: What is the most beautiful city by night?

Answer: Friends who have been there swear New York or Paris. But I am certain that, at night, there are more stars in Rome than anywhere else in the world.

The wind blows my hair: it trembles below my helmet as I dart along on my scooter; *Shake it off* by Taylor Swift is playing through my earphones at top volume. There's no traffic along the road around the Coliseum, so I don't slow down; I slalom around small groups of tourists dotted here and there on the way to via San Giovanni, hunting for a good pizzeria.

I shouldn't be in a hurry: despite the precise hair removal operation and endless trials in front of the mirror, I left the house early. I still feel like rushing through the night anyway, as fast as I can, until the wind makes my cheeks red. Obviously, my Scarabeo scooter – second hand, as at the time mother was going through her anti-capitalist phase - thought otherwise and when the road around the Coliseum turned uphill, the engine began to splutter pitifully.

It doesn't matter! I fill my lungs with the fresh evening air, and it is delicious. I can almost smell the maritime pines mixed with the plants on Colle Oppio which are in full bloom in May. The air is warm; a harbinger of summer.

I'm on my way to Circo Massimo, an oval hollow in the city concrete as wide as a football pitch. The ground is bumpy, patchy with grass and weeds, with no logic to it except perhaps a lack of maintenance. A single ribbon of gravel, stretching from one side of the hollow to another, appears to be the only attempt to give some sense to this ancient spot. Once it was a proper circus, with wooden grandstands where Roman spectators would sit to watch the chariot races. On some occasions they would even fill it with water, creating a huge pool in the city centre, and simulate sea battles.

Now, they usually organise concerts. Lady Gaga came a while ago, and I still remember when I sat on Dad's shoulders during the New Year's eve concert that he enjoyed so much. I'm sure that this evening will merit a place in the album of unforgettable moments: under a blanket of stars, I'll make love for the first time. With Tommaso.

It'll be wonderful: the firmament above us, the wind rocking us, the soft grass caressing us, the growling cars for once drowned by the chirping of crickets. It'll be like doing it on a desert island, or in the middle of the countryside. It'll be as though three million Romans have disappeared to allow us a magical moment, all to ourselves. Me and Tommaso.

It was a risk, but I was right to wait: inside the Lancia would have been a bit squalid. Whoever would want to do it the first time with the handbrake shoved into your thigh? As I gazed at Tommaso's face above me, I wasn't aroused; all I could see was Alessandra's face as I described the scenario to her: *yes, Ale, I'm telling you it was very romantic! He had me on the back seat of the car and then we went to get a kebab at the Arch of Travertino. My treat.*

Oh, please!

This time though it will be completely different. The atmosphere is perfect and I'm ready. Ready, prepared, determined and shaven: if I pull back again today, I swear that tomorrow I'll go to Santa Maria Maggiore and become a nun!

I jiggle along over the cobbles, once again travelling as fast as I can. The Coliseum is now behind me; out of the corner of my eye, I can just see the shape of it above the trees. Illuminated as it is by beams of yellow light from spotlights, it looks like a flying saucer from a different world, the relic of an alien spaceship that landed centuries ago. Katy Perry is on my wavelength and starts singing *E.T.*.

Once at Circo Massimo I turn right and drive past the few pubs that look over the ancient Roman circus. From their open doors, a neon glow radiates onto the road that surrounds the hollow, and a loud noise of chatting and laughing and clinking glasses comes from the young patrons inside. I take off my earphones and slow down. Fuck, I thought I saw Tommy in one of the pubs; I'm almost sure it was his voice. But he can't have gone out with his friends. Not tonight. Not before seeing me. No, that would be too weird.

I park against the wall of one of the bars and walk into the Circo Massimo. I am cloaked by darkness: beneath a moonless sky, there are no street lights in this pool of grass and earth. The stars alone guide me - the few that are bright enough to penetrate the dome of dirty air that covers the city. A gust of icy wind blows into the neckline of my sweatshirt and makes me shiver. I feel cramp in my stomach and wrap my arms around my middle. In a split second the atmosphere seems to have lost all trace of romanticism and I get a terrible feeling of foreboding.

The sound of traffic fades as I walk across the grass, my shoes sinking in amongst the soft, flimsy blades. The tree that grows at the centre of the Circo looks like the head of a gigantic snake rising from the putrid and muddy waters of a bog. A warning that, if I get too close, the ravenous snake will come out to devour me. What ridiculous thoughts. And I've got goose bumps. All because of the neckline; did it really have to be so plunging?

