

APPETITE

a Carter Couple



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OneKindScience.com

****APPETITE****

A Carter Couples Novel

by

Brian B.J. Hall

Inspired by the standard set by Beyoncé and Jay-Z
For every couple who creates something larger than themselves
and still chooses each other as the main work.

FADE IN:

****BLACK SCREEN****

Silence.

Then the soft sound of a knife on a cutting board — rhythmic, precise, intimate.

White type fades in:

****APPETITE****

Beneath it, smaller:

****a Carter Couple****

Finally:

****by Brian B.J. Hall****

The sounds of the kitchen grow richer — flame catching, butter foaming, the low hum of a man who cooks like he means it.

****INT. PRIVATE DINING ROOM – NIGHT****

A single long table. No staff visible. Candlelight only.

DARIUS (early 40s, warm presence, physical, the kind of man who fills a room without trying)
stands at a portable station, finishing a plate with the focus of someone who has cooked for
presidents and still treats every dish like it matters.

Across from him sits ELENA (mid-30s, striking, guarded, intensity that doesn't need volume). She watches him the way other people watch storms.

He sets the plate in front of her. No flourish. Just the food.

****DARIUS****

Tell me what you taste.

Elena picks up the fork. Takes one bite. Chews slowly. Sets the fork down.

****ELENA****

You.

Darius looks up. The air changes.

****DARIUS****

That's not on the menu.

****ELENA****

It is now.

She takes another bite. Holds his eyes the entire time.

****CUT TO BLACK.****

****TITLE CARD: APPETITE****

****ACT ONE****

****INT. ELENA'S STUDIO – DAY****

High ceilings. White walls. The smell of oil paint and turpentine.

Elena stands in front of a massive unfinished canvas. The work is beautiful and unsettling — bodies that look like they are in the middle of becoming or undoing each other. She works in silence, sleeves rolled up, hair pinned messily.

Her phone vibrates on a paint-stained table. She ignores it. It vibrates again. She glances at the screen, then answers without softening her voice.

****ELENA****

I'm working.

****DARIUS (V.O.)****

I know. I'm outside.

She freezes for half a second, then crosses to the large industrial windows and looks down. Darius stands on the sidewalk with two paper bags and zero shame about being there.

****ELENA****

I didn't invite you.

****DARIUS (V.O.)****

I brought lunch anyway.

A long beat. Elena almost smiles. Almost.

****ELENA****

Third floor. The door's open.

Don't touch anything.

****INT. ELENA'S STUDIO – MINUTES LATER****

Darius sets the bags on the only clean surface he can find. He looks at the canvas for a long time without speaking.

****DARIUS****

It's violent.

****ELENA****

It's honest.

****DARIUS****

Same thing sometimes.

He begins unpacking food — simple, perfect things. Bread still warm. Oil. Cheese. A small container of something that smells like the ocean and lemon.

Elena doesn't stop working, but her brush slows.

****ELENA****

You cook like you're trying to seduce people.

****DARIUS****

Only the ones worth seducing.

She finally turns to look at him fully.

****ELENA****

I'm not easy.

****DARIUS****

I noticed.

He holds out a piece of bread dipped in oil. She hesitates, then takes it from his hand with her fingers instead of letting him feed her. Their eyes stay locked while she tastes it.

****ELENA****

It's good.

****DARIUS****

I know.

The tension is quiet and thick. Neither of them rushes to fill it.

****INT. DARIUS'S FLAGSHIP RESTAURANT – KITCHEN – NIGHT****

Service is over. The kitchen is empty except for the two of them.

Darius has changed into a simple black shirt, sleeves rolled. He moves around the pass with the ease of a man who built the place with his own hands.

Elena sits on a stool, watching.

****ELENA****

You always stay this late?

****DARIUS****

Only when I have a reason.

He places a small plate in front of her — something delicate and precise.

****DARIUS****

Open.

This time she lets him feed her. The act is simple and somehow more intimate than if he had kissed her.

****ELENA****

You're dangerous.

