

The Wife

Author not credited

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Contents

PROLOGUE	5
CHAPTER ONE	8
CHAPTER TWO	13
CHAPTER THREE	18
CHAPTER FOUR	28
CHAPTER FIVE	33
CHAPTER SIX	38
CHAPTER SEVEN	43
CHAPTER EIGHT	49
CHAPTER NINE	54
CHAPTER TEN	59
CHAPTER ELEVEN	64
CHAPTER TWELVE	69
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	75
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	80
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	85
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	91
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	96
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN	102
CHAPTER NINETEEN	107
CHAPTER TWENTY	112

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE	117
CHAPTER TWENTY TWO	122
CHAPTER TWENTY THREE	128
CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR	132
CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE	137
CHAPTER TWENTY SIX	142
CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN	147
CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT	152
CHAPTER TWENTY NINE	156
CHAPTER THIRTY	161
CHAPTER THIRTY ONE	166
CHAPTER THIRTY TWO	171
CHAPTER THIRTY THREE	177
CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR	182
CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE	187
CHAPTER THIRTY SIX	192
CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN	198
CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT	203
CHAPTER THIRTY NINE	208
CHAPTER FORTY	213

About this edition

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PROLOGUE

"When will you give me a grandson Nathan?" Nathan listened as his mother brought that subject up once again.

What could he do to satisfy the woman?

His mother was a tall woman in her early fifties. One with the mouth of a teenager. She could never just stop babbling. Nathan could hardly believe he was spawned by the woman. Her hair was dirty blonde with faint streaks of the grey but she did a good job hiding them using hair treatments. Her skin was porcelain white almost making her as white as a corpse and it had fine lines to adorn her transition into old age. She was not welcoming it well, however.

She masked her face in Mary Kay in hopes to defy nature and it was a failing battle.

He, on the other hand, had picked most of his features from his late father. He had the same hair color as his mother but he earned his chiseled features from his no-nonsense father. His built-up body was a work of his, the only thing he took seriously in his teenage years. Things have changed but going to the gym once a week had become a part of him. His light caramel skin, a mixture of his mother's ghost-white skin and his father's ebony skin color.

Nathan's mum reached out to pick a cracker from a tray that was placed on the enamel-coated stool.

Stuffing her mouth with the plain but not bitter snack, She continued to rant.

"Are you even listening to me?"

Nathan was not. His mother's visit was interrupting his perfectly planned day. His face was plastered on his phone where he had written his schedules for the day and how his mother had swallowed up two hours and ruining his life.

What he had to do for family!

"I am mother," Nathan replied absentmindedly as he watched his mother stuff another of his maid's cracker into her mouth.

"You shouldn't eat too much of that," Nathan commented when he watched his mother pick another one.

His mother flayed her hands at him sending some of the grains on his perfectly ironed shirt and making it dirty.

"Good gracious!" He yelled when this happened.

"Mom! I had a really important meeting!" Nathan yelled louder gaining the maid, Betty who peeked from the kitchen to see what drama she was missing.

"Don't you yell at me!" Her voice turned hoarse and Nathan could tell she was about to be more dramatic.

"I just want what's best for you. I might not live long enough to see you happily married." She sobbed.

"Even if..." She continued to Nathan's aching ears." it's Betty."

Nathan raised an eyebrow. He had nothing against Betty but she wasn't just his type. He cherished control and he knew Betty would never even let him taste that. The girl held her pride in high esteem despite being a worker.

Nathan brushed back his brownish hair backward as he thought of a good way to get rid of his mother. She was staying with him for a week before she moved back to Greece, where his family manor resided.

"Ok, Mom! I have a girlfriend. If I bring her home, would you be satisfied and let me be?"

Nathan watched his mother face lit up with excitement.

"I knew it." She stated, snapping her fingers like she had gotten a brilliant business idea.

"Bring her home, Nathan. I want to talk to her." His mother mused.

What a drama queen!

Nathan checked his phone again for his schedule. Of he didn't plan his move now, he would be late and like really late.

He had a meeting with Mr. Duarte Suarez, another business mogul that could make his company hit the world.

"So...I have to go. Betty will help you with anything you need. I'll be back at four in the afternoon."

And before his mother could assert her opinion or another one of her many ridiculous ideas. He strode out.

His mother watched in silence as he threaded out the doorway and his bulky frame slowly disappeared in the light.

"At least he was bringing his girlfriend." She pacified herself and reached out to the tray to pick another cracker only to find out it was empty. She sulked and called on the maid to give her a refill. Her son was coming home soon and she could hardly wait to see his woman of choice.

CHAPTER ONE

The Boulderfist company was one of the most influential companies in the suburban of Mexico which was set up six years ago by Nathan and three other equally wealthy individuals.

The company produced wine. The kind that made people drunk and drained them of their money while adding to Nathan and his shareholders' pockets.

The elegant building was a 20 story building adorned with glass-like mirrors and a very busy one at that.

A red Ferrari pulled up at the enormous parking lot with Mr. Nathan Tocci getting out from it.

A young woman in her early twenties and dressed in a red suit. immediately rushed to aid him with his briefcase which he could be handled individually.

"Sir! Mr. Rodriguez is waiting."

Nathan bit his lips hating he wasted a fellow elites time.

"Thank you, Claire."

The woman gave him a weak grin and brushed her long black hair which was being tossed around by the wind behind her hair.

Nathan rushed into the seminar room, ignoring hundreds of workers greeting him a good morning. This uneventful morning was about to turn sour if he didn't bag that deal.

The seminar room was the only quiet place in the building that was absent from noisy workers. The room was painted Plain white with the lights tonight up its simple elegance.

It could contain twenty individuals and although it was rarely used, the room remained speck clean.

A rectangular table was placed in the center of the room close to the office with chairs made from ebony wood and marble giving it it's shine. At the end of the room was a digital projection device and a whiteboard.

Mr. Rodriguez was busy scribbling on the board and unaware of Nathan's arrival.

"I'm so sorry Mr. Rodriguez." Nathan apologized, indirectly informing the absent-minded man he was around.

The man turned and Nathan got a full view of his status.

His second-hand grey suit and plain white tie told a lot about his fashion sense. He had deep lines on his forehead and Nathan could picture him awake all night and a lot since he had bags under his eyes which made his appearance seem a little bit more haggard. His wide-toothed smile revealed a lot more. His teeth were slightly brown from an early morning coffee drink and His hair was a bit tangled and rough. Nathan could tell he was equally desperate to secure the deal with him.

"It's no biggie. You must have had a tight schedule."

He said.

He was not wrong. Nathan had to babysit his grown ass mother and the thought of bringing in a random girl home to present to his mother as his girlfriend came to mind again. Nathan quickly brushed the thought off and took a seat next to his client to be.

"So...What is the deal about?" Nathan asked, opening his briefcase and taking out a pen and a notebook.

"Yes. I have an idea that will boost your company revenue."

Nathan nodded, penning what the man just uttered while the man continued his presentation.

The man took out a marker and began to make a scribble on the whiteboard.

"Your company is into winemaking, warehousing, and food preservation but there is a forgotten market no one has taken interest in."

"And what is that?" Nathan quizzed.

The man sketched a horribly drawn top and said,

"Clothes."

Nathan jotted it down.

"Nice. Why would you suggest a throw a million-dollar at...clothes."

The man wiped beads of sweats that had slightly formed on his forehead and continued with his presentation wildly gesticulating.

"We wear clothes every day but we forget one Simple detail. Change! Throughout history, fashion changes. It's still changing and Boulderfist could be part of this revolution."

Nathan stopped jotting and placed his hands on his chin for support trying to figure what the man had just suggested.

"So you want Boulderfist to start a clothing line with you."

"Yes!" The man replied.

"So how much would you need?"

The man was silent for a brief moment and the only sound that echoed in the room was Nathan slightly tapping his foot on the tiled floor.

"A five hundred to begin with." He finally said.

Nathan could almost laugh if he wasn't on professional grounds.

"Do you have a sample of what you plan to make when you are giving the resources?" Nathan queried further, getting bored with the conversation.

"Ye-e-s!" The man rushed into his portfolio and brought out a set of drawings.

He arranged them neatly to Nathan who glanced through them briefly.

"So are you going to be the designer?"

Nathan watched the man adjust his tie like he was under huge pressure.

"Me and my wife." Mr. Rodriguez chipped in, his face turning red.

Nathan looked at his left fingers and noticed the golden band shining slightly thanks to the influence of the lights. He hadn't noticed that before. His mother's words came to mind. How she wanted to trap him while he was still so young.

"Well, I've heard enough." Nathan said standing up. "Congratulations Mr. Rodriguez. I'll be signing a contract with you soon and then we can talk about the pay."

Nathan watched the man's tensed face turn to a slight smile.

"Oh my—Thank you, Mr. Nathan."

It was no biggie even if he knew he might lose a bit of money. He hardly trusted the man would be successful due to his demeanor but imagining him and a nagging wife was a reason to give charity.

He had the same problem albeit a mother.

Done with the seminar, Nathan walked out and headed to his office to give himself a mental break.

Nathan straightened the stuff on his desk, making sure everything was square and properly spaced. There wasn't much just a phone, a legal-sized lined black pad, his favorite color, a translucent Bic pen with a black top, and a big plastic cube with a picture of his family which his mother forced him to place there.

The Lovely mahogany desk was from his late sister who battled with cancer before losing the battle last year's December. It was the only reason he refused to get rid of it.

Nathan sat down to think of where he was going to get a lady to pose as his girlfriend for the night at least to get his mother off his back.

His door opened and a small face peeked in. Nathan's eyes opened to see Claire, his assistant. He wished he could use her but his mother had seen Claire and her boyfriend a thousand times and there was no way she was going to believe they would be a thing. They had been inseparable since college but in the workplace, she made sure she took him with the high accord.

"Mr. Nathan, someone wants to see you."

Nathan knew he was still free for an hour or two so he wondered who wanted to meet him in his only free time.

"Who?" He queried.

"A lady." Claire replied. "should I let her in?"

"Sure." Nathan buzzed like an exhausted child.

Claire walked out and soon later, a young woman came in.

She was dressed in a sweeping gown that made her look too casual to be here for business. Observing her from leg upwards, Nathan noted her features.

She was slim, like skinny. She had black hair cropped short that balanced her rather long face. She wasn't beautiful in the conventional sense but she was pretty. Her black eyes and plush olive skin were a sight to behold almost making Nathan lust if she wore something more revealing.

The woman walked up to him and bowed respectfully.

"Hello, Mr. Nathan."

Nathan broke free from her spell and immediately spoke,

"Yes, ehm-you wanted to see me?"

"Yes! I need your help."

This he knew. She needed a little bit of money.

"How much do you need?" He asked, bringing out a checkbook from his drawer.

The woman put up her palm as if to shut him up,

"I don't need your charity. I just want to work."

Nathan was astounded by her boldness yet pleased that she wasn't lazy.

"Mrs..." Nathan said trying to get her to say her name.

"Bianca." She chipped in.

"Thanks. Mrs..."

"Miss!" She corrected.

"Sorry, Miss Bianca, we don't have a job right now for you but not to worry, I can arrange something."

The woman immediately fell on her knees when he said this.

"I'm begging you. I have no place to stay. I'll do anything." The woman pleaded, face down.

Nathan was embarrassed. She didn't want money and there was no menial love available presently.

"Please stand up Miss Bianca. I wish I could help but..."

Nathan's mind went reeling just when his phone chimed. It was his mother. He stared at the phone and the woman who needed a job simultaneously.

What a connection and yet he had almost blindly missed it.

"Sir?"

"Maybe I have something for you but it's personal. Can you act?"

The woman didn't even waste a second in giving him her reply.

"Yes! I acted in middle school."

Nathan smirked. He didn't believe in miracles, not since his sister's death but maybe manna did fall from heaven. Maybe it did.

CHAPTER TWO

"Manna doesn't fall if you don't ask."

"So what do I have to do?" Bianca asked, angsty to finally start working.

"You...pretend to be my girlfriend," Nathan said firmly but gently.

"Why?"

Bianca seemed confused as to why he would want her to make her pretend she was in a relationship with him.

"Because I have a demanding mom and I want her out as soon as possible. "

Bianca nodded solemnly to his reply.

"So now that I'm idle. Let get to know each other. My mother will kill you with her question so best be prepared."

Bianca nodded in response and began talking.

"Well, I'm Mexican. Twenty-one. I guess that's all."

Nathan raised an eyebrow.

"No family?"

He watched Bianca slowly grasp to the Hem of her garment and he immediately knew he had made the wrong move.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know they were dead." He apologized, out of necessity than from his heart.

Tears escaped Bianca's eyes and she wiped them off with the back of her hands.

"They are not dead. I haven't seen my father since birth. My mother is an alcoholic and can barely for herself. I do my best to support us."

Time was running out and this conversation and taken tye route to self-pity not what Nathan was expecting. His phone chimed again and this time he picked it up.

"Hello, mother."

"Nate! It's getting late. Where are you?"

His mother's voice rang furiously at the end of the line. Bianca forgot her worries suppressing a laugh.

"I'll be back by six." Nathan sent, his cheeks flushed.

"Waiting."

The line went dead and Nathan dropped the phone.

"That is what I face every single time she visits. Always complaining about something. Maybe that makes us alike, like kindred spirits."

"Very unlikely." I'll do anything to trade my life with yours." Bianca admitted.

"Interesting," Nathan noted.

"So what about you?" Bianca asked.

Nathan thought for a little while.

"I'm a simple man. I love anything black, love working, and more importantly, I cherish my privacy."

He tensed the last part like he was referring to Bianca.

Bianca ignored this part.

"When do we go?" The fake girlfriend demanded.

Nate checked his Rolex and determined when they would be going.

"At four o'clock. My assistant Claire will be with you shortly."

Bianca stiffened,

"I don't do well with people. Can't I stay here?"

Nathan stared expressionlessly to her chocolate black eyes.

"We just met Bianca. I just told you, I cherish my privacy."

Nathan strode out and waited at the door for her to come out.

"Milady." He said in a feigned British accent.

Bianca stood up and followed.

"I never knew you had a good sense of humor." She commented.

"I never knew you were so stereotypical," Nathan said, slightly offended. He had a good sense of humor at least when his sister was still alive.

Bianca walked out and Nathan locked the door shut.

Bianca was dead bored with the assistant's attempt of striking a conversation with her. She would not just shut up.

Bianca's reply to every question the secretary threw at her way Ok, Wow, and facial expressions. The phone in the pocket of her gown which she had sown herself rang. She was tempted to pick it just to stop talking to Claire.

"Sorry. I have to pick this." Bianca said, reaching into her pocket and bringing out a small mobile phone.

Pressing a button, she put the phone to her ear.

"Hello, mother."

Claire resumed typing on the computer placed in front of her to give Bianca some privacy.

Bianca talked very briefly before cutting off the line.

"Was that your mother?" Claire asked.

Bianca gave her a stupid look before replying.

"Yes. So when will Mr. Nathan be done with whatever he is doing?"

"There he comes." Claire pointed and Bianca turned to where her finger led her.

Nathan looked exhausted. His shoulder sagged down and his shirt was soaked in his sweat making his singlet visible.

Nathan placed a hand over his head like he had a headache

"We need to go."

"Ok."

Nathan immediately stopped her, his eyes inspecting her body.

"You're not going like this."

Bianca wondered what was wrong with her dressing. She wore the best she had. A gown that had not lost color yet and was presentable to the public eye, a sandal she once set aside for beach-going. She was totally presentable.

"We are going to the mall."

"You have to be kidding me." Bianca retorted.

Turns out he was not kidding. Nathan dragged Bianca to the mall and now she had to pick a dress. One that was presentable to his almighty mother's eye.

Nathan abandoned her in the hands of the manager of the clothing store.

The store manager, a woman who looked between thirty-five to forty, blessed with ebony black skin, and a penchant for fashion tips followed Bianca as she made a selection. If Nathan was going to let her pick a dress then she better-made use of the opportunity to burn down his bank account figures.

She picked three dresses. A royal blue gown that was at knee length and covered everything that needed to be covered. The other two were forced on her by the enthusiastic manager.

"This one will bring out your eyes." She threw a

Leopard skin printed jumpsuit, tight enough to kill a cat. Bianca wondered how she would be able to breathe in those.

"Now go dress and let check you out." The manager said whilst pushing Bianca to the dressing room.

The dressing room was like a closet except with mirrors. The three corners of the walls mirrored her image. Plain and drab.

"Dress." A voice echoed from outside the room.

Bianca roused from her deep thought and picked up the Royal blue dress, the only one she had intended to wear.

She disposed of the old gown she was wearing and slipped into the new ones. Bianca picked up a set of Matching flats and wore them also. Done with dressing, she checked her reflection in the mirror.

"Who are you?" She ran her hands on the image her eyes portrayed.

"Why don't you just get—"

"Oh! my God!"

The scream made Bianca Yelp. It was the manager who could not wait for her to finish. What if she was naked?

"You look amazing but it needs something more."

Before Bianca could resist, the woman was already at her face applying Makeup.

After a series of brushing, wiping, and adding. The woman was done.

"Look at you, you look like a doll."

She was right. Bianca looked like an Android that was under the influence of a remote.

"Thanks." She lied.

"You're welcome. Now go show your boyfriend."

Bianca left, refusing to even debunk that Nathan was her boyfriend. It would be a losing battle.

Bianca stepped out. Slightly uncomfortable with people staring at her. The silent compliments even made it worse.

She quickened her steps until she reached Nathan who was staring blankly at his phone.

"Hello!"

Nathan lifted his chin to meet her face and his eyes immediately widened.

"Woah! You look stunning."

Bianca blushed at his compliment.