Here though, someone insisted that I should dress to freeze! Damn Alessandra and her advice!

I reach the tree, which really is a tree and not a snake. I lean back onto the trunk, whose black shape stands out against a sky that is dotted with faint stars. I breathe slowly, observing the buildings that surround the short side of Circo Massimo. The lit up windows reassure me, though they are too far away.

I must not be overcome by panic: there is nothing to fear. Tommaso and I have already been here at night. We have drunk in the pubs, and set up our picnics, before lying on the ground in each other's arms. But we've never gone any further than taking off our t-shirts and kissing. Tommy did try to slide his hand into my pants once, but I stopped him by sucking his neck until it made him laugh. Regrettably, I am insecure; at least as far as *that* is concerned.

I check the time on my phone. Eleven fifteen. It's unusual for Tommaso not to be here yet: normally he's early for dates; I always find him there waiting for me.

I text him: WHERE ARE YOU?

I walk around the tree and look up and down, but I can't see a thing. He could be ten paces away from me and I wouldn't realise. I put my backpack down and sit on it. I turn my eyes to the sky: the starry spots look more and more like flakes, colder and further away. The darkness doesn't bother me as a rule, quite the contrary; when I walk down into the hollow, hand in hand with Tommaso, I've always felt secure, like going into the house of an old trustworthy friend. This evening, however, the gloom is close, stretching out its tentacles to scratch my skin, the same sensation as when you take off a woolly sweater and the static makes the hairs tingle on the back of your neck. It's bound to be nerves. Or the frozen pasta I cooked in the microwave for dinner. Or perhaps ... I've no idea why I feel like this, and not knowing makes it worse.

The phone chirped.

Tommaso's text says: YOU'RE ON TIME FOR ONCE. I'M ON MY WAY.

I stare at the display. What sort of a message is that? How is that the way to start a romantic evening? Where are his manners, kindness and sensuality? If that's how he feels, as cold as ice, he needn't have bothered inviting me.

The minutes are slow to pass, and I'm still sitting on my backpack. Alone. I write a message on WhatsApp for Ale. I explain what's going on and she tells me that if Tommaso doesn't appear immediately I should leave: never let anyone treat you like a doormat. Ever. She made that mistake with an ex and it was agony. You should always stick up for

your choices and even get angry if necessary. For example, when you're on the most important date of your life and the guy makes you wait half an hour, in the middle of nowhere, at night.

My irritation toward Tommaso grows, but I decide to ignore it and allow him another ten minutes. After all, it was me who mucked things up the last time, and I'd feel terrible leaving without even speaking to him. Something might have cropped up. Something could have happened.

At eleven forty-five I've had enough: I'm sick of sitting there freezing my arse off.

"Go to hell."

I stand up and brush down my leggings. A rustle in the grass to my right. The sound of steps. I turn towards it. Some guys appear out of the gloom: dark shapes against the lights of the pub. I hold up my phone and turn on the camera flash, pointing it at the group.

"Tommy? Is that you?"

The light dances over his face, highlighting his delicate features, the groomed Justin Timberlake beard, and his eyes, with the downward contour that I have loved since the first time we set eyes on each other.

"Hi," he says, flatly, coldly.

He doesn't smile. Who are those people behind him? University friends?

I go over to him, and lean to kiss him, but Tommaso shifts his face to one side. My lips do not meet his, just the rough beard on his cheek. My heart misses a beat, my blood chills in my veins. I step back a pace.

"What's wrong with you?" I ask him. "I've been waiting almost an hour."

I point to the group of boys standing next to him. "And who are they?"

"Friends," he replies. "We were having a drink not far from here. It took us a while, but there's no need to be hysterical."

Hysterical? Me? I'm speechless, as his friends chuckle and make comments amongst themselves. I open and close my mouth a couple of times, without actually managing to say anything. I'm shocked. *We were having a drink...* Whilst I was here racking my brains with doubt, worrying about him, in the cold and dark and with the crickets competing to see who could jump down the front of my sweatshirt first in an attempt to frighten me out of my skin!

A hot wave rose up to my face, a wave of anger.

"Are you drunk? Or gone stupid and can't remember appointments anymore? You were the one who asked me to come." I hold the phone in my fist and the flash abandons

his face. "If you wanted to go out for a drink with your friends we could have arranged for a different time."