****DARIUS****

You're the one who paints people like they're being consumed.

****ELENA****

They are.

He leans on the stainless steel counter, close but not touching.

****DARIUS****

And what about you?

Anyone ever get close enough to consume you?

Elena's expression doesn't change, but something in her eyes does.

****ELENA****

They try.

They don't finish the meal.

****DARIUS****

Maybe they ordered wrong.

She studies him for a long moment.

****ELENA****

You're very sure of yourself.

****DARIUS****

I'm sure of my palate.

Everything else is negotiable.

He steps closer. The kitchen feels smaller.

****ELENA****

If you kiss me in this kitchen, I'm going to expect you to be able to back it up everywhere else.

****DARIUS****

I don't serve anything I can't stand behind.

He kisses her.

It is not polite. It is appetite — direct, warm, certain. Elena meets it with the same intensity she brings to her work. When they break apart, both of them are breathing differently.

****ELENA****

Lock the door.

Darius reaches behind him and does.

****INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN – LATER****

The pass has been cleared. Elena sits on the stainless steel, Darius between her knees. His hands are on her thighs. Her fingers are in his hair. The kiss has turned into something hungrier.

****ELENA****

This is a health code violation.

****DARIUS****

I'll take the fine.

She laughs once — short, surprised — then pulls him back in.

The scene is physical, charged, and completely mutual. Two people who create with their hands finally using those hands on each other.

****FADE OUT.****

****ACT TWO****

****INT. ELENA'S STUDIO – MORNING****

Sunlight. Elena stands barefoot in front of a new canvas. She is painting with a focus that borders on aggression. Darius sleeps on the worn studio couch in the background, one arm thrown over his eyes.

Elena pauses, looks at him for a long moment, then turns back to the work. She begins to paint his shoulder from memory.

****INT. DARIUS'S APARTMENT – NIGHT****

A different kind of kitchen — personal, lived-in, full of excellent knives and better ingredients.

Darius cooks while Elena sits on the counter, legs swinging, watching him the way she watches a canvas she hasn't decided whether to destroy or keep.

****ELENA****

You're quieter at home.

****DARIUS****

I'm not performing.

****ELENA****

You perform at the restaurant?

****DARIUS****

Every kitchen is a stage.

Here I just get to feed the only person whose opinion can actually ruin my night.

She absorbs that.

****ELENA****

I don't give compliments easily.

****DARIUS****

I noticed.

That's why the real ones matter.

He tastes a sauce from the spoon, then holds it out to her. She leans forward and tastes. Their eyes stay locked.

****ELENA****

More salt.

****DARIUS****

Blasphemy.

But he adds the salt.

****INT. HIGH-END ART GALLERY – NIGHT****

Elena's solo show. The room is full of collectors, critics, and people who speak in careful, expensive sentences.

Darius moves through the crowd with a plate of small, perfect bites he insisted on providing. He is warm, charming, larger than life — and still somehow only half-present. His attention keeps finding Elena.

A collector stops him.

****COLLECTOR****

You're the chef.

****DARIUS****

Among other things.

****COLLECTOR****

She's difficult, you know. Brilliant. But difficult.

Darius looks across the room at Elena, who is standing in front of one of her own pieces, arms crossed, refusing to smile for a photo.

****DARIUS****

She's exacting.

There's a difference.

He walks away before the collector can reply.

****INT. GALLERY – LATER****

Elena finds Darius on a balcony away from the noise.

****ELENA****

You didn't have to come.

****DARIUS****

Yes I did.

****ELENA****

You're very visible next to me. People are already telling stories.

****DARIUS****

Let them.

I've never cared about the stories. I care about the source material.

She looks at him for a long time. The guarded expression softens by a fraction.

****ELENA****

Take me home.

****DARIUS****

Yours or mine?

****ELENA****

Yours.

I want to be fed.

****INT. DARIUS'S APARTMENT – NIGHT****

They barely make it through the door.