"Thanks."

"Ok. Let's go."

The car ride to Nathan's home was quicker than expected. He lived in a huge mansion painted cream. Nathan had Reve to her he wanted it black but didn't want to be tagged as creepy.

The doors were opened by servants and Bianca got a better view of the decor. The house was even painted. It was layered with plaster of Paris that gave it its flawless look. It was more than break taking. Bianca didn't get the chance to allow her eyes to adore the house as Nathan rushed her in. She saw why. The neighbors were glaring at her like they had seen a ghost.

Nathan rang the doorbell and waited for it answered.

Bianca's heart kept pumping in anticipation of what was coming.

What was Nathan's mother going to be like? What would happen?

The questions he knew no answers to were killing her and then the door opened.

CHAPTER THREE

"Everyone has problems so don't you envy."

The maid had the look on pure surprise when she saw Nathan with a visitor. It was more than a rare occasion to see one visit and it was a girl. She knew Nathan had his fair share of women but he was not a player.

This woman, however, looked kind of different. His league of exes usually had three distinct features which were long hair, an exaggerated accent, and a bad attitude to the lower class. The beautiful woman her eyes beheld was humble. The way she had a face to the ground suggested so and could hardly hide her dislike for the heels she wore. Her short hair told a lot about how much she was willing to spend on her looks.

"Can we come in?"

Betty adjusted her hairnet and apologized. She then gave enough room for Nathan and Bianca to come in.

"Nathan is that you?" A voice echoed from somewhere in the huge house.

It was his mother.

"Stay here," Nathan instructed Bianca and she took her seat on an Egyptian made chair while Nathan disappeared into a corner to see his mother.

Nathan's home looked like it was on a world tour. The Greek carpet had a soft feel that sent twinges of pure Bliss up Bianca when her feet grazed on them, it was almost sensual.

There was a fireplace and it was not some Moving picture. Bianca immediately made a mental picture of the new apartment she would get from this odd job. She also noticed the maid would not stop gazing at her. It was very unsettling but Bianca kept her damn mouth shut and then her phone rang.

Of all the time!

Bianca didn't pick up. It was her mother and she knew picking it up would only spell trouble.

She instead waited for the call to drop then sent her mom a text telling her where she was and switching her phone off.

Her palms were sweaty despite how warm the room was but it wasn't cold that made Bianca chilled, it was fear.

Nathan returned and this time with his mother.

The woman was a tall dirty blonde who looked a little to plump for her height. Bianca could spot fine lines on her thin face and the tye makeup she used was doing only little to help.

"You must be my son's girl."

Her voice was loud and Bianca immediately felt she was the chatty type.

"Thank you, ma'am," Bianca responded, not knowing how to act around her.

Throughout her years in middle school, she for once felt stage fright.

Her heart was pumping hard which each step the woman took forward. She could do nothing but stare in the lady's deep grey eyes that seemed to want something from her.

Nathan's mother put her hands on Bianca's skin while she slightly shuddered at the woman's touch. They felt as cold as death. A feeling to match with those eyes.

"Please call me Miranda."

The awkward conversation ended and another began. The maid had disappeared into the kitchen to cook and Nathan was quite busy on his laptop so Bianca was alone and with Miranda who did nothing but stare at the girl.

"So where did you meet?"

Bianca thanked the heavens that she and Nathan had covered that part on the way home and there was nothing to hide or lie about.

"In his office." She calmly replied.

Miranda seemed dissatisfied. She wanted more details.

"When? Could on! Talk to me!" She mused.

My mind raced around trying to imagine the perfect scenario to meet with Nathan under normal circumstances. I needed a cock a bull story.

Nathan's head peeked up and I could see him worry about what I was going to say.

"I met him at the last Boulderfist meeting. My father was sick so I have to fill his place. It was like the universe brought us together. After the meeting. We had a little accident and we got to know each other and from there... I think we blossomed unto what we are now."

That kept Miranda calm for some time.

"Forgive me, dear, what so your name?" Miranda questioned.

"Bianca. Bianca Romero."

"Nice name." She complimented making Bianca smile.

"And what do your parents do?"

"My father is dead now and my mother works runs his company now. The company is into winemaking." Bianca lied.

Miranda listened tentatively then proceeded to comment.

"Like my son? Your meeting was preordained."

Nathan suddenly shut his laptop.

"Betty, bring my food upstairs when you're done. "

That being said, he headed to his room but his mother stopped him.

"Nath! We need to talk."

Nathan was just about to protest when she yanked him by the arm and made him follow her.

"What now!?" Nathan protested when they were away from the living room. He was almost sick of his mother dictating his life for him like he was some kind of zombie.

She didn't look disgruntled at all. Her son was full of bad behavior so it was hardly something new.

" I like her. Why haven't you proposed yet?"

"Because we met a month ago," Nathan answered, very sarcastic.

"I mean, mum, you've seen her. Can you let me be? And when are you leaving?" Nathan added.

He slowly watched his mother turned pale.

"I just...when your sister died, she didn't have children. I'm just worried that something bad happens to you...I don't want to..." Her words were heavy and incoherent before she burst into tears.

Nathan felt sad and hated his mom for playing the guilty card. She was quite talented in the game.

"I'm sorry Mom." He cooed.

"Just promise me you will get married to her."

This was blackmail. She knew he didn't have a choice.

"I will."

His mother immediately wiped away her tears as nothing had happened.

"And...I'll be staying for the next two months. Your father has a meeting here but his health won't allow him to make it so I will be here longer than you think."

Nathan glared at his mother wide-eyed. She was good! She had swiftly planned a these and there was no way he was going to beat her at her own game. He watched him leave but remained glued to the spot.

He had promised Bianca money for faking to be his girl for a night. He would have to offer more than that if he was going to keep her close for two whole months and if his mother had anything else in store, He might have to marry her.

The maid was setting the dining table for supper and Bianca could hardly wait to stuff her mouth with food. She was hungry and she would not be modest about it. Miranda returned to the living room however Nathan was yet to be found. It was 8 pm already and that meant she was late so much for trouble. Where was Nathan?

The devil immediately showed up looking just as worried as her.

He walked up to her and whispered to her ear,

"We need to talk."

Bianca pondered why he would say that. Did his mother say vile things about her?

"Ok!" She whispered back.

"Follow me." He commanded, his words were sending hot breaths down her neck which somehow turned her on. It was a feeling she did not like especially when goosebumps immediately sprouted on her skin in response to just....breathing!

She didn't question further. Nathan's mother was busy helping the maid set the plates and hardly even turned to look at them. Moreover, it was an opportunity to get away from those glaring eyes.

Nathan led the way and Bianca followed. The house was bigger than she expected. She followed Nathan upstairs that led to a passageway with doors on both sides of the walls.

Nathan went one on right, the third one to be precise.

It was his room. Nathan's room was not much of what she expected.

It had a medium-sized bed right in the center of the room with an office table on the left. The right was a wardrobe that was half opened so she could see some of his clothes. The floor was carpeted

with a woolly velvet material. Bianca was wearing heels again but she could tell it was just like the one in the middle living room.

She still wondered why Nathan called her here so she turned to face him but found him undressing instead.

No!

His shirt had completely disappeared and he was also doing away with his singlet. When the singlet was on the floor, Bianca could see his toned features.

He was built. He didn't look like he was obsessed with having the perfect body but he did have rock hard albs that made her swoon. The middle was hairy and oh it was doing things to her and worse, he was doing away with his pants too. What did he plan to do?

"So why am I here?" Bianca asked gaining composure and the strength to fight the flesh.

"You might be staying more than a night."

"Why?" She demanded sharply, taking her eyes away from the bulge under.

"My mother will be staying for a month at two so I need you at my beck and call," Nathan responded, searching his wardrobe for something light to wear.

"Is that all?" Bianca further asked, struggling to keep her mind clear and not even look down.

Nathan approached her still in his boxer shorts only. He was so close to her that she could hear his slow deep breathing.

"And I might also marry you. I'll pay you handsomely if you say yes."

Senses had gone haywire and Bianca was losing it. His bulge was touching her and she could feel her nipples begin to harden and that occasional graze.

"So what do you say?" He quizzed, moving closer.

"Yes!" She blurted.

Bianca knew she would regret it and a lot. She wasn't in her right senses when she replied and even now when he smiled at her.

This man was dangerous.

"Manna doesn't fall if you don't ask."

"So what do I have to do?" Bianca asked, angsty to finally start working.

"You...pretend to be my girlfriend," Nathan said firmly but gently.

"Why?"

Bianca seemed confused as to why he would want her to make her pretend she was in a relationship with him.

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"Well, I'm Mexican. Twenty-one. I guess that's all."

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"I'm so sorry. I didn't know they were dead." He apologized, out of necessity than from his heart.

Tears escaped Bianca's eyes and she wiped them off with the back of her hands.

"They are not dead. I haven't seen my father since birth. My mother is an alcoholic and can barely for herself. I do my best to support us."

Time was running out and this conversation and taken tye route to self-pity not what Nathan was expecting. His phone chimed again and this time he picked it up.

"Hello, mother."

"Nate! It's getting late. Where are you?"

His mother's voice rang furiously at the end of the line. Bianca forgot her worries suppressing a laugh.

"I'll be back by six." Nathan sent, his cheeks flushed.

"Waiting."

The line went dead and Nathan dropped the phone.

"That is what I face every single time she visits. Always complaining about something. Maybe that makes us alike, like kindred spirits."

"Very unlikely." I'll do anything to trade my life with yours." Bianca admitted.

"Interesting," Nathan noted.

" So what about you?" Bianca asked.

Nathan thought for a little while.

"I'm a simple man. I love anything black, love working, and more importantly, I cherish my privacy."

He tensed the last part like he was referring to Bianca.

Bianca ignored this part.

"When do we go?" The fake girlfriend demanded.

Nate checked his Rolex and determined when they would be going.

"At four o'clock. My assistant Claire will be with you shortly."

Bianca stiffened,

"I don't do well with people. Can't I stay here?"

Nathan stared expressionlessly to her chocolate black eyes.

"We just met Bianca. I just told you, I cherish my privacy."

Nathan strode out and waited at the door for her to come out.

"Milady." He said in a feigned British accent.

Bianca stood up and followed.

"I never knew you had a good sense of humor." She commented.

"I never knew you were so stereotypical," Nathan said, slightly offended. He had a good sense of humor at least when his sister was still alive.

Bianca walked out and Nathan locked the door shut.

Bianca was dead bored with the assistant's attempt of striking a conversation with her. She would not just shut up.

Bianca's reply to every question the secretary threw at her way Ok, Wow, and facial expressions. The phone in the pocket of her gown which she had sown herself rang. She was tempted to pick it just to stop talking to Claire.

"Sorry. I have to pick this." Bianca said, reaching into her pocket and bringing out a small mobile phone.

Pressing a button, she put the phone to her ear.

"Hello, mother."

Claire resumed typing on the computer placed in front of her to give Bianca some privacy.

Bianca talked very briefly before cutting off the line.

"Was that your mother?" Claire asked.

Bianca gave her a stupid look before replying.

"Yes. So when will Mr. Nathan be done with whatever he is doing?"

"There he comes." Claire pointed and Bianca turned to where her finger led her.

Nathan looked exhausted. His shoulder sagged down and his shirt was soaked in his sweat making his singlet visible.

Nathan placed a hand over his head like he had a headache

"We need to go."

"Ok."

Nathan immediately stopped her, his eyes inspecting her body.

"You're not going like this."

Bianca wondered what was wrong with her dressing. She wore the best she had. A gown that had not lost color yet and was presentable to the public eye, a sandal she once set aside for beach-going. She was totally presentable.

"We are going to the mall."

"You have to be kidding me." Bianca retorted.

Turns out he was not kidding. Nathan dragged Bianca to the mall and now she had to pick a dress. One that was presentable to his almighty mother's eye.

Nathan abandoned her in the hands of the manager of the clothing store.

The store manager, a woman who looked between thirty-five to forty, blessed with ebony black skin, and a penchant for fashion tips followed Bianca as she made a selection. If Nathan was going to let her pick a dress then she better-made use of the opportunity to burn down his bank account figures.

She picked three dresses. A royal blue gown that was at knee length and covered everything that needed to be covered. The other two were forced on her by the enthusiastic manager.

"This one will bring out your eyes." She threw a

Leopard skin printed jumpsuit, tight enough to kill a cat. Bianca wondered how she would be able to breathe in those.

"Now go dress and let check you out." The manager said whilst pushing Bianca to the dressing room.

The dressing room was like a closet except with mirrors. The three corners of the walls mirrored her image. Plain and drab.

"Dress." A voice echoed from outside the room.

Bianca roused from her deep thought and picked up the Royal blue dress, the only one she had intended to wear.

She disposed of the old gown she was wearing and slipped into the new ones. Bianca picked up a set of Matching flats and wore them also. Done with dressing, she checked her reflection in the mirror.

"Who are you?" She ran her hands on the image her eyes portrayed.

"Why don't you just get—"

"Oh! my God!"

The scream made Bianca Yelp. It was the manager who could not wait for her to finish. What if she was naked?

"You look amazing but it needs something more."

Before Bianca could resist, the woman was already at her face applying Makeup.

After a series of brushing, wiping, and adding. The woman was done.

"Look at you, you look like a doll."

She was right. Bianca looked like an Android that was under the influence of a remote.

"Thanks." She lied.

"You're welcome. Now go show your boyfriend."

Bianca left, refusing to even debunk that Nathan was her boyfriend. It would be a losing battle.

Bianca stepped out. Slightly uncomfortable with people staring at her. The silent compliments even made it worse.

She quickened her steps until she reached Nathan who was staring blankly at his phone.

"Hello!"

Nathan lifted his chin to meet her face and his eyes immediately widened.

"Woah! You look stunning."

Bianca blushed at his compliment.

"Thanks."

"Ok. Let's go."

The car ride to Nathan's home was quicker than expected. He lived in a huge mansion painted cream. Nathan had Reve to her he wanted it black but didn't want to be tagged as creepy.

The doors were opened by servants and Bianca got a better view of the decor. The house was even painted. It was layered with plaster of Paris that gave it its flawless look. It was more than break taking. Bianca didn't get the chance to allow her eyes to adore the house as Nathan rushed her in. She saw why. The neighbors were glaring at her like they had seen a ghost.

Nathan rang the doorbell and waited for it answered.

Bianca's heart kept pumping in anticipation of what was coming.

What was Nathan's mother going to be like? What would happen?

The questions he knew no answers to were killing her and then the door opened.

CHAPTER FOUR

Three months later

"Time tells all things"

The wedding preparation was far too hectic for even Nathan. His mother indeed had her way and now he was getting married to a girl he barely knew.

Who is was he to complain?

Bianca as taking this well. She was a good little girl or maybe she was just doing it for the huge paycheck he was going to offer her.

Nathan had no male friends so his room was filled with his co-workers who hardly cared if he was dressed or not. They were all too busy either chatting or on their phones.

Nathan spoke to the only person who would listen to him, himself.

"Just do it, Nathan. In a year you'll file for divorce and everyone goes home happy."

He put on a black tie adorning his spotless and ironed white shirt. His favorite color.

"Are you ready?" Rodriguez asked.

Strange as it might be, the man was quite talented at fashion designing, and his brand, Rori had taken the fashion world by storm. Boulderfist was now ten times richer and Rodriguez now shared stock with our company, proving me wrong.

"Yes, just thinking."

Rode seemed to take Nathan's words the wrong way and he proceeded to give him a pep talk about starting a family.

"I know." Nathan lied.

This wasn't me. He didn't want kids...at least now. It had been his big sister's wish to have a huge family she could cuddle and somehow that reminded Nathan of his dead sister.

No! He had to clear his mind off the incident. That was in the past and even if this wasn't his future, it was his present.

He had to do this. He put on the last piece of clothing to complete his attire. A dark blue lounge jacket trimmed to hug his skin.

"Let's go."

"You look really beautiful."

Bianca did not feel so beautiful. Her mother had refused to the honors of dressing her or even complimenting her.

Sure this was not an average wedding but the least she could do for her was put on a happy face for her sake.

"How does she look?" Claire innocently quizzed her mother.

Mrs. Romero was neither pleased with Claire's incessant ramblings but she kept her mouth shut. She would spill far lethal things if she let her tongue roam.

Claire finally let it go and continued dressing Bianca. She was complete. The delicately sewn gown was a creation of "Rori". It was simply perfect.

The gown spun on the bare floor like cotton, soft. It even made the bride look more innocent but what was innocence without the veil.

Bianca's hair had been plaited into a bun to accommodate the veil's comb and not bother her too much.

"Done. We can meet the groom now." Claire said in delight almost grabbing Bianca's hand and taking her out. Her mother didn't seem to elate to watch her daughter getting married. Maybe she knew it was a marriage of convenience.

"No Claire! I'll take it from here. No one does it as a mother would." Mrs. Romero's voice was authoritative. Claire wasted no time in obeying the woman's wish and disappeared out of the room.

"Adriana! You can still stop this madness!" Mrs. Romero said in a hushed tone.

Bianca faced her mother, her stance was now possessive. She was no longer Bianca, the girl she played far too good.

"No mother! You are wrong. I'm doing this to stop that bastard's madness." Bianca/Adriana shot back.

Her mother's solemn look turned pale.

"You don't have to be vengeful like your father. I'm begging you."

Adriana/Bianca ignored her mother's concern but acknowledged her words.

"He didn't think of the repercussion when he almost destroyed Dad. He's about to learn the world is not a monopoly he's good at."

Adriana's mother respected her daughter's wish. She only wished she had been there earlier to prevent her husband from filling her daughter's head with so much evil. Her sweet innocent girl was going after a man that had ruined her husband and made a lifelong rocky relationship between the three, Maybe it was meant to be.