I thought you wanted to spend a special evening too, I wanted to add, but the audience - I've counted them, there are five friends, five dickheads that stink of sweat and beer – discourages me from becoming romantic or worse melancholy. If they think they're going to get a free show *Tommy's* little girlfriend bursting into tears whilst he behaves like the tough guy, they couldn't be more wrong.

"She's uptight as well as frigid," says one of the boys. Which means that Tommaso has gone round telling people about my refusal. He has bad-mouthed about our most intimate moment. And he won't have had any scruples about going into detail: about how I had goose bumps on my arms as he kissed me, how I was embarrassed that he should see me in my bra, the scent of my arousal... I want a hole to open beneath me; to drown in the bog where the snake is waiting for me with its jaws wide open.

"Listen Chiara..." Tommaso, now a black shape again, takes a swig from his bottle of beer. "I've been thinking and I don't think that we're right together. I think we should take a break."

He just says it, with the disinterested tones of someone who is reading their social security number to the tax man. This is not the kind boy who, a month ago, offered to show me around the faculty of economy at the *Sapienza*; the boy who, on seeing a high school kid in trouble, improvised as tour guide. It isn't the boy who gently pushes my hair to one side to kiss me. It isn't the boy who comes to pick me up at school and consoles me with a bunch of roses if a class test went wrong; and celebrates, again with a bunch of roses when I get a good mark. It is not my Tommy, or the person I thought was Tommy.

This is a piece of shit who is dumping me just because I didn't give it to him. And brings along five other twats who make him feel even more manly, so he can brag about how he can leave a girl when he likes and pick up a new one just as easily at the pub.

Tommaso's friends stand there in silence, their eyes glinting in the night. A pack of wolves standing around their agonising prey.

I would like to be strong. I would like to not cry. I would like my voice not to tremble; I'd like to tell Tommaso and his friends to go screw themselves and to leave with my head held high. I'd like to come through this whole business with my dignity intact. But when I think back to how excited I was an hour ago as I straightened my hair, imagining Tommaso caressing me and whispering into my ear that he wanted to...

When I think about how much I wanted him, I want to die.

I am betrayed by a tear that runs down my cheek. I sob. I can only hope that in the dark no one will notice that I have started to weep.

“Come on, don't be like that.” Tommaso comes close and holds out his free hand to dry my face. It would have been a thoughtful gesture had he not just broken my heart.

I step backwards.

“Now I realise why you brought your little friends,” I say, my voice is firm despite being on the verge of tears. “You didn't have the guts to leave me by yourself.”

“Look Chiara, I only came to tell you in person out of respect. I could have sent you a message.”

“It would have been more your style.” I laugh. I would like it to sound like a defiant laugh, but it's not easy with tears streaming down your cheeks.

I lift my face to look him in the eye. His soft features, so familiar to me, emerge out of the darkness. The memory of when I caressed his chin and nuzzled his beard with my nose before kissing him leaves me with a bitter-sweet taste in my mouth, like discovering that the fruit that looks so tasty on the outside, is in fact rotten on the inside.

“I'd come to continue the question of the other evening,” I add. “But now I realise that I was right not to give it to you, boys with no balls aren't much good in bed.”

I hear a short whistle come from one of Tommaso's friends, another explains to me in vulgar terms how he'd be able to satisfy me. I am on the edge of the abyss, the depths of desperation. I would like to throw my phone in Tommaso's face and go. But I need the phone to call Alessandra, so all I can do is get out of this place.

I pick up my backpack while Tommaso jokes with his friends, distracted by their stupid comments. I set off rapidly in the direction of the road, towards the bar next to the park where I left my scooter. I don't look round once, but I realise painfully that inside I still feel a spark of hope: Tommaso may already regret what he has done; he might get rid of his friends and run after me. He'll beg me to forgive him, and I will allow him the honour of picnicking on the grass, before lying on the towel to continue our night of love.

Continue. It hasn't even started.

I sniff and dry my tear-soaked face with the sleeve of my sweatshirt. Thank goodness I am now well away and thank goodness Tommaso hasn't followed me, because now I'm bawling my eyes out, and I don't want to give him the satisfaction of seeing me in pieces.

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Question on ask.fm: What embarrasses you most at the thought of doing it for the first time?

Answer: Looking awkward. Ruining everything with a crap comment or a stupid move.

