

Carina Press Blog Tour Program: *Here to Stay* by Adriana Herrera
Excerpt

Julia

I stepped into the elevator and shoved my phone into the pocket of my dress, took a moment to send a prayer to the employee discount that let me buy bomb clothes on a nonprofit worker budget, and did some mental math of what could be going on.

Was the program really in trouble? Could we actually get shut down?

Nope, I would not go there. I would not think about what it would be like to get on a plane back to New York dumped and unemployed. Not happening.

A distraction. That's what I needed. Just as the door to the elevator was about to close, someone got in. The fact that I was eye level with the base of his throat was a good clue as to who it was, but when he opened his mouth and the now familiar knee-weakening baritone echoed off the walls of the elevator, I got my confirmation.

"Morning, Ms. Ortiz." That voice could be used for interrogation tactics. Every muscle in my body loosened at the same time whenever I heard it.

I squeaked out a "Morning" and took my time lifting my head all the way up to look at the last person in the world I wanted overhearing my conversation with my mother.

Him.

Rocco Fucking Quinn, otherwise known as the "Team Leader" for the consulting firm looking to bag my job. The guy with the New York City-est name on the planet. I hadn't exactly gotten personal with Mr. Quinn, but I picked up on that accent the first time we met.

"What's good?" I really tried to sound polite, but my Queens jumped out in situations like this. I did not gulp, because I could not let this fucker see me sweat. I managed not to cut my eyes at him, but it was a close call.

I took him in, ramrod straight, every hair in its place, not a wrinkle in sight, and decided he could not be the proprietor of the laugh-choke from before. The man seemed to be completely lacking a sense of humor. I knew he must have teeth but *I'd* never seen them.

Yeah, definitely not him. That fact rallied my spirits a little bit as I stood close enough to pick up on how he smelled. Like the ocean and something woodsy. That was not helpful information.

Without saying another word, I ran my eyes over him. It struck me that he was not wearing something bespoke like pretty much everyone here. Don't get me wrong, he still looked good enough to eat, but he was clearly on a budget. And at a place where everyone looked like they were heading to a New York Fashion Week photo shoot, it was sort of jarring. Still, the suit fit him well. And there was no question, this guy could wear the fuck out of a suit. I held back a whimper when I envisioned him in a Brioni or a Zegna. They'd have to put out a heat advisory for the building if that ever happened.

"I thought I could detect a familiar accent when I was coming down the hall." His perfectly blue eyes twinkled at what I was certain was an expression of utter mortification on my face. He sounded pleasant enough, but he was also alluding to the fact that I was yapping on my phone. This wasn't the first time he tried to be cute. Rocco Quinn seemed to like fucking with me. And it was only a matter of time before he stepped on my last nerve and I reamed him out.

Thankfully, just as I was scrambling to respond to his comment, the elevator got to my floor. I was planning to just leave him hanging and run off, but he was hot on my heels.

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Dammit.

“Sounds like your mom misses you.”

Oh, for fuck’s sake. Why did he have to act all fake nice?

I nodded without looking at him. “She does. Listen, Mr. Quinn—”

“You can call me Rocco.”

Nope, that was not happening. I was not letting this sexy bastard talk me into getting all chummy with him. I was already on thin ice as it was. He could keep his pheromones and his slick-as-fuck expressions to his damn self. I came to a dead stop a few feet away from the conference room door where my boss—and whatever shitty news she was about to give me—was waiting.

When I turned around, Rocco was looking down at me with an expectant smile. God he was handsome, that jet-black hair so dark it almost had a tinge of blue and those eyes, piercing. And I guess he had teeth after all, and of course they were perfect. Asshole. I shook my head hard when my traitorous brain started wondering what Pantone color his eyes would be.

Get your head in the game, Julia del Mar.

I straightened my back, determined to fight off the debilitating effects of those gleaming teeth and perfectly pink lips. I had to remember this niceness was probably his way of getting us to let our guard down. He was here to find ways to cut jobs. I was not about to mouth off and get myself fired, but I needed to get some things clear.

“Look.” I was proud of myself for not rolling my neck or pointing at his face. “I know you’re trying to be nice, but you make me nervous.” I pulled on the hem of my blue polka-dot dress and smoothed my yellow cardigan, avoiding eye contact at all costs.

“Why do I make you nervous?”

Uh, maybe because you’re here to close down as much of the foundation as you can.

I refrained from actually saying that because I had not been raised by a Puerto Rican man and Dominican woman just so I could act like I had no home training with the guy who could get me fired. But it was a close call.

“I’m sorry for saying that. You don’t make me nervous.”

Lies.

Rocco Quinn didn’t just make me nervous. He made me want to run my hands all over that big-ass body and moon over his almost but not quite curly hair and blue eyes, in spite of the fact that I knew he was out here gunning for my entire program. And yet, I still wanted to kiss the hell out of him while I climbed him like a sequoia.

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