He avenges the innocent after all.

The bells rang rhythmically and gave Claire a tune that was surely going to get stuck in her head. Saint Marco cathedral was a beautiful place and old in every way.

The walls were made from stone bricks and had refused to be changed to concrete due to the popular belief that it would disturb resting souls.

The walls were now mossy green and some looked moist and sleek enough to disgust a germ-phobic but it actually gave the arena a more archaic look and it just sent a peace sign to every troubled soul if you just let yourself go and absorb the scenery.

Taking in the dove chatter, the bells rhythm, and the priest...

"Wow! Nathan's bride looks awful familiar."

Claire groaned and wondered why she even brought John here. He had ruined her quick 'peace within the storm' kind of experience.

"Oh! A model you saw maybe." Claire joked.

John laughed a little but he wasn't letting his premonitions go.

"Yes, A COO at..." John said snapping his fingers and hoping to remember the name of the company he thought he saw Bianca.

"Yeah!" He snapped his fingers, "Transcorps."

Claire glared at him. He was speaking gibberish. There was no way the bride exchanging vows with her reluctant friend was a COO but it was worth checking into.

"Yes, I do." The bride answered the priest question looking sweet and adorable to her future husband.

"Do you Nathan Tellez take Bianca Romero to be your lawfully wedded wife, to be true to her in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. To love her and honor her all the days of your life?"

Nathan gave a smile, one that spoke of fear.

"I do."

The rings were brought forth, a young child holding them in a red cushion, bands to seal their relationship. One that was never even real.

It was now or never for Nathan. He turned to see his mother weeping with joy for him. The bands were getting closer to his hands and he was also touching Bianca's hands already. If only someone could just object.

No one did and the rings went in on the new couple.

"You may now kiss the bride."

Claire reached into her pocket and withdrew her phone. Turning on the internet connection, she went over to Google and searched on the Transcorp agency.

It was one of Boulderfist stiff competition and if it turned out John was right, she would have to tell Nathan.

The page loaded and she began scrolling through, inspecting the individuals in the pictures wiki provided.

Claire soon got her answer and it made her jaw drop.

A photo of Transcorp CEO, Everardo Romero. The surname was the same as Bianca's. The woman close to him was what added to the shock.

"Adriana Romero, COO of Transcorp."

The lady was a spitting image of Bianca except the woman staring back at the camera in the photo looked more confident.

Just to be sure, Claire checked Nathan's new bride. She could not be wrong. That cropped hair, those deep eyes, the restlessness, and the craving, it was all there.

Claire read recent news concerning Transcorp and the headlines she saw terrified her.

"Mexico's leading agency, Transcorps COO disappears. Rumored to be in a top-secret meeting."

It could not just be a coincidence. The answer was obvious. There was no one like Bianca.

Adriana was only here for no good but what kind of evil could she possibly want to achieve?

Claire had to know for sure before she accused Bianca of spying and if she was right, she would know what to do.

CHAPTER FIVE

"After God, fear women"

Claire was dumbstruck. It could not be. Nathan had just married his competitor and she had nothing to say about it.

The dinner was about to commence so she had plenty of time to prove Bianca was a fraud.

Wrong!

She had very little time and she remaining glued to her seat was not going to change anything.

Claire stood up and joined the new wife, her suspicion making her unable to keep a smile.

"Bianca..." There was nothing to say. Claire did not want to throw the bombshell just like that, people could still make out what she was about to spit out but Claire kept the word buried inside. There was a chance that Bianca might just be a lookalike and it was all just a misunderstanding. A thousand thoughts were scrambling her mind and Bianca feared she was about to utter a word that could ruin Nathan's marriage.

"Bianca! You look beautiful."

Luckily, Nathan's mother came to her rescue along with her bubbly nature.

"Thanks!" Bianca coyly replied.

"Now let's go get dressed for the party," Miranda said, grabbing Bianca slightly by her wrist.

Before Nathan's overbearing mom could drag her off completely, Bianca turned to face Claire,

"You wanted to say something?"

Claire paused, she badly wanted to know but she had no solid proof that Bianca was Adriana and was a spy from Transcorp. A photo could not be the only validation that Bianca was a fraud.

"Let's go get you dressed for the party!" Claire managed, keeping a plastic smile to avert suspicion.

"Ok."

Claire could feel the guilty look in Bianca's almost innocent eyes, the lies.

If she was Adriana, why was she doing this?

It was a question she could answer if she studied Bianca closely today.

She made a mental note to keep to her word.

She had a plan and it began with Mrs. Romero. She was the only person who did not seem a bit happy about this marriage. She probably knew what was off and wasn't happy with her daughter. It made sense now.

Claire followed Miranda and Bianca towards the dressing room and when she noticed they weren't looking, she made a getaway.

The cathedral was getting empty with guests leaving to reach Nathan's mansion where the party would take place.

Mrs. Romero wasn't going just yet, she sat alone in the front row and staring blankly at the picture of Christ placed on the altar as if asking for something.

Trusting her instinct, Claire sat next to her.

"You seem sad Mrs. Romero, why?"

Mrs. Romero hadn't noticed someone joined her and shuddered lightly when those words were spoken.

"Oh! Just sad!" She stated and went silent.

The look she had on her face informed Claire she wanted the conversation to end as quickly as possible.

"What's making you sad Mrs. Romero? Are you not happy your daughters is getting married to a well-do man....or is it something else?"

Mrs. Romero cast a deep gaze at Claire who joined in the "glaring games".

"It's Bianca's father."

She stuttered her daughter's name, Almost like she wanted to say something else.

"What about him?" Claire pressed further.

Mrs. Romero was not enjoying their small talk but she made no means to let it known.

"I just wish he was here to see his daughter getting married."

Claire was not buying her response. She needed answers and she was getting them albeit slowly. She could get the message that "Bianca's" father was probably alive and he was instrumental in the game they were playing and that was why he wasn't here and was proclaimed dead.

"What was his name?"

Claire has gotten to know from the Transcorp wiki' profile that the CEO was Adriana's father. If only Mrs. Romero made a slip-up.

"Is there anything you want from me?"

The woman suspected Claire's intentions.

"No! I just..."

The woman stood up and walked out abruptly on Claire.

"Shit!" Claire cursed when Mrs. Romero was out of sight.

There was something else she had in mind and she was willing to try it.

The mansion had been decorated.

The blending hue of yellow and blue made Nathan's eyes burn.

Taking another sip of the bittersweet champagne that stung his lips mildly, he wondered what he was going to do now.

The ring - an embodiment of imprisonment glittered in the bright lights, mocking him.

"Fuck you!" He spat at the wedding ring which seemed to only smile more. He was dead drunk.

It was seven pm and he wasted away like he was in a bar drowning his worries. At least he was doing the latter.

Clapping forced his attention to why people were making such an awful noise.

His bride was coming down the stairs and epitome of man-made beauty.

Nathan could see his mother locking hands with her and telling her to walk slowly, cherishing the moment.

Bianca was dressed in an elegant blue gown.

It was strapless and showed enough skin to make men drool.

The gown reached down and flowed on the carpeted rug like a dancing fountain, it then twirled into shocks of midnight blue with every step she took. The whispering silver hiding amongst the indigo like stars peeping through broken slits of dark blue night.

None of his business if they wanted to do a parade but then everyone turned on him.

Was he supposed to do something?

He hiccuped. Their stares of sheer joy, he interpreted as prosecution.

They were leading him to a slaughterhouse. A beautiful and smiling one. What could he do but put on a show.

Nathan walked up to Bianca, trying to keep a straight and collected face. The media were here after all. Each step he took, a risk of falling flat and emptying all he had drunk.

"Will you do me the honors?" Nathan asked as politely as he could be.

His stomach grumbled and he felt a deep pain in his guts. His stomach was punishing him for tainting it with impurity.

Bianca unlocked her hands from Miranda's and reached for his.

When her suckle hands touched his, Nathan felt a surge of electricity and it made him hold on to her hands refusing to let them go.

The music began playing.

No Ordinary Love, a song by a popular R&B singer. His mother was obsessed with that music and he could only guess she was responsible for why it was being played.

All he wanted to do was sit alone but now Nathan was In the middle of the room about to be stared at for minutes straight.

His stomach condition worsened and he began to feel a bit sick.

"Is anything wrong?" Bianca quizzed, she could see how pale he looked.

He ignored her concern and proceeded to dance.

"I'm fi..."

The words barely came out before he hurled out all the contents in his stomach.

Bianca got it all. Her once beautiful gown was now covered in undigested chunks of food and champagne. To add to the awkward moment, cameras began to flash, followed by a clicking sound.

The media were taking pictures.

Bianca was stunned and her cheeks turned rouge. Two things Nathan could make out, she was either angry or humiliated but there was only a thin line separating that. It could be both.

Nathan's mother came to the rescue. She shielded Bianca from the camera and led her back upstairs to clean up.

Nathan was alone again. His wish had come true but with another disadvantage. People were laughing or just staring wide-eyed and with their mouths agape.

"Swallow me." He begged the earth silently.

Nathan walked back to his drink. He shouldn't, not after puking on Bianca but he couldn't resist. He wanted this whole night to be over as quick as possible so best he wasted away to do away with time.

The drink went down his throat burning it all the way down.

Bliss.

Bianca ignored any help from Miranda as she stormed into the bathroom.

Not paying attention to anything, she went right for the shower and slipped herself of the ruined dress.

That bastard!

She scrubbed the sticky yet sleek waste off under the running water.

She felt chills almost immediately the water touched her skin.

Closing her eyes, she ran her bare hands over her body, Dirty yellow liquid went down the drain getting tinted with each rain of water running down her body.

Bianca ran her fingers on the faucet, stopping the flow of the screaming water.

A towel was already hung out on a rack and she robed her naked body with it.

Bianca noticed a note peeking under the door and picked it out of sheer curiosity.

Why had she even picked it up?

It did feel like someone slipped it there just when she entered.

What could be in it?

She unwrapped the content and read.

"Adriana."

No! No! No! Someone knew.

CHAPTER SIX

" Evil lurks in the walls you conceal."

Damn! Fear gripped Adriana. Had her cover been blown?

Her father would be so disappointed with her. She needed to act quickly but first, she needed to get dressed.

She had made up her mind not to go out of the room until she had gotten her answer.

Adriana went to Nathan's room hoping to find what she needed to hold on to if indeed she was revealed or even if she had to flee.

She was regretting her decision now.

She slipped into a pair of new undies that Nathan had made sure he bought for her.

That man just disgusted her!

She reached for her luggage which was stuffed inside Nathan's wardrobe and brought out a phone she had concealed inside the bag.

She dialed a number and placed the phone to her ear.

"Hello, My princess."

Her father's voice calmed a bit.

"There's a problem father!"

Her tone was serious and the man on the line knew something had gone wrong.

"Did he find you out?"

"No! I don't think so but someone has and the person is trying to get to me. I found a note with my name on it."

Her father cackled.

"No need to worry, even if he finds out, you're already married. What you need to do now is to focus on the mission. Let the blackmail keep wasting his/her time. You...get the job done!"

"I won't disappoint you father."

He did not reply. The line just went dead.

Adriana tossed her phone to the bed and contemplated on how to make her next move.

She had wanted to follow Plan A before but maybe she would have to go for Plan B. The blackmailer was making things quite hard for her.

Fuck! Adriana brushed away the wet hair sticking on her face. She was in between. Maybe she'd just do both.

The door opened and Adriana turned to see who the intruder was.

Her mother. She seemed distant and her eyes examined the room cautiously like someone was watching.

"What mother? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Mrs. Romero walked up to her daughter and pointed a finger in her face then spoked in a hushed whisper,

"I warned you! They'll find you out now."

For all Adriana could see, her mother was being paranoid. She could handle the worst of blackmails, that was why she was COO after all.

"Mom you're being childish. Just tell me what you know."

Her mother twisted her neck back and forth once more before speaking.

"That girl Claire was asking too many questions."

While her mother continued, Adriana got dressed.

"You have to stop chasing your father's ambitions and follow yours."

Adriana was already dressed in a midnight blue sleeveless dress that hung like spaghetti to her shoulders when she replied to her mother.

"It's our ambition Mother!"

Her mother shook her head in disappointment.

"What happened to that cheerful little girl who could not keep a grudge?"

"She grew up!" Adriana retorted staring at her thin and subtle reflection through the mirror that could be seen from the open bathroom.

She was ready to ruin him!

"I put it there." The young boy informed Claire in a loud voice.

"Thanks, you're a lifesaver."

The small child smiled and scurried away to join his family.

The night was heavy and people had begun to exit the party wishing Nathan marital Bliss.

Claire gulped down a glass of red wine as she pondered on what step she had to take now.

It didn't take long for the wine to kick in and give her a boost of the confidence she needed. She was going to confronts Nathan's new wife irrespective of what was thought of her. She was only looking out for her best friend.

Claire sluggishly walked up the stairs finding it difficult to walk tall due to the dizziness the wine had blessed her with. The cost of the confidence she was now burning with. There was a price for everything after all.

The floor was wet and had the shape of footprints, a sign that Bianca had treaded on the floor. The wet prints led to Nathan's bedroom.

Being a gentlewoman, Claire knocked and waited for a reply before entering.

Mrs. Romero was with her daughter. It was that convenient or they were afraid of something perhaps. Something she had whispered to Mrs. Romero earlier.

The wine's stronghold over Claire made her spit out her mission without hesitation or beating around the bushes.

"I want to talk to you, Adriana."

Claire expected a gasp or at least shock. There was none of that. Claire/Adriana just smiled.

How convenient!

"Come sit Claire," Adriana said, her hands on the bed, an invitation to join the enemy.

Who would resist such an offer?

Claire joined the scheming two on the bed. The fact that Adriana had not debunked her accusation was a sure sign she was right but maybe she hadn't heard. Claire, however, knew differently. Bianca's round black eyes held mischief and something far sinister underneath. Her toothed grin was creeping her out but the wine... it was sure working wonders.

"I see you found out."

Claire opened her mouth slightly. Just enough to convey her shock. Bianca wasn't denying it. She even acknowledged her theory.

"So you are a fraud?"

"Yes!" Bianca answered, her eyes fixated on her polished fingernails.

The wine seemed to have lost effect as the room turned cold. The hairs on Claire's back stood erect like they had a magnetic pull to something.

"Are you going to kill me?" Claire stuttered, crippled with fear.

She regretted coming here alone and not informing Nathan first.

Sure he was drunk and might have laughed her off but at least someone would gaze what happened to her when she confronted these people.

"No!" Bianca's answer was quick and plain and echoed a thousand times to Claire.

"I have a job for you."

Claire's mind was drawn away from the conversation. All her mind wanted now was out... Out of this box she was trapped in.

The door was not that far to make a run for it but Claire doubted she would make it before something bad happened.

"What deal?" Her vocals tightened and all she could mutter was a croak.

"I know Nathan sometimes lets you handle his paperwork... So I want you to get him to sign this."

Claire watched Adriana shove a paper into her arms.

Claire lifted the paper in her sweaty hands to take a look at what was written there. It made her sick.

"You want Nathan's company!" She erupted. "And you think I'm going to assist you in destroying my friend!"

Claire was still ranting when Claire played to her hearing a recording.

"Aunty...Help! Help!"

The recording went silent and Bianca spoke,

"I think you know who that is. It would be a shame if something just happened to her."

Claire fell silent, trying to build up the confidence to even utter something.

"If you hurt my niece..."

"Nah! There will be no hurting if you do as we say and with no slip-ups."

Adriana's voice was authoritative.

Claire was trapped. She dared not report to the police if she wanted her Niece's safety. Her mind reeled in several ways this deal she was forced in could end up in but nothing was beyond her niece's safety, he was blood after all.

"So what do you say, Deal or no deal?" Adriana quizzed, one hand on her phone in anticipation to give Claire's Niece abductors the next step to take.

Say No! Say No! Claire's conscience screamed.

"Deal!"

"Smart choice."

Claire had to ask, why was she doing this if she was a COO in another prestigious Enterprise but she best kept her mouth shut.

She latched on to the paper that would be either her Niece's death or her friend's destruction.

In the end, blood is thicker than water.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"The tree never forgets what the ax did"

The heavy breathing on Nathan's neck awakened him. His eyes opened to see a very exposed Bianca.

He was naked. Her black lingerie was trapped in his hands and his boxer In a far corner.

"No!" He silently whispered.

She didn't seem a bit dazed nor where her eye glazed as proof that he has forced himself on her.

He felt drained, another sign that something stupid had happened last night.

His alarm rang as if on cue and Nathan rushed to put the damn thing off.

How would she look at him now?

Nathan had no time to dwell on such. He was late for work. It was almost seven in the morning and he was an early riser.

He picked up his undies and strapped them on.

His head was pulsing heavily. He had to leave before Bianca woke up and began to question what happened yesterday. He was without the answers himself and he cursed that he went against his principles last night.

Nathan walked casually to his wardrobe and selected a black suit.

He turned briefly at the still sleeping Bianca and made a mental note that he would dress her. She was just too... appetizing.

Shut up!

Having cautioned his devilish mind he dressed in his bathrobe and rushed into the bathroom.

Nathan raced down the stairs in a hurry, taking a cup of coffee and that the maid had made for him.

The hot liquid gave his tongue a burn and he quickly dropped it to tend to his now sore tongue.

"Someone's in a hurry."

Nathan faced his mother who was doing nothing but watching a soap opera and snacking.

Typical!

"Yes! I have..."

"You always have something to do." His mother retorted, unintentionally cutting him off.

She always had something to say no matter the occasion.