So, I find myself sipping iced orange juice on the leather sofa in Cesare's living room. I feel small in the huge, cold house, dominated by straight lines and flat white. The sofa, soft and spacious, so much so it seems to want to swallow me up, is pure white, the same tone as all the other furniture. The only accents of colour are the CD cases stacked along the book shelves, as tall as skyscrapers. I can count dozens and dozens of CDs; from the titles, I'd say all classical: they must be a family of classical music lovers, in another room I spotted a grand piano.

A whole wall is given to gigantic windows. The sun lights them up, and only when a cloud passes does the gleam subside and I realise that behind the glass is a large garden, whose lawn is kept as perfectly as Annalisa's.

"Do you like the juice?" Cesare appears at the kitchen door. The warm early afternoon light bathes his bare chest, highlighting the muscles. He must have taken off his shirt while he was in there. His hair, tattoo, and his dark eyes contrast with his pale skin. He's holding a glass of dense juice, dotted with beads of condensation.

I swallow. I think it is the most erotic image I have ever seen.

"Yes, thank you," I croak.

"Pardon?"

I clear my throat, which seems to have gone completely. "I do."

Cesare smiles and sits next to me. Even when he relaxes, his six-pack is chiselled; his shoulders have nothing to envy in a Calvin Klein model. I'm breathless.

Jesus, how can a naked chest make me feel so uncomfortable?

Cesare lifts his glass to his mouth. His lips close around the edge. He sips. "Perhaps you prefer peach." He holds out his glass. I lower mine to the parquet and wrap my fingers around his, looking bewildered like an idiot.

"You're quiet. I wonder why." Cesare chuckles. He puts his hand on the sofa, between us and leans towards me.

"Why did you invite me to your house?" I ask.

Cesare tilts his head slightly.

"Why do you think?"

"Well..." I hesitate. "I don't think it was just to offer me a drink. Nor because you were sick of driving. You seem to enjoy driving the BMW."

“There is one thing I enjoy more.” As he says this, his devilish expression fills me with desire. If he weren't already naked, I would have stripped him.

I take a long sip of peach juice, hoping to cool down. As usual, having Cesare at my side makes me so hot and flushed it's like being in a sauna. The only relief is his fresh fruity breath.

I want him, I long for him in *that* way. Like I have never longed for anyone before. But I am confused, and I don't really know what to do. I am about to glide towards an unknown universe, and I have no idea how to face what awaits me.

I have another sip; before I finish, I tip the glass towards Cesare. “Would you like some?”

“There's more in the kitchen.” Cesare lifts his hand. His thumb brushes my lower lip, sending a quiver through my entire body. “But the only juice I want right now is this one wetting your lips.”

Cesare's hand slides behind my neck. He pulls my face to his. Our mouths join in a peach tasting kiss. A fragrant, delicious kiss. So tasty in fact that my lips part unprovoked and my tongue seeks his. My heart begins to race; I can feel it beating in my chest and head. Its rhythm becomes the soundtrack to our kiss.

This time we do not pull apart. We both know that this time it won't just be a kiss; I read it in his eyes as he pulled me towards him.

Cesare takes his mouth from mine and moves downwards to kiss my neck. Every time he touches my skin I shudder, and when his hands squeeze my jeans-clad thighs, I feel as if I'm going to melt in the sun shining through the great windows. Cesare's fingers reach the small of my back, and I accompany his movement until I am lying on the sofa, so big that there is room for both of us to lie next to each other.

But Cesare is over me, on all fours, and he continues to kiss my neck. He is as handsome, strong and dangerous as a panther ready to pounce on its prey.

“I would be truly honoured,” with each word he kissed my throat, “if the prize pupil would give me a glimpse of her gorgeous tits. I'm certain that just seeing them would redeem me. I'd be a new man, more serious and studious.”

“Idiot!” I ruffle his smooth hair. He looks straight at me and hooks his index finger under the hem of my t-shirt.

“So, may I?”

I bite my lip and nod.

Cesare slips off my t-shirt and my hair falls back down over my bare breasts. I am pleased because it would appear I have left him speechless. He only finds his tongue after admiring me at length.

“You weren't wearing a bra.” Cesare observes me with hungry eyes. “What a mischievous girl!”

“It was hot today, and it was too tight.” This time it is me with a wicked face. “Do you mind?”

In response Cesare leans over me and his lips close over my right breast. “They are so soft, like cream,” he murmurs, and I feel his words vibrating on my skin. “I want to eat them.”