This time the hunger is mutual and unrestrained. Clothes come off with the same focus Darius brings to a reduction and Elena brings to a brushstroke. It is physical, creative, occasionally rough, and completely present.

Afterward they lie on the kitchen floor because the bed felt too far.

****ELENA****

We're going to get cold.

****DARIUS****

I'll make it worth it.

He does.

****INT. ELENA'S STUDIO – DAY****

Elena is working on a new series. The bodies in the paintings are no longer only in conflict. Some of them are holding on.

Darius enters quietly with coffee. He sets it down and does not interrupt. He simply sits on the couch and watches her work for twenty full minutes without speaking.

When she finally turns, she looks almost startled to find him still there.

****ELENA****

Most people get bored.

****DARIUS****

Most people don't understand that watching you think is the main event.

She walks over, takes the coffee, and kisses him once — soft, rare, unguarded.

****ELENA****

Stay out of the red paint. It doesn't come out.

****DARIUS****

I'll risk it.

****FADE OUT.****

****ACT THREE****

****INT. DARIUS'S RESTAURANT – PRIVATE DINING ROOM – NIGHT****

A major investor dinner. Pressure is high. Darius is in full command of the kitchen, but his phone keeps lighting up with messages from Elena that he can't answer.

When he finally steps out, he finds her waiting by the back entrance, coat on, expression unreadable.

****DARIUS****

You're supposed to be at the studio.

****ELENA****

I got tired of being the only one who shows up.

The words land. Darius wipes his hands on a towel and steps into the alley with her.

****DARIUS****

I'm building something.

****ELENA****

So am I.

The difference is I don't disappear inside it and call it ambition.

Silence. The city noise fills the space between them.

****DARIUS****

I don't know how to do this at half-speed.

****ELENA****

I'm not asking for half-speed.

I'm asking not to be the thing you schedule around.

He looks at her — really looks — and the larger-than-life warmth drops into something more honest.

****DARIUS****

Come inside.

I'll feed you after they leave. Properly.

****ELENA****

And if I say no?

****DARIUS****

Then I'll close the kitchen and cook for you at home.

I'm not losing the main course because of the side work.

She studies him for a long moment, then nods once.

****INT. DARIUS'S APARTMENT – LATER THAT NIGHT****

True to his word, Darius cooks like the rest of the world has been canceled. Elena sits on the counter in one of his shirts, watching him move.

****ELENA****

You're still performing a little.

****DARIUS****

Old habit.

Give me time.

She reaches out and stops his hand mid-reach for a pan.

****ELENA****

Time is the one thing I don't give easily.

****DARIUS****

Then I'll earn it in smaller pieces.

He kisses the inside of her wrist. The gesture is quiet and devastating.

****INT. ELENA'S STUDIO – WEEK LATER****

A new painting dominates the wall. It is the most vulnerable thing she has ever shown him — two figures, close, unfinished on purpose, as if the act of completing them would be too final.

Darius stands in front of it for a long time.

****DARIUS****

Is this us?

****ELENA****

It's the risk of us.

He turns to her.

****DARIUS****

I'm all in on the risk.

****ELENA****

Even when I'm difficult?

****DARIUS****

Especially then.

Easy never taught me anything worth keeping.

She walks into his arms. For the first time, there is no performance on either side. Just two people who have decided that the appetite they have for each other is the one thing they will not ration.

****INT. DARIUS'S RESTAURANT – KITCHEN – NIGHT (MONTHS LATER)****

Service is over. The kitchen is closed to the public.

Darius and Elena move around each other with the ease of people who have learned each other's rhythms. She plates while he finishes a sauce. They do not need to speak much.

At one point he stops behind her, rests his chin on her shoulder, and simply breathes her in.

****ELENA****

You're going to get butter on my shirt.

****DARIUS****

I'll buy you another one.

****ELENA****

You always say that.

****DARIUS****

I always mean it.

She turns in his arms. The kiss is slow, familiar, and still hungry.

****ELENA****

Feed me.

****DARIUS****

Always.

****FADE OUT.****

****THE END****