"Yes, mother." He said just as sarcastic and took another sip of his morning coffee to be sure the content had cooled down.

"How was your night?" His mother asked, mischief plastered to her face.

Nathan recoiled, flashes of Bianca's naked body embedded graphically in his mind.

He ignored his mother and kept on sipping his drink in a rushed manner.

He hoped Bianca would not wake up. It was already awkward that he could not make out what they did the night before not to add that he dressed her in his shirt. That would surely arouse questions.

"I have to go, mother."

His mother nodded, a cup of tea on her lips.

He had expected a response that had become a daily occurrence and her silence surprised him.

"Okay...!"

Nathan picked up his key from the counter and walked out.

"It going to be a hard day."

Someone knocked at the door and Adriana obliged. It was the nosy maid.

She could already feel her huge chestnut eyes examining her surroundings and trying to make out what had happened last night. Adriana was glad she had cleared up the room as soon as Nathan stepped out. There was no reason to give the tattletale a story to gossip around with her friends.

"Coffee?" The maid asked stretching a brown tray almost at Adriana's nose.

"Thanks!"

The maid dropped the tray carefully on the bed and made her way to the door but not before saying,

"Nice shirt."

Adriana took a look at the item she was wearing.

That was where that scent was coming from!

Adriana hadn't realized Nathan had dressed her.

She would surely give that maid a piece of her tongue.

"Thanks! Hope you focus more on what you are paid to do here!"

Adriana witnessed the frown on the maid which gave her brief satisfaction just as the woman exited the room.

Nathan would be messed up now.

Adriana pondered on.

It reminded her to call Claire just in case the latter wanted to chicken out.

She glanced her phone looking for her one-way ticket to destroy Nathan's number.

Aye!

She voiced inaudibly what she found it. She then dialed the number and waited for Claire to pick up her line.

Her patience was waning out and she was sick of staying and sleeping so close to the enemy. She remembered countless of times how she had fought hard not to smother Nathan with a pillow.

Like her father would say,

Rich men don't fear death. They fear loss.

And truly she knew he did.

"Hello?" Claire's voice was trembling over the line.

"I just wanted to know if you haven't backed down from our little deal. Your Nephew..."

"Why are you doing this?" Claire asked, her voice firm.

"Like I said before..."

"You know what? I can't do it! Nathan is a good man. You..."

Adriana's blood boiled just that moment.

How dare she compare Nathan an epitome of blackness with righteousness. Couldn't she tell a beast from a lamb?

"You know, Miss Claire! If you cherish your nephew's life, you wouldn't ask me stupid questions."

Making her opinion clear, Adriana cut the line.

Claire was a darling. She wouldn't risk human life for political gain or a feel thing as friendship.

Adriana sure hoped she was right.

Claire dropped the telephone, her eyes hot with saline.

She ran her palms on her bangs, a remedy to cope with stress but it was not working this time.
How could she do this?

She would lose her job if she was caught. She doubted this though. If she messed up intentionally, her little nephew who was like a brother to her would be dead. She was divided.

If this woman wanted to destroy Nathan so badly, he had to deserve it.

Claire bit her tongue until a metallic taste hit her taste buds. Her tongue was bleeding.

Claire stared blankly into the paper still not knowing the step to take, her eyes were beginning to well up with tears.

"I'm sorry Nathan," Claire begged his spirit hoping she would ever find redemption for what she was about to do.

Claire walked into Nathan's office trembling with the paper on her hands.

"Hi!" She greeted him when she noticed he was carried away.

There was no doubt he was troubled, Claire could only begin to wonder what strings his innocent wife had tightened.

She didn't ask you though, she had enough to deal with already.

"Hey!" He said, finally acknowledging her presence.

"There's a letter from...the shareholders that need your signature."

Nathan gave her a loud sigh and a very bored one at that.

"Really?! Let me take a look."

Frozen was not the word. Claire was taken aback. She was doomed.

Nathan reached out from his office chair and picked the paper from her stiff fingers.

It was better to confess.

"Your wife... She..."

Nathan faced Claire like she was about to utter something very stupid.

"Nothing...just..." Nathan stuttered while his hand frantically searched for a pen on his table. His eyes were placed on the paper but Claire could tell he was not even reading it. She had never seen him this jumpy in a long time.

"Where do I sign?"

Those words elated Claire whilst disheartening her.

There was no way he was going to spill all that and put her Nephew's life on the line but she could give a hint.

"Nathan, Do you trust me?"

Nathan's pen was already on the paper scribbling madly.

Stop him, Claire! Her mind yelled.

"What kind of question is that? I do! You know I do. You're my friend, the only one I've had since—death."

Claire's heart dropped. She wished there was another way this could go but No! This was the only way.

Maybe she could somehow stop Adriana's plans.

"Have it." Nathan handed his destruction right to her hands on a platter of gold.

Damn! You're supposed to be a businessman.

Claire flashed him an empty smile, tears almost falling.

"About trusting me, You shouldn't trust me...or anyone. You never know who will stab you in the back."

Nathan nodded and returned to his lethargic state.

Claire saw it as a cue for her to leave. Everyone did need to be alone sometimes and she needed this the most. A coping mechanism for betrayal.

Her phone chimed. She checked it and saw a text from the devil herself.

"Do you have it?"

"Yes." She sent back.

Adriana sent a smiley emoji and another text telling Claire the place and time to hand her the document.

Claire was trapped. There was still a chance to save Nathan. She should just...No! Tears poured freely down her eyes. Her Nephew.

"Madam, are you okay?"

Claire sniffled her runny nose and wondered who was bothering her.

The newspaperman!

"The papers." The man said, handing her a today's article.

The headlines read,

" Popular business mogul lookalike Weds Boulderfist CEO "

OMG! This was her salvation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"Fear a woman with a purpose or just an intent."

Claire roughly snatched the paper from the man's hand.

"Yes! Yes! He has to see this."

Claire mumbled to herself. She needed to give this to Nathan as soon as possible.

The paper-man stopped her right where she was.

His eyes were somewhat bloodshot and his eyeballs preyed on her.

"What!?" Claire asked, puzzled.

"The papers Miss Adriana wanted you to get signed?"

Claire was speechless. This was also part of that Bi*ch's plan.

How could she be so dumb?

"You know of this too?" It was more of a surprise than a shock.

The man nodded, not interested in the conversation one bit as his eyes searched the table for the papers.

"Where are they?!" The man demanded, now in an angry tone.

Claire was just dumb. Every piece of the puzzle was slowly coming together, or least how she could see it.

The old paper-man was said to have retired, she could sense why now. Adriana had probably planned all these from the start. It made Claire wonder if she was planning all this alone.

"The papers Miss! Your nephew is depending on you."

The mention of her nephew brought Claire back to harsh reality.

She reached for the paper which she had securely hidden under her dress. The man stretched his hand to receive the parcel but Claire drew back the paper.

"You don't have to this Mister. Help me and I'll make sure you receive a reward, you won't go to jail, I guarantee..."

Claire stopped speaking when the man burst into a snicker.

Why was he mocking her?

The man straightened his expression then spoke,

"Most of us aren't after money. We are loyal to the Romero household."

"Why?!" Claire screeched.

They all seemed to have something against Nathan but there had to be something.

The man snatched the paper from her hands and answered,

"This company is built on the suffering, ideas, and deaths of many. We are only doing the right thing, Miss Claire."

Were they right?

Did she not know Nathan?

Claire dwelled on the thought and watched the spy/collector leaving.

"My nephew?"

"Your nephew has been dropped at your house. Adriana doesn't back down on her promise, Sweet child. We had fun."

Fun wasn't her definition for kidnap but as long as her Nephew was safe, that was one burden off her chest.

"And..." The man continued, now at the door that led outside.

"You can give Mr. Nathan the papers now."

Claire stared down at the paper in her hands. Was it even worth it now?

Nathan still deserved the truth so she had to do it.

"Papers!" Claire declared when she was inside Nathan's work station.

"Oh thanks, Claire, I've been waiting for those."

"Have you checked the internet?" Claire teased.

Nathan was old school and frankly did not believe reading news online. Bloggers would do anything just to make green bucks.

"You know me." He answered.

Claire placed the papers on his table and excused herself.

That was odd!

Claire usually lazed around to talk or just stay.

Nathan got the paper and now it was time for him to entertain himself with world problems, Cliche business tips, and of course what was going on around the business world.

The headlines, however, were the first thing to catch his attention.

Bianca's lookalike? WTF!

Nathan combed the thin pages for the full news.

It read,

"Female Mexican business queen, Miss Adriana Romero's lookalike Weds Nathan Galvan..."

Nathan's breathing stopped, he didn't even struggle to accept what he thought.

Romero? How could he not see it?

If she was so popular, why didn't he get to know earlier?

He has little to no answer for the questions he threw at himself.

He read on,

"The COO of Transcorp..."

Wait! Wasn't that one of his competitors' companies?

The atmosphere was getting heated each second and the air conditioner seemed to do nothing to stop the sweats sticking to his skin.

He had to leave. There were questions he had unanswered and, how he needed them now.

Nathan fled from his office, sealing the door, and raced outside.

"What's wrong Nathan?" Claire queried despite knowing why.

"Just some... Just stall for me ok !" Nathan said in a hurry.

"Ok."

Nathan raced for his car and getting in before one could say cranberry, starting the engine of the red Ferrari, he vanished into the road.

Bianca had just received a call confirming the arrival of Nathan's signature.

After all these years of plotting, Boulderfist was more theirs. She needed a drink.

Finally out of her bedroom, She sneaked into the living room. It was a miracle, Nathan's mother hadn't disturbed her all day for ger small talks. She was in no mood for that.

Avoiding Miranda whose eyes were glued to the TV screen whilst snacking like she always did.

Did she even know what health complications that could cause?

None of her business though!

Adriana ransacked the refrigerator ever so quietly in order not to startle the maid who was making something in the kitchen and of course Nathan's mother who was watching an Indian soap.

She found what she wanted. A bottle of Baileys, not too strong.

She shut the refrigerator and retreated upstairs when something made a loud bang.

She turned to see Nathan who was as red as chilly.

Somebody is mad.

"Where is she?!" Nathan demanded, tearing away his tie from his neck.

"Me?" Adriana played dumb, she was ready for what was coming.

"You! You manipulator! Serpent! Who are you exactly?"

The question of the day. This was the perfect time for Adriana to do what she has practiced in the mirror for four good years.

"Me?— "

"Yes, you!" Nathan screeched, saliva almost dropping out of his mouth.

Adriana had never seen him like this. It was even more than she anticipated. She wanted to break him and she was succeeding.

"Yes Mr. Nathan, I'll tell just who I am!"

By this time, Miranda and the maid were already within proximity.

"I am Adriana Romero COO of Transcorp and your biggest nightmare."

"What!", Miranda blurted, a cracker in her mouth scattering to the floor.

"Well, I have nothing to say to you then Get out!"

Nathan then reached out for Adriana's hand but she smacked them off.

Nathan was bewildered. She was courageous for a trespasser.

"I will be going nowhere!" Adriana retorted.

"I'll call the police." Nathan threatened, dialing a number almost immediately.

"In my house?"

Nathan's phone dropped. It's elegant black screen shattering.

"What!"

"Yes! This is my house Mr. Nathan and only me says who will be thrown out as well as your company."

All mouths dropped. They couldn't take it.

"What do you mean?" Nathan stuttered.

Adriana walked up to him and placed her lips near his erect right ear, resisting the overpowering urge to bite them off.

"It means I own you, Nathan!"

Nathan's shoulders dropped. His hands clenched into a fist then the inevitable happened.

Psssh!!

Nathan could not believe what he just did, his hands still rested on Adriana's stung cheeks.

Pshh!

Adriana returns the favor. Hers was far more wicked.

Small drops of tears slid down Nathan's cheeks to the tiled floor.

"Why are you doing this to me?"

"Tower" She retorted.

Nathan didn't know why the mention of Tower sounded familiar but it did and it symphonized with Romero.

CHAPTER NINE

Tower, that name sounded too familiar to be forgotten. It had been his secret shame, something he had done in the past and regretted.

Six years ago

Nathan sat all by himself, recluse, and with hate. He stroked his bruised hand just to feel something. His mother had bandaged the hurt fists before he was sent to the academy for healing, a subtle term for the mental hospital. He was believed to be suicidal and not in an average sense.

Nathan had taken it upon himself to get into fights and visit dark alleys to get hurt or maybe die.

It was not working well.

"Howdy."

It was the other patient. The small box could only contain that or less. His roommate was a man in his forties, the golden age. He had a full beard, fairly unkempt, and had grown his hair to achieve the rockstar look. He looked a bit skinny too. Other than those, he was alright.

Nathan ignored the man's friendly gesture of starting a conversation.

"Why are you here?"

The man continued anyways.

Even in the silence, Nathan longed to answer. He was telling a complete stranger after all.

"Self-harm."

The room returned to being deafening silent and if one concentrated well enough, you could hear them breathing.

"What are you here for?" Nathan asked, slightly surprising himself.

If he was going to be here for some time, he best made friends.

"I'm here for klep- ehm!"

Nathan noticed the man's plight and stopped intruding.

"So they didn't take you to prison?"

The man was a bit hurt and almost looked like he would rush and hit Nathan any second soon.

"It more like a curse. I want to stop but I can't."

Nathan briefly took pity on the man. It was his condition. He was reminded of his sister who remained strong when Cancer kept Fu*king with her. When her hair fell off, she showed the world. She was strong till the very end and died with a smile on her face. She was his sun and without her light, he was just an empty moon.

"Sorry!"

"No need to be!" The man retorted sharply just like his mother would.

"I one day want to be a CEO so I don't have to steal people's things or money."

That would be nice, Nathan thought.

All his life, he hadn't made worthwhile life goals. He always had everything within his reach and even if it was under his father's wing, he was satisfied but now, a part of him wanted out.

"What would you call it? Your company?" Nathan asked now lying down on the rock hard bed and eyes up to the concrete roof.

"Tower."

"Nice, what your name?" Nathan queried, now enjoying the small talk

"Thomas Romero." The man replied.

It was going to be the beginning of a fruitful partnership, Nathan could see it.

It was his shame all those years, his mistake.

"Your father is Thomas!?"

Adriana gave no reply but gave him a scorned look.

"You gave fifteen minutes to evacuate this building or I'll call the police."

"You can do this, please!" Miranda begged, falling on the floor, her eyes red and puffy.

"Mom, don't do that!" Nathan yelled.

He cherished his ego more but in this case, he was nothing but a wounded lion, he would submit to her.

"It's a pity you don't have too many friends, you've betrayed a lot of them. You can stay, but... You'll be taking orders from me."

Just when Miranda was about to speak, Nathan objected.

"You're wrong there. I do have a friend."

He then picked his phone from the floor and dialed a number.

"Hello Mr. Rodriguez, we'll be lodging in your house for the night." He blared just to spite Adriana and to kill the glorious win she was so relishing.

The call ended and Nathan faced Adriana,

"You'll pay for this!"

Adriana remained composed as she gave her reply,

"You'll come begging when I'm done with you."

Just one stare into those soulless eyes and he knew she meant it.

"Let's go," Nathan said and proceeded the walk upstairs.

Adriana stopped him, her hands on his ripped chest.

It disgusted Nathan. He slapped her hands away.

"What do you think you are doing Witch?"

"You have your choice, Nathan. Leave! No one is going upstairs unless of course, you've lost your ego almighty Nathan."

Nathan was glued to the spot.

This girl was nothing but a manipulative bi*ch! How come he had not noticed earlier.

"I wonder who betrayed me for you?"

Adriana wanted nothing but to crush Nathan and she wouldn't miss any opportunity to do so.

"Your best friend, isn't it ironic? You betrayed my father and now, your friend betrays you. See how twisted that is Nathan!"

Nathan's eyes were boiling and his sight becoming blurry. He was so stupid to let his guard down for a second. Adriana wanted to see him on his knees but that was never happening.

"We'll leave without our belongings."

"Betty?" Nathan turned to the maid who just stared at the drama wide-eyed. She turned to her boss or her former boss instead.

"You can stay here for the day or move out whenever you can."

Done talking, Nathan walked out, dragging his mother who wanted and pleaded profusely to Adriana.

Not even Satan could unlock her sealed heart!

Rodriguez was more than a darling to let Nathan into his humble abode. He was just an appreciative man who was being helpful. It was shameful for Nathan to tell to him his plight.

"You mean she did all that!" Rodriguez's wife, Lia expressed.

Nathan nodded taking a sip of the warm tea that had been handed to him. His mother, however, was secluded and it was strange since it was very unlike her.

Nathan left the sitting room to join her on the stone polished dining table.

She glanced at him before looking away just as quickly.

Nathan could see she was in tears.

"It's ok Mom." He reassured her locking his fingers in hers.

They needed to be strong in trials like this.

"No, it's not! If it wasn't for me... You would still have everything. I pushed you so hard just like I pushed your sister away... until...she died!"

She burst into tears again and collapsed on the table, her hands covering her swollen face.

Nathan was agitated to see his mother in this step and to remind him of late Aurora. Adriana was going to pay! He just did not know how now.

Just then a fuzzy image crossed his mind, an idea!

Rodriguez joined them, his face pale like he had gotten a call from hell.

"Ehm! Adriana called, she threatened to cut Rory off Boulderfist if I let you stay here."

That cunning witch!

"I— don't want to do this to you, Nathan—. You are a— good man..."

Nathan could see the man was battling with morality and his future. He would not let him choose.

"My mother will stay here. I will go back to that Witch. If she wants me to be on knees. She'll meet me there."

"Thank you!" He appreciated Rodriguez. The latter nodded.

Miranda did not want and she didn't waste her time to disagree.