Cesare's lips encompass my nipple, they suck it. A shard of pleasure embeds itself in my brain, and I realise I am losing control. I turn my head to the side, my burning cheek against the leather of the sofa.

Cesare continues to suck my breasts, the tip of his tongue tracing squiggles around the edges of the pink circle; with his hands he opens my trouser zip. Without feeling strange or unnatural, I rub my legs on the sofa, and then I raise my hips to help him slip them off. I am in my underpants.

For a moment, Cesare's lips stop teasing my nipples.

“Are they all the same color?” he beams. “All white?”

I get my breath back, and smile at him. “That's what good girls prefer.”

My comment, barely whispered, appears to excite him. Now I can clearly see the swell pulling at the groin area of Cesare's trousers. But, contrary to the agitation and worry I used to feel when I was with Tommaso, now, here I feel *proud* to know that I am exciting him. A new and very pleasing sensation.

“You're even more beautiful than I imagined,” he murmured.

I lift my head a little. “And when exactly did you imagine me?”

“I've been undressing you with my eyes since September.” Cesare lowers his face, his nose brushes the lace on my underpants. I flush.

“And now at last I can taste you,” he says. “No one will interrupt us today.”

I watch him with a mixture of desire and expectation as he takes the perfect lace edge of my panties in his teeth. Slowly, he pulls them down, along my thighs. He uses his hand to help move them over my ankles.

He half closes his eyes and breathes in, his head over my groin. “You smell sensational.”

“Wh-what are you going to do?”

“You think you're a good girl, right?”

“Ye-yeah.” I swallow. “I think so.”

Cesare smiles, and his crescent-shaped dimple widens with his mouth. “I want to show you that you're not.”

His breath caresses my pubis. “I'll show you that there's a bit of bad girl in you, too. And I want to prepare you for me, because you'll have to take all of me.”

Before I can reply, Cesare plunges his lips on to me.

His burning tongue explores me, and I hear myself moan, my head is invaded by butterflies and filled with pink soap bubbles.

I twist my head from one side to the other, I bite my lip hard. My eyes are tightly shut as I feel pleasure surge through my body from my hips. A hot wave that threatens to engulf me.

I arch my back in sheer pleasure and grasp Cesare by the hair, pushing his face into my groin. I moan loudly, but when I am on the point of reaching orgasm he lifts his lips from me.

“I can't resist,” he says, his voice overflowing with yearning. “I want you. Now. So much.”

With unsteady hands I help him to undo his belt and I whip it through the loops as we kiss each other hungrily. I drop it to the floor next to the sofa. Cesare slips out of his trousers; his black pants no longer hide his virility, which presses against the fabric. I too am desperate for him. I stretch out my fingers and lower the elastic, I remove his pants and he too, like me is naked.

He imprisons me beneath him, his sculpted chest against my soft breasts, his mouth on mine, his fingers interlaced with mine.

“I'm a virgin,” I moan. “I'm on the pill, but it's my first time.”

Cesare's lips move upwards to my ear, he nibbles my ear lobe.

“I'll be gentle.” I sense a smile. “To start with, anyway.”

His sex presses into my groin, against me. I hold my breath. Sudden anxiety makes me falter; I am about to push Cesare away, to tell him to stop.

But he strokes my hair. He looks deep into my eyes.

“Don't feel afraid,” he says, his voice is serious. “I won't hurt you. I want to make love with you, and we can only make love if both of us enjoy it. I'll make you happy, you'll see.”

I nod, enraptured by his eyes. Cesare pushes his hips against mine and slowly penetrates me. He moves further in and the more I take him, the more intensely I feel pleasure.

I begin to move with his thrusts. The excitement increases, and I raise my head to bite his neck. I follow the thorny edge of his tattoo with my teeth, along the criss-cross of brambles. Cesare quivers inside me, and I feel him grow bigger. I gasp, and beg him to do it, to fuck me like he'd wanted to since the very first day. We melt into each other and move as one, seeking ultimate pleasure.

When he comes inside me, *with me*, I understand what it means to make love.

After doing it a second time, we collapse next to each other. Cesare wraps his arm over my breasts, and rests his head against my neck; I caress his hair and enjoy his warmth, and his calm breath. He is falling asleep.

I smile. His lips are red from my kisses and, touching mine, I find that they are hot from his.

I believe that it has been the best first time - the best two first times! - that a girl could ever have had in the history of the universe.