"No Nathan!" She stiffened clutching to her son's hands like he was going to poof away any second soon.

"I can call your father..."

"No!" Nathan almost yelled out.

His father was a dominant man. He had hated his son being in the limelight, not in his shadow, and was somewhat responsible since for what he was going through at this moment.

He would do this his way.

Nathan knocked on the door of his—Adriana's house.

Adriana was the one to open the door making Nathan guess Betty wasted no time to leave.

"Well, well, well..." Her haughty voice repeated.

"I have come to beg for a palace to stay."

"Didn't I tell you, you'll come back begging."

Nathan only had to endure for some days before he put his plan into action. Adriana was a woman after all and even men had weaknesses. Everyone has an Achilles heel and when he found hers, he would ruin her.

CHAPTER TEN

"Rolling Stones gather no moss"

How to get to her? It was the only question Nathan could ask himself. She had remained to herself with her eyes glued to her phone.

It was like she didn't even care he was here.

"The files!" His mind got working.

Nathan doubted the files having his signature would be in the house but he had to give it a shot.

Talk about way over your head!

"So...Now that Boulderfist is yours what do you intend to do with it?"

Adriana gave him a bemused look crossing her slender legs in the most intimidating manner.

"What makes you think I want your company? If it was left to me I would have it to the ground but he has other plans."

Her answer got Nathan more curious,

"Who? Your father!"

She didn't reply. She stared back into her phone and began to type.

"About your father—I didn't mean to betray him, my..."

A knock cut Nathan short.

Who could be at the door?

"Get it, Nathan!"

She had turned him to her b*tch but he had to do it...he had to kiss her feet until he got what he came for then he would make them pay.

The painted white door opened to reveal a familiar face.

No!

Another nightmare was right in Nathan's face.

"Hello, Nathan." The man's voiced, his tobacco breath making Nathan's stomach tighten.

"Hello, Thomas."

Thomas was a stout man whose head was now covered in greys and fine lines, a scar that wasn't there when they met now resided on his forehead, his silver eyes had lost their glow and were now bloodshot.

"You must be surprised to see me after you let me rot in penury."

Nathan took a deep breath as old memories flashed in his head like family photos.

"I'm sorry Tom..."

"It's okay Nathan, u have everything you stole from me but I have to thank you for helping me build it. It would be perfect to merge Boulderfist and Transcorp as one. Just like I had dreamt, a tower."

Thomas took a seat near his daughter and I could barely see the resemblance between the two, Adriana had a deceptive demeanor that would make you lose your mind but the new Thomas looked like a hood gangster, a shell of his former self.

"Adriana wanted you here to know we have won." Thomas continued reaching out to a portfolio Nathan hadn't noticed before and brought out the signed document.

Nathan rushed for it but stopped halfway.

Not with a silver revolver pointing dauntlessly at him.

"No!—No!" Thomas warned, toying around with his weapon.

"Not a step closer." His firm voice, a reminder that it was not an empty threat.

"No one will believe I sold Boulderfist. They'll believe you forced it out of me. The shareholders will.."

"The shareholders hardly care who is in power, they are fine as long as their cash inflow doesn't stop," Thomas said with utmost confidence.

Nathan was even losing to their mind games. He had to try a bit harder, hardening his face and speaking in a deep voice he couldn't even believe he could muster, it was something he only did as a child.

" Well, there's the court, I'm a respected elite and I think the law will favor me if I said I was threatened. Claire revealed to me what you used to get to her or who rather!" Nathan threatened. A smirk on his perfectly accentuated face.

"Well, there's the court, I'm a respected elite and I think the law will favor me if I said I was threatened."

Adriana's phone repeated what Nathan had just uttered, they were recording.

You sly daughter....!!

Nathan cursed, prancing around the room like a wounded lion that he was.

"The court would really like to hear that!" Tom snickered.

Nathan had to admit, This was a failing battle but there was a weakness he could see in them both, Pride. If he played his part well, he should get on their good side.

Nathan dropped to the floor. His head pulsing nad making his sight blurry.

He could feel what it meant for the world to come crashing down on one but apparently, his world wasn't done with him yet.

"I don't have a job— it would be a disgrace for a former CEO to wor—..."

Thomas was enjoying Nathan's grumbling and more importantly, his pain.

He walked towards the poor child and whispered to his hearing.

"Isn't that sad? There is a job for you if you can take it."

Nathan almost erupted in a mad laugh. He hadn't taught how easy this would be. Thomas and Adriana just wanted him broken and dejected and once they saw him that way, they felt they had a hold over him, an authority they wanted badly.

"Anything!" Nathan stared hopefully into his savior's eyes, the silver orbs penetrating his dark souls.

"Adriana's assistant."

Adriana's attention shot at Nathan then to her father.

"What! You couldn't give him something lesser, it wasn't easy..."

"Hush child!" Thomas cautioned his daughter and she obeyed grudgingly.

"So what do you say, Nathan?"

Nathan paused for some time, he did not want to jump at the offer. It would make them suspicious.

Baby steps! he reminded himself.

"Do you want it or not?" Thomas's impatient tone was a go-ahead for Nathan.

"I accept."

"Very good. Smart choice Nathan."

"Could you be a darling and get us a drink from the kitchen," Adriana ordered.

Nathan stiffened at her words but obediently disappeared to get anything he could find.

When Adriana saw Nathan disappear and out of sight, she pulled her father almost roughly and whispered to his ear.

"Father, what was that about?"

Thomas stroked his chin with his bony fingers, folds of skin forming art patterns on his body. He was aging.

"My dear Adriana..." Her father began, running one of his bony fingers down her cheek.

"Nathan thinks he's going to win this game but I think otherwise. I gave him the position for a reason. Accidents happen, don't they?"

Her father's question sent her the creeps and was even more confusing. What could he be up to? What was he even getting at?

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you'll play dumb and let him think you've broken your walls. When he thinks he's gotten what he wants, you bust him, he's deemed a criminal, society will hate, the hood will reject him, he'll finally be the outcast he has always been."

Adriana could not express her shock when she learned a little about what her father had in store for Nathan.

Sure, she wanted him to suffer but her father's plan was way too intense. Would she even go through with it?

Thomas noticed his daughter's reluctance. She did not want to go through with this and he knew how to get the soulless Adriana back.

"Adriana, you are just like your mother, worried about doing the worst even to the worst of people but remember what Nathan caused Adrian!"

Adriana's breathing rate increased tremendously with her heart beating fast and pumping adrenaline of hate into her system.

How could she forget?

How could she feel pity for Nathan?

Nathan was nothing but a rabid so that needed to be chained or rather killed.

This is for Adrian!

"How those it feel having the rage back Adriana?" Thomas quizzed.

"Good!"

Adriana knew her mission and she had to take a step to make her father's intended future for Nathan become a reality and to get that, she had to pretend to break down her walls, get to know him inside out.

A little part of her wanted nothing to do with a fellow human's downfall which would make her just as bad as Nathan whom she detested. Maybe it was her conscience but it didn't prick her, it just nudged, a gentle one at that.

It was now her choice to make.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Two can't play Cupid's game"

" This...This and this"

Nathan nodded absentmindedly as Adriana threw files at him. His mind was still transfixed to what had happened earlier.

The words Boulderfist which he had erect on top of the building for the price of a thousand was tossed down like it was nothing. Nathan remembered Thomas' smile as the words Tower were reconstructed in its place.

"Are you even here?" Adriana quizzed seeing he was lost in thought.

"Nothing..."

Adriana questioned no further. She instructed him on what he had to do even if he knew it all. It was part of her torture.

The conference room had been refurbished to meet her standards as it was her new office.

"Don't just stand there...Go and get something done." Adriana spat, irritated.

Nathan nodded in submission and went out.

The door opened an hour later and Adriana grumbled wondering who that was.

Nathan's ugly face reared up.

"You again!"

"Are you done with the files?" Adriana asked with an eyebrow raised high.

"Yes," Nathan answered, mentally exhausted.

That was fast!

"Well...There's more..."

Before Adriana could finish her statement, Nathan spoke.

"I want to say something. What do you have against me? I know your father hates me for betraying him but you... Why?"

Adriana picked a pencil from her desk, tapping it lightly on the wooden board before her.

"I don't owe you any explanation!"

Nathan was disappointed. He just wanted to know why she had this much hate against him.

"It started five years ago, a couple of months after my father met you. I— used to have a twin brother. His name was Adrian and he was the most cheerful boy you'd meet. Unlike me, his twin, he was very outgoing and even defended me when I was being bullied. When my father began to pool his money into the Enterprise you both planned, our household began to suffer. He wouldn't give money for anything we needed. He was obsessed with being affluent.

My mother took over his responsibilities, catering for us alone despite being married.

When you betrayed my father, my brother fell sick. My father was too agitated by his loss that he couldn't see how worse he was faring. When my mother got enough money, she took him to the hospital where he was diagnosed with pneumonia, it was too late to be managed so he died."

Adriana sobbed, his beautiful face now ruined.

"I blamed my father after his death. I hated him. My mother couldn't live with him anymore so she moved out with me. Over the years I came to realize it was all you, if you had never come into our lives, we would be fine. You destroyed us. I return to my father at eighteen and we began plotting your downfall. It took years but when your mother arrived in Mexico, we knew it was time. A little gossip and that was it. Your mother wanted you married and I showed up, your savior. It was worth it."

Adriana spewed with disdain.

Nathan could not believe his mistake had caused her family such huge trauma. He was beyond sorry.

"I— am so sorry..."

"Save it, Nathan! I got what I wanted in the end, to see you feel the same pain, to watch you lose everything one by one until you break."

Adriana was like candlelight, beautiful to watch until you touched the flames.

"Well since I told you what I have against you Nathan, why don't you tell me something. Why did you betray my father? You were born rich, why the trickery?"

"I had a business mogul for a father."

"When Tower was being planned, I shared with my father what big dreams I had. My father mocked me for thinking of sharing the Enterprise with a lower class. I listened knowing I would never face backlash or prosecution. I regret it now."

"Would you have been if you were still whole Mr. Nathan?" Adriana quizzed.

"No!" Nathan admitted.

Claire detected Nathan approaching her. She wished the ground would open to take her whole.

"Hello, Claire." Nathan greeted, almost like his regular self.

"Hey!" Claire said still refusing to face him.

"I wanted to talk to you."

"About what?" Claire demanded using her anxiety as an excuse to keep her face transfixed to the monitor and her hands tapping the boards of her keyboard.

"Its about the company papers."

"I'm sorry Nathan. I was being blackmailed into doing it. You know I wouldn't do anything like that just to hurt you." Claire blurted, her voice shaking with regret.

"It's ok Claire. I don't blame you for any of this but I need your help."

Claire remained catatonic almost like she was thinking of something else.

"Is anything wrong?" Nathan inquired.

"I quit Nathan. I just could not bear that you lost all this because of me."

To say Nathan was shocked was an understatement. He was upset.

How could Claire make such a step without involving him? He knew she was going through a ton of guilt but her quitting had just ruined the perfectly detailed plan he had orchestrated in his head.

"You have to take your job back," Nathan begged.

Claire nodded her head in disapproval.

No! No! No! She kept saying.

"Please Claire if you are my friend you will..."

"No!!" Claire yelled, standing up and holding her head tightly with her hands.

"I'm not your friend Nathan! I could ruin whatever you have planned just like I have ruined you."
Claire wept, curling into a ball on the floor.

It was slowly gain the attention of coworkers and it won't be long before what was happening spread to the high authority who happened to be Thomas and Nathan did not want that.

"It okay Claire. Thanks for trying." Nathan announced and let the poor girl be.

He would have to figure out a new plan, one that was fireproof and would not fail him but also he had to be quick with whatever he was plotting.

Claire opened the door slightly and peeked in.

People were found to doing that here. Where were the manners?

Adriana made a mental note to tell Claire but first, she had to hear what she had to say.

"A woman is here to see you, Ma'am."

Adriana has no fixed appointment. Her father had made sure of that. It got her curiosity waxing.

"Tell her to get an appointment." Adriana made known, unwilling to let a beggar come and bother her.

"I think you should talk to her."

Claire seemed disturbed which meant she knew something more but Adriana would rather find out than ask.

"Very well, let her in."

A woman in her early forties came in dressed in a flowing black gown, the type one would wear to a funeral and a white veil. Her hair could not be seen as the veil hid it. She had a round face Albeit with gaping cheekbones.

"May the good Lord bless you." She said taking her seat opposite Adriana.

"What do you need sister?"

"I—don't want to sound ungrateful" the woman began, "Your company has helped the St, Nicholas Orphanage but I learned you've cut off our budget and would not be giving charity to the Orphanage anymore."

The woman slowly began to sob and it brought Adriana who had a heart of steel down to the point of tears.

"Who told you that?"

"The CEO."

What!! Why would her father do this? There had to be something off somewhere.

"Could you return tomorrow, I'll see what I can do."

"Oh thank you! The children would also be delighted to see Nathan if he can make it." The woman appreciated.

Adriana could see she wasn't aware of the new development and saw no need to shatter the good woman.

The woman left the room, turning back when she was at the door to thank Adriana again.

"You know, you and Nathan would look good together."

Adriana's cheek reddened. She was about to flare out disapprovingly at the woman but the woman was long gone when she found her tongue.

Why would she even think that?

The question remained though. Why her father had cut an orphanage of the money they relied on to survive. It was barbaric and unheard of And who knew Nathan gave charity? Did monsters have a soft spot too?

CHAPTER TWELVE

"love is a drug, can be used and abused"

The bed felt like a bush of roses with prickly thorns tearing at her skin.

Adriana tossed around, shivering as her sleep became a plagued nightmare.

Sweats drenched the bed and her grunts and pleas for help went over the top.

"No!" She suddenly shrieked getting a breakthrough from the demon.

Nathan got in as quickly as he could and joined her at her bedside.

His room was opposite Adriana's.

"It's alright." He pacified her, clutching her tight in his arms.

Adriana's fingernails bit into his skin like pine needles but he hardly cared. Her soft skin touching his, intoxicating.

"What the hell are you doing?" Adriana demanded when she came around.

She was as of before a scared child waking from a bad dream but now, her bossy demeanor had returned.

"I thought..."

"Leave my room," Adriana ordered.

There was one problem though, Nathan did not want to leave.

"I will if you tell me what you were dreaming about?"

Adriana sent him a deadly gaze.

The words of her father echoing in her head.

Get to know him!

"A bad dream about my brother."

The topic caught Nathan's attention swiftly as he grabbed the office chair that was once his closer and sat rapt with attention.

"What happened?"

"He was blaming me for still keeping you alive."

Nathan didn't miss the sarcasm. Was she joking? Or could it be true?

"From what you've told me, I believe your brother is haunting your dreams only because you haven't let him go."

Adriana turned sour.

"Says the fellow responsible for his death. Tell me, Nathan, how do you sleep at night?"

"With a light drink and homework. You know my sister died right?"

"What!"

Nathan could not believe her, she had been studying him for years and he had mentioned Aurora's death once or twice to Thomas. There was no way they would miss that.

"I hardly believe that!"

"That a monster had a sis?"

Adriana didn't answer. She could sense the hurt in Nathan's voice.

Don't get close! Adriana remembered.

"What was her name?"

"Aurora."

"I've always wanted to name my daughter that," Adriana revealed.

Nathan and her shared a puzzled expression before she burst into a laugh.

"My mother wanted to name her daughter that so bad but Adrian followed and it's believed we must share identical names," Adriana said using her fingers in an exaggerated manner.

"Maybe you would have been nicer if you were named Aurora. Maybe you would have forgiven me."

"Good people don't last you know. I can tell your sister was good."

The statement said wasn't sarcastic, Adriana's face suggested so but it still hurt like hell. The hole Aurora left had not been sealed up and maybe it would never be, Not when every damn thing reminded him of her.

"I never knew you did charity."

At last, a lighter conversation

"I don't call it charity. I love helping the less privileged. My sister never had kids before she died and her husband left her for dead. Her only solace was the orphanage. She treated that like her one and after her death, I promised myself I would take care of them."

Nathan felt a warm soft hand creep over his shoulder. Turning to where the hand came from, he saw Adriana's reassuring smile comfort him. He nervously returned the favor, a grin. Adriana's rainbow turned upside down, her disapproval returned. She was really fighting an internal battle.

"My father cut their budget."

"What!?" Nathan yelled getting up.

"Calm down psycho. I'll talk to him today. He must have gotten it all mixed up."

"I don't think so."

Adriana knew he was right. As much as she hated to admit it, her father was a scheming bastard. She only hoped this time, her instinct was wrong.

"They are Orphans father! How can they be a detriment to the Enterprise. You are literally swimming in millions and more comes in every year." Adriana ranted, banging her hand on the desk wildly.

"What's all the fuss about?"

Adriana couldn't believe him. He thought the sufferings of orphans as nothing.

"Orphans father."

"Okay, if they really need the money they can come to me."

"What!"

What did her father plan to gain from this? Attention?

"Father, this is unlike you."

Thomas rocked his chair gently, keeping his gaze at his daughter.

"Is he getting to you?"

"Who?" Adriana had to ask, despite knowing very well who he meant.

"Don't play stupid! It really doesn't suit you."

Adriana gave her father a grimace before replying,

"He's not getting to me but maybe this power is getting to you. All we wanted was to make Nathan suffer but will you ever forgive him?"

"When I began this Enterprise with Nathan, we were supposed to be partners, Co CEO but No! He betrayed me. He's getting what karma wants him to have."

"You're slowly becoming just like him. It won't be long before Karma comes knocking and I won't be there to watch you suffer when it comes in."

Adriana went for the door, she couldn't bear seeing her father so monstrous. She only hoped he didn't drown in his newfound luxury.

A call came in. Nathan reached out for the chiming phone.

Claire.

She hadn't been around today, Nathan remembered.

Maybe she was calling him to say why.

He picked up the call.

"Hello, Are you Mr Nathan?"

The question was puzzling. Claire wouldn't ask such a funny question. What was going on?

"Y-es."

"Mrs Claire left your number for us to call before she shot herself."

"Is she ok?"

Nathan's head panged.

What stupid thing did you do Claire!

"I'm afraid No." The man solemnly replied.

The already damaged phone fell to the floor harder this time because Nathan slammed it hard on the wall.

No! No!

He had gone there.

Adriana jumped in, her face furrowed with worry.

"Is anything wrong?"

Nathan fell to the tiled floor, cold and hard like his miserable life.

"Why did she take her life?"

"Who!?"

"CLAIRE!"

Adriana's voice went on holiday almost immediately. She remembered that girl. The girl who was instrumental in getting the papers signed.

It was no wonder why she would decide to take her life.

Her guts felt empty and unimaginable pangs surged from within.

She has been the cause of it all.

"Nathan?" Adriana whimpered walking to him with great difficulty. Her body felt numb.

"Stay away from me!" Nathan yelled out when her hands came to close.

"You killed her and I did too! If o-nly I made the right choice."

"I have lost people too Nathan...I didn't know she wild go this..."

"Ahe wouldn't take her life for betraying a friend. Some of us might live with that guilt but others are not that strong... She wasn't."

"I know how you feel-"

"Do you? I don't think you've ever cared for anyone apart from your pathetic self."

"Stop Nathan!" Adriana yelled. Hot tears pouring out from her lids while she clenched her hands to her ear to block out his vile words.

"I won't stop! If you've ever cared for anyone, you wouldn't have done that to someone like her?-"

Stop! Adriana lunged for Nathan slapping him repeatedly but it was of no use. He grasped her hands firmly, no damage done.

"I wish you live well with that guilt Adriana. It would be gone by tomorrow anyway."

The door closed, so did Adriana's bravery. She sobbed.

Not because someone died but because of the words Nathan sent her.

I am not a monster! I am not a monster! Arrghh! I am a monster!

Who was she fooling, she was a monster! She was the one who pushed her brother down the window, angry that her father never showed up to her performance. All this year's she had blamed Nathan but maybe it was her.

Maybe it had always been her.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"Hard to get, easy to lose."

Nobody. It had been taken away. The chalk drawing on the floor told Nathan however where her body had rested.

Ignoring the bright yellow tapes that clearly stated no trespassing allowed imprinted, Nathan reached the site of the crime.

"Why did you do it?!"

A policeman came forward humming lightly to make his presence known to a grieving Nathan.

"I'm sorry for your loss." He expressed.

"Are you?"

"It's my job." The man sincerely made known

.

"All I need is some answers, Mr. Nathan."

What answers could he want?

"If I can be of any help then, sure!"

"Miss Claire mentioned you before she took her life, Did you have a relationship with her perhaps, More than Just Friends?"

Nathan banged his hands to the floor hearing such disgusting words the man spewed.

"Are you insinuating that I had a hand in this?!"

The man jotted down something.

"No Mr. Nathan but there has to be a reason why."

The man was right. Claire must have mentioned his name for a reason and he knew why.

"So do you think you know what it could be?"

"No!" Nathan lied, hoping the man would just cut the conversation short.

"Ok."

The man left taking the hint.

"Can I see her body?"

The man stopped in his tracks turning sideways to meet Nathan's eye.

"I'm afraid not Mr. Nathan. We are still investigating. it's possible that it was murder."

Nathan did not know why but he hoped it was Murder, which meant Claire did not go down weak.

Then a thought flashed by.

"Who called the police?" Nathan inquired.

"A passerby who heard the gunshot."

Nathan could immediately smell a rat. He knew Claire knew next to nothing about one and she had expressed her fear of the molded weapon.

Why then would she take her life with the very thing she feared, something wasn't right.

His pocket chimed and he reached in to pull out his already damaged phone.

He had saved it before going to Claire's house.

Adriana, Why was she calling?

Nathan picked it up and listened.

"Nathan, we need to talk."

"I'm kind of busy here coping with My friend's death. Nothing you'd understand."

"You don't understand," She groaned, "Claire... She..."

Nathan finally calmed down to hear what she needed to say if it was concerning Claire.

"What about her?" His voice was quiet yet husky.

"My father was talking to someone and I think...Oh, God... How..."

Adriana sounded concerned and somewhat afraid which was very unlike her.

"What's wrong?" Nathan asked, his hate for the woman melting like butter in the sun.

"I'll tell you Nathan but you must promise me you won't do anything rash."

She sounded extreme.

"I promise."

"I think my father sent an assassin after Claire."

What!!!! Nathan's scream got the attention of everyone else in the room.

"I'm coming to the office right away," Nathan said into the already deadline to mislead them.

It worked and they all went back to what they were doing.

A text came in,

"Let's talk at the office."

"Sure." Nathan sent back.

His mind was still trying to warp all that was going on.

A part of him wanted to tell the police right now but he made a promise to Adriana. Not that revealing someone's killer was irrational but Nathan wanted to know more.

Why would Thomas kill Claire? Only Adriana would seem to know more and he had to keep his damn mouth shut if he was going to get anywhere in knowing why.

They say curiosity kills the cat, don't they?

Adriana paced around the room slowly as she waited for Nathan to come.

She checked on her phone multiple times praying she had not made a mistake telling Nathan first.

Why did she even tell him?

Was it her conscience which stabbed her fatally or was it the words Nathan had spat at her out of hate and anger?

That did not matter now, she needed his presence.

Her father had left around twenty minutes ago and she knew very well it was to pay the mercenary he handed the dirty job too.

She had sent a spy after him to know more in high hopes that she was wrong and she has been eavesdropping on something else, one that didn't matter.

The door clicked and Nathan rushed in, his face the very definition of sh*t.

"I see you're here."

His expression changed swiftly to that of irritation.

"I don't have time for jokes. Spill!"

His words made the windows vibrate warning that if they had been any weaker, they would shatter.

"He's gone somewhere and my spy is on him as we speak."

Nathan ran a hand down his now unkempt hair,

"If he's responsible he's going to jail if I don't kill him first."

Adriana cowered slightly. Nathan had never had the upper hand before and she sure as hell did not want her father in prison.

Your big mouth!

"My Dad cannot go to jail," Adriana argued.

"Even if he kills someone?"

Adriana paused catching her breath,

"I don't know— But... If he's responsible, you won't tell anyone about it?"

"You are very mistaken Ad..."

"No! I'm not!" Adriana cut in.

"And you think I'll just shut up. This is my friend we are talking about."

"And that is my father we are talking about. If you look at all this, you caused all this, if you hadn't been a selfish piece of..."

She stopped, wiping away pangs of hair that blurred her sight. Adriana took her seat on an office chair where the AC worked best before speaking.

"If my father is responsible, I'll give you your house back."

It wasn't a bad idea if your friend wasn't on their way to the afterlife. Nathan was having none of it,

"And you think that is enough to buy my silence!"

Adriana groaned, This was getting hard for her. She regretted telling g her enemy in the first place. One who was now a threatened to her father's freedom.

It wouldn't be bad to put a bullet into his skull now!

"Ok, it's not enough. You'll get your company back."

That's not the cruel person I know." Nathan said, deep in thought.

Adriana could not help but feel he was right. She called him and told him her father's evil deed. Worse, she was even making bargains with him when she...

"You could just shoot me in the skull."

He completed her thoughts exactly. She could just shoot him the skull but she was not her father.

He tortured orphans and took away threats that stood in his way stood in his way to achieve power and let all know he was in control.

Maybe she just wanted to do the right thing but why?

Adriana's phone dinged. She checked who was calling.

Her fear. The spy she sent was calling. It meant he had information or was going to tell her what lost cause this was.

"Hello." She formally said, placing the phone on loudspeaker so Nathan could hear.

"You were right. He's in street. A man showed up and he was given an envelope by your father."

The line went dead.

It was official, Her Father was the monster she feared he would be and all monsters needed to be stopped.

"Since I guess we have a deal?" Adriana inquired, not meeting his gaze.

Nathan seemed to be overwhelmed by the thought coming in, To betray his dead best friend's memory for the power he lost or die.

"Yes."

It's not like he had a choice.

Adriana thought hard. She was about to go against her father, it was an incomprehensible betrayal.

A small part of her, however, had somethings to say about it.

Not if you kill this bastard!

The other,

What Dad doesn't know won't hurt him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"Choose your stand, fight for it."

"I think you made the right choice." Mrs Romero honestly answered.

"Really?" Adriana quizzed, doubting her hearing.

She had no idea why she had taken such a drastic step towards her father. She was going to ruin him and for a man.

No! You have to fix this.

Not that she would have the opportunity to fix her mistake.

Nathan was a smart ass and would have a plan of his own to sidetrack hers just in case she failed.

Adriana assumed he had already told someone if he hadn't even recorded their conversation and handed it to a trusted friend in his stead already.

She was freaking out.

"Adriana!" Her mother recalled her back to reality.

"Sorry Mother but that was done in the heat of the moment, I wasn't thinking right."

"I think you were doing the right thing." Mrs Romero maintained.

Adriana gave her mother a groan and continued to pace around the room.

"No mother! You've been against this since the very beginning. Your words must have gotten to me and now I think I'm doing the right thing betraying my father."

"You're seriously gonna make this about you now!" Her mother flared.

Your father killed someone and that against everything I taught you, even against the laws."

The room was tense.

"You're right Mother. I might not have seen it but I inherited this from you, abandoning the family when they need you to most."

Adriana received a smack on the cheek for her vulgar statement.

"You dare blame me, Adriana! Your father—He ruined our family and..."

"No! Nathan did!" Adriana cut in, her face flushed in rage. "Why did I even tell you all this?"

Mrs Romero looked down, drops staining the Persian rug and turning it from tomato red to a darker shade of the color.

"I know that is what you tell yourself every day but deep down you know who caused all this."

Adriana knew her mother's words made sense but it was difficult accepting it.

Her mother's warm hands caressed her face reminding her of old times they had together.

"I trust you'll make the right choice and no matter how it goes, I'll be proud of you."

Adriana turned her face away, guilt was coming back to her.

"But if Father finds out..."

"You do the right thing, Adriana. Your father killed someone and that is wrong. He's lucky you're just doing just this."

Adriana managed a brave smile to keep her mother from continuing.

"I just—Our family is really broken. Adrian's death, You and Dad's divorce and now this. I just don't want to break the only thing I have left."

"It's not your fault. We all make mistakes and—they have consequences, good and bad. Your father made his along with others. This is the consequence."

Adriana could not help but feel her mother was right.

She imagined Claire with an angry relative or friend who knew the truth, they would come for revenge just like she had with Nathan.

She had better save her father from such a torment, even if it meant betraying his trust.

It's for the best.

The air was a bit cold to breathe in but luckily Rodriguez's wife was kind enough to turn on the thermostat.

"So she wants to give you the company back?" Rodriguez quizzed taking a sip of black coffee.

Nathan sort of envied him. He worked at home and had a very cooperative wife. It was his dream life.

"Here." His wife dropped a cup of black coffee with cream swimming on top, Nathan could tell his mother made it. No one knew he liked Almond milk.

He took a sip and smacked his lip, savoring the creamy goodness before nodding to Rodriguez.

"And you trust her?" It could be a trap for all we know."

"I know." "That's why I'm telling you and also because I need your help."

Rodriguez lugged his chair closer, his gaze deepening.

"What kind of help?"

"We plan to threaten him since he killed Claire, we'll use it against him."

"I don't understand you, Nathan."

"You will be the blackmailer."

Rodriguez stopped. Nathan could guess why. Thomas still ran the company as of present and if there was any slip-up, Rodriguez was doomed. He could only picture a thousand reasons why.

Nathan knew what he was asking for was demeaning and dangerous. Rodriguez would soon become a family man and the leats he wanted were to ruin him and his small family but Rod was the only one he could trust.

"I know it difficult but I need you and with you involved, it will be difficult for Adriana to back down on her words."

Rodriguez nodded, passing his empty cup to his wife for a refill.

"I really can't say no Nathan... You helped me and without you, I would have never been here. I'll help you."

Nathan swore he heard his wife shrieked.

He ignored it since it eas only the concern of a loving wife. She saw the rational, even if she wouldn't say it.

"Thanks for taking care of my mother. How's she coping?"

"Frankly, she's been withdrawn. She hits well but you know... She hardly talks and she spends a lot of her time upstairs." Rodriguez's wife stated.

Nathan momentarily doubted who made his drink.

"But she made this right?" He asked, raising his drink high for her to see what he was talking about.

"Yes, before she went upstairs."

I have to see her.

"I guess I'll go see her then."

"She won't open." The couple said in unison.

What? Why wouldn't she?

Nathan ignored their pessimist statement and trudged upstairs to see his mother.

Rodriguez's house was small so it was quick to locate her room. The door was made of wreath brass, a subtle protection for Intruders and petty thieves.

"Mother!" He knocked.

There was no reply.

He knew very much she was inside. He could hear her sobs and he could tell she was crying.

"I know you're there and even if you don't answer, u want you to know I'm getting everything back. You'll come home. I promise."

"You told him everything!" Adriana yelled not caring if her father upstairs could eavesdrop on the conversation.

"That is irresponsible Nathan."

"We need more help of we are going to be successful with this. The first person hell suspect is me. I was thinking out of the box."

Adriana made her hair into a rough bun and she continued to think.

"But how do we know we can trust him?"

"I trust him!" Nathan upheld.

Nathan could not help but see Adriana as a worrisome green. A lot like his sister.

"Can we stop fighting for once? It almost like you have something else against me."

Adriana walked to him defiantly, her stance screaming 'Don't mess with me!' but even irresistible.

"What do you mean?"

Nathan ran a finger on her plump pink lips begging for his attention unsure of what came over him.

The air became tense and Adriana felt shudders as his hand traced her velvety skin to even tender places.

"What are you doing?!" She slapped his hands off.

"I'm—sorry I must have had a lot to drink."

"Call him."

"Who—Rodriguez? I—I'll do that."

Nathan faced his phone screen just to cope with the awkwardness of the situation.

He had to admit, He had a swing before coming to Adriana but was it the drink or was he acting on pent up feelings he buried deep inside.

He hoped it was not the latter.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"Love is a game you can't win neither can you lose."

The afternoon as a tiring one for Thomas. Nothing interesting had happened apart from the fact that he had paid a Hitman he sent after a blackmailer.

The girl Claire was dumb as hell. Threatening to reveal his involvement in murders he had a hand in if he didn't relinquish the company back to the right hands.

Nathan!

He knew very very that Nathan was a threat now if Claire had even slightly revealed her research to him.

"How did she even father so much dirt against him?" He said, aside.

His phone pealed and he slid the screen to see who.

A private number. It better not be the hitman demanding more money.

"Hello?" Thomas greeted.

"Hello, Mr. Thomas." A baleful voice acknowledged.

"Who is this?" Thomas asked, now relaxed.

It wasn't the Hitman so who was it?

"Just someone in need of a favor."

"What kind of favor?"

"I need something from you if you want me to keep my mouth shut."

The man's tone was getting suspicious

"Is that a threat? Who is this?"

"Someone who doesn't want the truth about Miss Claire's death out."

His hands went numb.

He had asked that stupid Hitman for a clean job and he got this. He was not going to be blackmailed.

"Sure, How much do you need?"

As a businessman, he had to think fast. If the blackmailer accepted monetary compensation, then it would be easy to get rid of him.

"The papers in your name."

This man had to be within these walls.

"What? You must think I'm stupid..."

"Two days Mr. Romero, Two days before the police find out the truth."

The blackmailer cut the phone.

Thomas wasn't done just yet. He checked his call history.

That stupid mercenary had to pay for disappointing him if he wants to even the blackmailer.

Thomas had one simple rule. He never trusted anyone, he had been disappointed far too much to rely on someone.

"Hello." He placed the phone to close to his ear, awaiting the reply of the other line.

"Hello, Mr. Romero." The somber voice replied.

"Kill Silas."

The man snickered a bit, his croaked voice reverberating over the line before it also went dead.

Now all he had to do was find the blackmailer.

He had an acquaintance in the police force who could help him but that would also lead to questions as to why.

Fuck! This was all because of that dumb girl.

Browsing through the internet for any shady means to track a phone call.

Tada!

An app known as GPS TRACKER could do just that.

He promptly set it up, a malevolent intent as the app came on.

You'll wish you kept your damn mouth shut.

Just then, Adriana walked in. She looked tense and had lines on her forehead which indicated worry.

"Anything wrong Love?"

"Yes. Someone just threatened me for Claire's death. Have you heard?"

"About her death

Yes! I received a call last night and was briefly interrogated." Thomas answered them diverted his attention to tracking the delinquent.

"He said he wants the company."

"I know." Thomas acknowledged, getting close to catching the bastard.

"So what do you plan to do? Are you going to give it?"

Thomas was frankly irritated by Adriana's questions. She was acting like her mother and being a pesky fly.

"I think I will."

Thomas observed Adriana's reaction. She was a bit dazed.

How wrong she was. The app worked fine and he had to where the call was taken. The person was smart enough to discard the phone but the call was taking right between these walls.

It was Nathan just like he suspected.

Nathan wanted a game and he enjoyed games.

The bartender passed Adriana another of God knows what. It was alcohol though. What else stung the throat and made your head spin.

She briefly wondered why Nathan wanted to meet up a bar that seemed more like a club.

Male strippers had come a time too many to flirt and it was grossly disappointing she had to refuse to uphold her dignity.

She hoped he'll come quickly so she didn't have to endure any more torture.

"Hey."

Nathan joined her. He looked recluse almost like he had been working his ass off.

Adriana remembered her father had beckoned on him in the office and had probably overworked him, his sagging shoulders assured.

He was clad in a shirt and tight pants, almost like he was going for a date.

"Well, my father is working well with this...surprisingly."

"Ehm!... I didn't call you here for that."

The red lights turned on. Why did he call her then?

"So why am I here exactly?"

"I wanted to thank you for doing this. It takes a lot of guts to—go against your father and I know how you must feel."

Adriana shook her head in disappointment,

"So a club is the appreciation I get."

She could see what the dressing was for now. He was on a date—with her.

Nathan was a bit confused but got the message.

It was either his sudden drop in the class hierarchy had lesser his standards or he never really had a date since women would have tripped for his looks and more importantly his money.

"So where do you want to go?"

It was a Friday and tomorrow was gonna be a boring one for her so Adriana made up his mind to make the best of tonight anyway.

An expensive restaurant that would dry up his pocket was all she could think of.

"I have something in mind."

"This is good." Nathan complimented the local food taking a bite from his bread.

"So is that all you're gonna say all day?" Adriana yelled so he could hear her.

The restaurant was next to a busy street so yelling was more like talking.

"So what should we talk about?"

"Anything but the food."

"I see you're disoriented so I'll start. How is your family like?"

"My father is pretty much like yours, demanding."

"I know your mom so tell me about your sister."

"She was the kindest person I knew. Always fight for what she believed in. It painful when she died, I felt like I had lost the world."

Adriana locked her finger in his to reassure him that it was okay.

"I know how it feels."

"You know you are just like me. We have demanding fathers we have to live up to. A sibling who is dead and who we've refused to let go of."

"Is this what you brought me here to say?"

"No, I'm just saying we are basically the same and with the way you're going. You're going to hurt someone as I did to your family."

The conversation was getting uncomfortable for her. Just when she thought he was being a gentleman. Once an ass, always an ass.

"I have to go."

She got off her seat and headed for the door, visibly pissed off.

"Please don't." He apologized, blocking her way.

"Get out of the way."

"No, I won't...I have something else to say."

Others eating glanced at them, wondering what was going on and Adriana did not appreciate the attention she was getting.

"People are watching." She whispered.

Let them watch. Adriana..."

His hesitation, his starry eyes, the stance, she's seen this before.

"I don't want to hear it."

"Then I'll show you."

He drew her toward him with his starry eyes, he inclined his face toward hers and lay his mouth on her mouth, which was like a freshly cut out strawberry.

For a time too long, silence ensued, the world was still and all that could heard was their breathing.

She could run now knowing well what would happen but the forces above had other plans. Her legs went jelly or maybe they just wanted what her brain had fantasied on Friday nights like this.

His lips were puckered and inviting. It was hurting he still hesitated.

Their lips touched, the Sparks lit.

She was filled with astonishment as he worked his way through her tongue slurping it like tasty chicken, Her body felt noodle as she battled to keep standing.

Flashes of how she resisted, ruled him, put him off played like she was watching it on Tv.

Why did she lure him on now? Joining him as her hands found their way to his neck, promising to choke the life out of him if he dared to stop.

I'd only she was stronger to push him away but she couldn't. She was starved. Her minds were at play.

Lust took control of HQ and it wasn't ready to give up power to rationale.

To think that she thought she had it all.

Up to now, she had been missing the last ingredient, but now she had it. Added to her spices, she was never going to let it go.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"If love was an object, it would be a kitchen knife."

Adriana pushed away, sanity coming back to her in a rush.

"Nathan, if we cross this line, there's no going back."

Seeing he did not care, she walked out on him.

"Wait, Adriana!" He begged following closely.

Adriana turned to face him, her eyes basked in tears.

"Why me? I've always hated you and I'm sure the feeling was mutual."

"For some time, yes but when I was with you Adriana, I felt something that I haven't felt in a long time."

"What did you feel?" She asked, more in a hush.

"I felt loved."

Adriana burst into a fit of laughter making her cheeks huge.

"I've always had fantasies of what it would be like if we met differently, if I wasn't a bitch and you never met my father."

"But it can be different now. I'll say it again Adriana, I've never felt this way for anyone before. I just want you in my life."

By this time, they were already near Adriana's ride.

"I wish it was meant to be Nathan but my father will always resent you. I don't want him to see me as a tool in your conspiracy and then he lost his daughter too. It'll kill him."

"I think he'll understand," Nathan assured, holding Adriana's hands and staring into her dark irises.

"It won't Nathan! Because I'll always put my family first."

Nathan was stuck. He didn't stop her from going, He didn't stop her from starting her car and he didn't stop her from zooming away.

It was clear, that he would still be insignificant no matter what.

"How did it go?", Rodriguez texted.

"Terrible. She said No." Nathan sent back.

Rodriguez sent a sad emoji with a try again.

Nathan was so not doing that. He was not a puppy who came back even after being flogged by its master. He was human and his heart was shattered.

Adriana couldn't be forced to be his and he could really see how divided she was. If she remained at his side. She would look like a betrayer and Thomas will definitely hate him more. She had made a good choice but without him in it. He just had to accept it.

The drill now was to get the papers back and get back his old life. The future was bright and miracles could happen.

It was his last night in penury. The lonely road that had opened his sealed heart, showed him pain, showed him sorrow, gave his love and took it away.

Nathan swiped his off phone finally taking control of his emotions and Misty eyes.

"Rodriguez, I'm coming to your place tonight."

The phone jingled as the text went through.

It was the most delicate night.

One That could save, or ruin him...Again.

The latter held more benefit, Rodriguez was had more to lose if he failed this night. He had disappointed Claire but he had this chance, No one was going to die in his name, not anymore.

The car slowly moved into the driveway, dramatic like Adriana's mental state.

She walked out and dragged her tired legs into the building she would vacate tomorrow. She had given Nathan his house papers already, quietly sneaking it out of her Father's room earlier in the morning.

She made a mental note to call her mother just to hear her moral gibberish I case she felt like a worthless snake.

The lights at the uttermost parts of the mansion were on. She could see the light passing the dark curtains.

Her father was around.

She best avoided him.

The main door was locked so Adriana reached into her purse and searched for her keys. She didn't need to bother her father, half of it because she was avoiding him.

Three turns and the door opened.

Adriana dragged her lazy legs upstairs.

She could hear her father ranting upstairs.

Probably business. Putting so much strength to Nathan's Enterprise. Oh the irony!

The agreement got intense and Adriana began to make out some of the words being said.

"\$200! for a shot. That's very unfair." She heard her Dad say.

She walked up the spiraled stairs half running to get what was going on.

Shot?

He wasn't up to his tricks again.

Without waiting, she barged in.

Adriana saw her father abruptly cut the phone.

"Hello, sweetheart. You scared me."

"You never call me sweetheart! Who are you going to shoot?"

"You heard everything?" He mumbled.

"Everything!" Adriana affirmed, more like lied.

"The blackmailer. Whoever he is, he wants to do the exchange at Lighthorn Creek. It plans on leaving an assassin to hunt him down."

Adriana let out an involuntary gasp. She imagined Rodriguez bring shot in the head.

No! No!

"Dad, don't you think that's a bit severe?"

"Honey, we are talking about a blackmailer here."

Images of Adriana blackmailing Claire flashed through her head.

"I don't support it Dad. If you hadn't killed Claire, we wouldn't be in this mess."

Thomas sent Adriana a cautionary glare and she kept her damn mouth shut.

"She got what she deserved. It would have come to her anyway. She was weak and you know what they say."

Adriana was beginning to fear the man in front of her. He wasn't just losing it, he was psycho.

Was he still there?

"Dad?"

"Are you waiting for me or against me Adriana?"

Adriana gave a defeated wheeze and gave her father his answer,

"I'm with your father. Family first."

Thomas smiled.

"That's my girl."

Adriana gave him a weak smile, her head making a note to call Nathan.

She didn't want blood on her hands, Not this time.

"So the plan is simple. He'll drop the documents here." Rodriguez said pointing to a hand-drawn map out of the creek.

"You don't look so good my friend." He stopped his planning and joined Nathan on the dining table.

"Are you still thinking about your rejection?"

Nathan was quiet making Rodriguez guess that was it.

He exchanged looks with his wife then continued,

"You know when I first met my wife. She wanted nothing to do with me. She rejected me twice and her brothers bashed me to warn me to keep away but u didn't. I tried the third time and she said yes..."

"You don't understand." Nathan cut in, "I think she's scared of what her father would think of her if she loved me."

"Well, you can always try and I thought you wanted to take your mind off her." Rodriguez joked.

"Well, maybe alcohol would help."

His helpful wife dashes into the store to bring out a bottle of McDowell's.

She was an energetic woman who cherished working.

"Thanks."

Nathan served himself a glass of the alcohol and sank in.

The gin got in quick and Nathan soon began to think of something else other than Adriana.

"So we go there at 6 in the morning, Get it all done and everyone gets their happily ever after."

"Yes. Everyone gets their happily ever after." Rodriguez repeated, with more Glee.

Nathan's phone buzzed. One look at it and his face turned pale.

Why was Adriana calling him?

He rejected it and to prevent her from Calling again, He switched off.

It was gonna be a big day tomorrow and he wanted absolutely no distractions.

Don't you want to hear what she has to say?, A tiny voice in his head asked.

Another swing of the gin and he felt fuzzy, killing that thought and forming new ones, ones that made him feel like he was on top of the world.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"Ever heard the tale of Cain and Abel?"

12:00 AM THE D-DAY

Adriana tried calling one more time. She had been at it all night and was exhausted. She didn't even realize she had slept despite all means she had tried not to.

The number you are trying to call is currently switched off.

She angrily tossed her phone on the bed. The force made its boomerang back at her. It hit the ground before she could catch it, sending a loud echo in the room that killed the silence.

"What do I even care?" She ranted to herself.

"I need some sleep. I'll think about it tomorrow." She muttered to herself.

She laid on the bed and cleaned her eyes to get some sleep.

Just then, her cracked phone lit up. Silent but someone was calling. Nathan was calling.

7:00 AM

Thomas hovered over his daughter.

His shadow making her subconscious sense she was in danger and she roused.

"Dad? What are you doing here? It's so early."

"The perfect time to catch the blackmailer. We, my dear, are going to the creek."

Every bit of sleep that clouded Adriana's mind zoomed off.

Today.

"Can't we at least have a relaxing time? It's Saturday for Laziness' sake."

Thomas gave her a no.

"Just get dressed Adriana, There's some bread you can eat on your way. I want this blackmailer out of my neck."

"Ok." Adriana groaned, sluggishly getting out of bed and taking her phone.

"Which reminds me. Nathan called you."

Adriana froze. Tapping her phone almost immediately her father said it.

12:12! That bastard.

"Does he call you that often? He's probably trying to get to spill something. I can only imagine the look that will be on his face when that bullet goes through his heart." Rodriguez stated.

"Yes. Maybe." Adriana said, drained.

She planned to go into the shower and wait until her father left the room. She would then go back to call Nathan.

Like she planned, her father left the room and she returned and tried Nathan again.

"Pick up, you prick."

The good thing was that his phone was on now but the bad news was he wasn't picking.

Adriana decided to send him a text.

My father has a plan. He's going to kill someone. Call me what you see.

Before she could send it, Nathan called.

"Hello." She said.

"Hey Adriana if this is about last night em"

"Oh please. This is not about last night, it's about your plan. My dad..."

Adriana suddenly squeaked seeing a dreaded figure smiling at her.

Her phone dropped.

"Dad. I can ex..."

"Who was that? You were screaming."

"Em...One of our workers, he em...wanted a leave."

"Is that so. You look like you've seen a ghost. Are you done bathing?"

"I was going to get my towel."

"Please do and..." He reached to the floor to pick the phone Adriana threw to the floor. "This is very expensive to come by. Treat them with care next time."

Adriana watched her father toss her phone into her bed. Her heart still pounding furiously.

"What are you waiting for Adriana? We are getting late."

Adriana scrambled away, thanking the beings above for protecting her and Thomas from heartbreak.

The only problem was what would she do now.

She turned the valve and cold water rained on her bare skin.

You have to think fast Adriana.

Nathan was lucky. He cut the phone early. Their plans had almost gone down the drain.

"Who called?" Rodriguez asked, his wife just as concerned.

Nathan faked a grin.

"Just Adriana having second thoughts but it ok now."

"Oh ok. I guess we are ready now."

Nathan sighed. Not sure he could go through with this. He felt like a child going for his first debate.

The butterflies in his tummies were wicked zombies and he felt the urge to vomit.

"I just have to see my mother."

He then rushed upstairs to the room his mother always locked herself in whenever he was around and spoke his mind.

"Mom. I'm going now. I want you to wish me luck and...It's okay."

The door creaked and the door extended to leave a dark opening. Nathan saw an eye peek out.

The balls were red and swollen. She had been crying.

Reaching his hand to the knob, He gave more way, enough for him to pass, and hugged his mother.

She smelt like ashes but he hugged her tight.

"I don't blame you. I could never do that. And not to worry, I'm getting it all back tonight."

"I know you will. I wish you luck."

"Thanks, Mom."

Rodriguez and Nathan got into the vehicle that would wheel them to the creek.

A cream Honda.

"You look tense," Rodriguez noted, igniting the car's engine.

"I'll be fine."

The car then slowly walked out of the driveway gathering momentum and when it reached the road sped off.

THE CREEK 10:00 AM

"We have to leave the car here and go on foot."

Nathan knew he was right. Adriana had mentioned something about her father changing the plans. He could hardly remember since she was incoherent and her call made him unstable as of that time.

"Yes. We should find a perfect place to hide and watch him drop the papers."

"What if he drops a fake?"

"Adriana made sure he didn't and if he has. She'll notify us."

"Let's go."

They agreed and separated ways.

The creek was a stony mountain like canyon that couldn't stay well with someone that feared heights. The bright side was it was unkempt and had grass tall enough for a strike team to hide in.

A few minutes passed and a black limo parked.

It once belonged to Nathan.

Two individuals highlighted. One dressed in a crappy designer three-piece suit that although was expensive lacked style and a lady who looked like she was rushed out in the middle of her dressing up. Makeup not done but she was just as gorgeous. She was dressed in a simple blue dress that was tight enough and displayed her cleavages begging for an auction.

They walked up to the cliff and dropped the folder they had been forced to bring along.

"We've dropped it and but we ask for your silence. The company is yours."

Rodriguez got ready for his part and took a fake gun they had built expertly from modeling clay and color. There was no difference between it and a real gun if it was shaken around occasionally.

"Step back and slowly move to your car." Rodriguez spat, waving the gun madly at them and adjusting the itchy hood that covered his face.

They obeyed. Slowly stepping back and giving Rodriguez enough time to pick the folder and examine it.

It was the original and the operation was a success.

A loud bang followed.

Rodriguez felt something wheeze before him.

He instinctively to where the sound and the wheeze came from.

A man with a scar lining from his head down to his collar, a straight line.

"You betrayer"

More shots followed proclaiming that the mission was compromised.

Nathan burst out of where he was hiding.

"Thomas stop this madness. People are going to get hurt."

"So you're not the one in the mask."

Adriana turned to see the gunman pointing the weapon right at Nathan. Her father's words repeated in her head.

I can only imagine the look that will be on his face when that bullet goes through his heart.

This was against her belief but she would rather die than watch Nathan fall.

She raced against time to save Nathan, jumping in front of him at the last moment.

A shot followed.

Time stopped and all eyes turned to Adriana. A bullet in her stomach and crimson pouring like tap water.

Before anyone could react, Nathan was fired. The bullet hitting square in his chest and sending him flying off the cliff.

Thomas turned to his Hitman seeing his daughter bleeding out.

"You shot her you bastard."

He then rushed to his daughter's side.

"Adriana! Stay with me. Please."

Rodriguez walked up to the man weeping over his child drifting slowly to the heavens.

"She's gone."

Another shot. Fired by none other than Rodriguez himself.

A bullet to the head, Thomas could still see what had happened.

"It was you all along."

"Yes. It was all my idea."

News Flash: A couple killed by a mad father. Bodies yet to be found.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Three years later(somewhere in Mexico)

"Ema." Someone called from inside a thatched cottage.

The sun was hot making the fire the woman was tending to burn faster.

"Ema! Come help me." The woman dressed in a white shirt stained with Ash and coal.

Her hair a mess of black and grey. Sweat making them stick to her forehead.

She coughed a little and reached out to her fan which she kept close to keep the embers of wood burning.

"Coming Mom." A voice rang from outside, soft yet loud like a clarinet.

A young girl in her early twenties rushed to the old woman who called for her.

"Mom, I don't want to cook. The farm is much fun."

"Yes. Digging and getting all those nails dirty is fun. It would have been better if you came as a boy." Her mother mocked.

"Help me with the melon seeds. Your Dad will be back from the city soon and you know how hunger he'll be."

"I know Mom." The young lady shrugged, pouting her peach-colored lips to her mom before getting the melon seeds that needed attention.

Night came in quickly, replacing the hot weather with a cool one. One that made a local family dine outside in the open staring at the sky and admiring the work their creator had done.

"Dad, you promised to take me to the city for one of your business trips these days. I need a little adventure in my life." The raven-haired girl whined.

"Eat your food, Ema Contreras!" Her mother chastised.

"Leave the poor girl Esposa. Our village is so boring. Let a girl fantasize."

"Let her fantasize about getting married. Fidel came to see her today. Poor guy. He brought flowers, vanilla. She just treated him like garbage before pushing him out."

"I don't think she's ready yet then." Ema's father still supported making his wife more agitated.

"Support her all day till she marries that man in her dreams."

Email blushed remembering the rompy daydream she had with that man that kept coming to her dreams to haunt her body. His wheat hair she buried her nails in when he took her right on the bed...in her sleep of course. His muscular body, her eyes ached to savor. His...

"She's thinking about him again. Ema, In case no one has told you, sleeping with someone in your dreams is very very bad and as a Christian, it has its spiritual implications.

"Mom! Sex? Please" Ema groaned.

"Explain the moaning every night? Whatever he does to you in your sleep. It better not be real."

"You should happy that it isn't those horrific nightmares I get."

The dinner got tense. Her mother choking on the food in her throat. Her eyes were bloodshot from coughing out the food.

"Ema? Don't mention that to your mother! You know how tense she can get." Her father warned, his eyes stern.

Ema returned to face her food, keeping quiet and remembering to detail what her nightmare was about.

Falling down a cliff.

Men in white attended to a patient.

The man was placed on a drip and kept muttering yet remained unheard.

machines beeped with each heavy breath he took.

"How are his vitals?" Miranda asked.

"Fine." One of the men dressed in white gown answered.

"This all my fault," Miranda swore. "I mentioned that unfortunate incident to him."

"About that," The doctor who was talking to her earlier walked her outside.

"Your son is still very disoriented. I don't think you should be mentioning something like that to him."

The doctor's words enraged her.

"Nathan acts like a child always screaming for Adriana. I want him back!" She yelled.

The doctor remained professional,

"He will remember who he is and get to his senses soon. Just try to make him live as he did before."

"My son—when he was in his right senses didn't have a regular Lifestyle. The only thing he knew was work and he can't do that now. He acts like a freaking three-year-old."

Saying that, Miranda broke sob, cursing herself and those who caused Nathan his condition.

"How is he?" Someone asked from behind her.

"Rodriguez." Miranda breathe a sigh of relief seeing her helper. The only one who came to her rescue.

"He's sleeping now. The doctors say his vitals are normal now but still. I'm worried Rodriguez. What if he never remembers anything?"

"He will," Rodriguez assured, wiping away a tear running g from Miranda's thin face.

"What would I do without you?"

"So what made him go hysterical?" Rodriguez asked.

"He heard me mention Adriana."

"That reminds me. Mrs. Romero left flowers for you."

The mention of that vile name made Miranda's intestine knot.

"Rodriguez, I appreciate what you've been doing for the company and us but never mention that name again." Miranda spat, seething.

"I'm so sorry Miranda. I just want you to extend a hand of friendship to her. She also lost a lot after the incident."

"I don't care Rodriguez. Her family only got what waa deserving of them. That was the only reason she survived and worse they wanted my son dead."

"I don't think we should just anyone. We are no better."

Miranda nodded still occupied in her thoughts.

"I just want to move on. I hope she does too."

"How's the company going?" Miranda asked, changing the conversation to something light.

"Fine. It's going well but not as well. without Nathan on board." Rodriguez answered.

"Thank you, Rodriguez. Nathan made the right choice making you Co-CEO."

"I have to go now. The doctor needs me."

Miranda left turning to another side of the room.

Rodriguez walked into Nathan's ward.

Checking the machines keeping him alive. If the security cameras were absent. He would have strangled him to death.

He didn't even know why the bastard survive. Nathan didn't know his betrayal sure but Rodriguez feared something else. If Nathan was alive, was Adriana alive. He remembered what transpired three years ago at the creek.

Three years ago(The creek)

Adriana stared at Rodriguez in horror when his gun exploded in her father's head.

She could not comprehend what was going on. All she could see was his madness.

"It was you all along." Her father managed to voice falling to the floor almost immediately.

"Yes. It was all me."

All this time, he was the one.

The shooter came to Rodriguez.

"Are they all dead?"

"She's still alive." He said pointing to Adriana whose eyes opened to convey how shocked she was.

"Please Don't kill me." Adriana beefed, her body vibrating.

"There's no time to do that. Hear that? That's the police. I'll just let nature do the job."

It all happened in seconds. Rodriguez grabs her and with every force, he could muster toss her over the cliff.

Her scream followed and a loud bang.

Rodriguez sighed, remembering how he had grabbed the opportunity that came by him.

He knew the saying opportunity comes but once too much and he had grabbed the opportunity with it's poking horns.

Who would have thought he would rule an empire, a dynasty.

He had the life every envied now and who would ever want to leave this kind of life.

"Nathan, you'll never get well and i—I'll make sure of that."

"Let make a bet. Shall we?" The psycho that was left to a helpless being said.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"The sun said to the moon, I'll burn you."

"Ema!" Her father's voice resonated in the small house and even escaping outside.

The bathroom the whole community shared was a terrible place to be in the morning.

It was worse than Ema was the fifteenth person entering.

It was still lucky though. The last person would have nightmares even while awake.

Why didn't I go in the morning?

Water was scarce and she didn't want to go far off as early as six.

At long last, the person using the bathroom got out. His face was twisted in disgust and Ema could only imagine her turn for worse.

"Slowpoke, Move it!"

Ema ignored the bastard and walked in.

The first thing she faced when she entered was the slippery floor.

She counted herself lucky for being to keep standing.

She got her sponge and dropped her bucket filled to the brim with water and prayed to the heavens that she could survive this.

Oops! The soap slipped pff and landed on the floor, the slipperiness allowing the soap to slid further.

Ema doused her face with water and searched for soap.

It was gone for good. Something that looked like worms was crawling on her newly bought soap.

Crap!

She would just finish up and go and meet her father. He could still be heard yelling.

"I'm ready," Ema said finally.

She had dressed in her best. A white-yellowish gown given to her as a present from her aunt.

"I don't support this.", Her mother complained, plaiting her hair.

"The city is not a terrible place Mom, moreover I'm going with Dad. I'll be safe. You worry too much."

Her mom sighed and rushed to get something.

"Are you ready?" Her Dad asked, dressed in denim and black shirt.

"I guess I am. We should go before Mom changes her mind."

"You're right."

They walked to the old white truck that would convey them to the city.

"Wait!" Her mother yelled rushing to her with something clutched tight in her hands.

"What?" Email rolled her eyes, she was not missing this chance to go to the big city.

"Take this." Her mother handed her a small sum of money, "Buy a makeup kit."

"I don't need that Mom. Who's looking at me?"

"A lot of men."

Ema knew where this was getting to. Her mother wouldn't let her go until she took it. It could even hinder her going to the city.

"But you wish, I'll buy it."

Her mother gave her a big hug before kissing her goodbye.

The truck started moving slowly out of their small compound and into the open.

At long last.

Ema had heard quite a lot about the city but those were just tales. She wanted to see it herself.

The big houses and scrapers that she only saw in pictures and textbooks.

"So where exactly are we taking this wood?" Ema asked, just to know how much she would be able to explore the city before they returned.

"Tower." Her father replied, kicking the accelerator.

"Nice name."

Rodriguez was a bit mad.

The attention was not on him today. It was on that imbecile.

Nathan had been brought in to the company just in case anything could kickstart his memory and make him again.

It wasn't happening though, not when Nathan was fed with drugs to retard whatever development or healing process could be going on and it was walking well he still spoke like an imbecilic child.

It was a pity he could not end his misery. He needed him alive if he was going to continue being CEO.

It won't be long before Miranda would give it to her son. Even if he too years, he would stand by her, The company would be nothing but his payment for helping the family.

"Rodriguez."

Miranda beckoned on him.

He walked over, hoping to talk about Nathan's improvement but she spoke first.

"He's not remembering anything." She sobbed, "Even if he doesn't, I badly want the real him back."

"It's ok Miranda. The doctor said it's a process. Just Jeep doing your best and try to be happy. He'll come back one day. I can guarantee it."

Miranda sighed

"I guess you're right. Thank you, Rodriguez, I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Well, how's your husband?"

"His health is deteriorating and I keep having to lie about Nathan's condition. I can't lose him too."

Rodriguez hugged her, trying to get her to stop crying. It was getting irritating.

"Mom! Mom!" Nathan called, running towards her like he was seeing her for the first time.

"Stay away from mom. You bad person."

He hit Rodriguez on the face, the hard smack making his earring.

You son of a bitch!

He was lucky his mother was here. If not, it would have turned bloody.

"I'm a friend Nathan. We were business partners. Do you remember?" Rodriguez said, a conniving smile on his face.

"Badman!" Nathan yelled again, stumping on his shoe.

That hurt than hell.

"We should go now." Miranda notified, getting tired of Nathan's babyish antics.

"Sure. I'll see you this night then."

"Hmm." She nodded positively and dragged her son who kept a wicked glare at his would-have-been killer.

Watching them leave, Rodriguez said to himself,

"Eventually, you will need to my will."

The scenery was beautiful.

The roads in the city had been built in the days of wealth and grandeur. They were wide enough for several lanes of cars in each direction. They must have been flat and glossy black with neat lines of white and yellow like in the movies she watched, Cats furiously speeding past her, threatening to rip-off her hands if she stretched them out beyond her limits.

Unlike the road in the village, they are just grey, cracked, pot-holed. There is no paint left, but then there are no cars either, not enough to go around at least.

Ema occupied herself till they reached Tower.

It was a spectacular view indeed.

The black tiled building that went so high. You could almost see it touching the heavens.

How many people would work here?

A new dream forced itself into her imagination.

One day, I'll work here.

The truck stopped at the back of the building where other trucks like her father were offloading wood.

Ema could see almost twelve trucks, some bigger than her father's offloading planks.

Her father stopped the car and notified her to get down.

Now it was time for the hard work.

Offloading those heavy planks.

Ema's father went into the small truck's wagon and began to toss them out to the floor.

That was his side of the work. Ema's father had a partner who did the carrying but he was sick which was why she followed him.

Ema got a hold of what she could carry and walked onto the shed where others tossed theirs too.

Her father joined her soon after. She had finished offloading and held planks side to side.

Ema could see people passing her strange looks and she knew why

This was a hard job and people in the rural part were so filled with what should be right and what was wrong.

The wrong, she was doing.

"You're doing alright."

Inside was a man who watched the men dropping the merchandise. He kept complimenting them on their hard work and he even knew their names.

Based on the way he was dressed, Ema knew he had to be working in the company.

"Good work, Mr. Contreras." The handsome man greeted.

"Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez, you keep patronizing us and I'll be able to buy a better truck next year."

The man bellowed. It wasn't that funny. Maybe the man was just so used to laughing for business' sake.

"And this must...."

The man left his mouth agape, no words came out. He was petrified.

"Hey," I said, trying to get what made him shocked.

"Adriana?"

What the hell was Adriana?

CHAPTER TWENTY

"The devil once said to the damsel,'You look ravishing' "

"Are you alright?" Ema asked the dumbstruck man.

"I think we've met before. Have we?"

Who was this man? Was he trying to flirt or something? Ema wondered.

"I don't think we've met before. I spent all of my life In the village."

"Oh," Rodriguez uttered, still displaced.

"Pardon me, I have to go."

The man then walked off. Ema thought it was quite odd.

"Did I do anything wrong?"

"No." Mr. Contreras replied, "just drop that there."

Ema dropped the heavy merchandise she was carrying and proceeded outside.

The man had messed with her and the name Adriana was stuck inside her head.

Did she have a lookalike?

Her Dad joined her soon after to get more wood. He saw how disturbed Ema was and asked,

"Are you alright?"

"Yes, Dad. Just a bit unsettled. Your boss was all over be like he saw a ghost. Do you know why?"

"Nope but why are you so worried?"

"I don't know. Maybe I just need to-"

"You know Ema, if you want to get the makeup your mother sent you, you can go."

That was something she needed. To be far away from this place.

"You're right but the way you said it, it sounds like you think I'm lazy."

"I didn't say that." Her father chuckled, "You can go, I'll be alright."

"Ok but I don't know anywhere here, I'm stuck with you."

"Well we'll just be would with what we are doing and I'll personally take you there."

"Ok."

Ema picked up a bundle of the treated wood and advanced it to the shed.

"No! This can't be happening." Rodriguez swept all on his table off in frustration.

"It can't be her. I finished her. She could just be her lookalike. Yes."

Rodriguez collapsed to his office chair staring out. He could still see the girl.

She was agile like a man and went back and forth the shed.

Her features were just like Adriana. The short hair, the round face, and those observant eyes.

Could God be put of models to recreate the same haunting face?

The door creaked open and the secretary came in.

"Mrs. Tocci is here to see you." She said.

This is disastrous! Of all times.

"Let her In."

The woman highlighted and the door opened once again.

"Miranda, What a wonderful surprise. Where is Nathan?"

It would be disastrous if Nathan saw her-lookalike.

"I told the maid to take him to the mall. You said I needed to relax."

Rodriguez exhaled. That was good. The meds might be working wonders but he had to play it safe.

"So why are you here? Is it about Nathan?"

"No. It's actually about the company."

That was interesting.

"What about it?"

"Well since Nathan is—not getting better. I was thinking maybe we'll start the process of making your CEO. I know you are still restricted to being Co-CEO."

Rodriguez could almost dance around the room like a simple village girl.

This was it!

"That's not necessary. It's like you believe he won't get better."

Yes, he was that a snake.

"I insist on Rodriguez. You've been so helpful in this trying times and it's not that I don't believe Nathan would get better. If he does get better. He'll take the role."

"Oh Really?"

A new plan had come up. A terrible one.

The truck highlighted In from of the spectacular castle called a mall.

Ema stepped out from the cream-ish old truck, gaping at the large building that set beyond the sidewalk, towering over her as if attempting to intimidate her. The cream coating of the paint shined as the sun beat down on it, causing Ema to have to squint just to know how tall it went.

Uniquely twisted fencing kept the building enclosed, neatly trimmed hedges surrounded the building. The roof was peaked, slanting down at an angle.

As she stepped onto the sidewalk, Ema noticed a marble fountain sitting towards the right side of the driveway. An angel holding a flower was perched on top, looking up towards the sky. Water spurted from its other hand, which lay gently out in front of it as if waiting for someone to take it in return. The water fell gently towards the crystal blue pool beneath it, causing ripples to form and wave out until they were no more.

It was taunting to think of going In alone.

"Are you coming with me Dad?"

"Nope." Her father nodded otherwise, "You can have the spotlight."

Guess it's just me.

Inside the shopping mall was architecture the schools and hospitals I knew could only dream of.

The ceiling was domed higher than any cathedral and made of the most beautiful glass.

The walkways flowed like tributaries to the main rivers of people, not a sharp angle to be seen. It smelt like heaven in a hand-basket and the floor shined like the surface of a lake at sunrise. In the background was music to soothe, gentle flowing notes to take the shopper's cares far away.

In a world so chaotic it in order. In a world of pollution and desecration, it is clean perfection in bubble-wrap.

Mannequins and clothes, all the clothes that could make you a kleptomaniac.

"Now where was the makeup section?"

It was sure going to be far from here. Ema was going to explore.

The dress section was a sight to behold.

Gowns! Shirts and skirts of all sizes.

"Hey!" A joyous shriek resonated where she was.

A woman came up to her. Ebony skinned and looked between thirty-five to forty. She was dressed in a leopard skin gown, knee-length that showed meat.

Ema could have sworn she had seen her before.

"I'm sorry, Do I know you?"

"Forgetful you. What's your name again? Riana?"

"My name is Ema."

The woman stared oddly at Ema for a bit before continuing.

"I saw your husband. He was acting all drunk. What did you give him?"

This was all getting weird. Ema was regretting coming to the city. People seemed to mistaken her for someone else. Making two in one day.

"My husband?"

"Yes. He's just down the shoe section."

Really?

"Thanks."

"Anytime."

Email walked to the shoe section wondering why she was even taking this step.

Was it just curiosity?

The shoe section was big and she might not even know who he was.

She kept on walking down a straight line at the shoe line, taking brief stares at the men she passed by.

None of them seemed to make a ruckus about who they thought she was.

It's time you gave up.

It was of no use. Ema turned back. She was here for a reason and she was making her innocent Dad wait. She would just get the makeup and leave and stop worrying if she had a lookalike.

But then someone said that name.

"Adriana!"

So someone like that existed.

Ema turned back to see the most gorgeous man. Wheat haired and packed, it was a common phenomenon in the village but there was something different in this man,

He was odd and 'very' indeed.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

"They met in their other life, Only this time they might live."

Ema gaped at the subtle dressed man.

He was clad in a white shirt and black jeans also sporting timberland. Of the Jean was a pencil, it would have suited him better.

He ran towards her with the glee of a child, his eyes bright like a child that just saw his best friend after a long night.

"Adriana." He said again.

Ema studied him. He had the joy that only a child could have. He also acted immaturely.

He was literally playing with her hands and his voice—it was just oddly childish.

"Do I know you?"

Someone ran towards Ema breathless.

"I'm so sorry." The woman apologized and grabbed Nathan by the arm.

"Let's go." She spat in between her teeth.

She seemed irritated with the man.

"But if I leave her, The bad man will kill her again."

He refused to let Ema's hands go.

"Leave me!" He snapped at the woman.

Ema saw it as a sin to leave before it got messy.

"I'm sorry. I'm not Adriana."

"No, you are!"

Ema felt his grip tighten around her thin wrist like a python.

Too late. Now it was weird.

"Let me go you creep!" Email yelled, trying hard to get loose.

"No! The man snapped. He'll kill you again." The man snapped back as the maid made a double effort to get him off, Ema.

"Let her go." Mr. Contreras intervened, pulling away from the creep.

"What's your problem dude?"

"He'll kill her again. You have to let him—r stay. She'll be safe here." He stuttered.

"Stay away from her. Let's go, Ema."

What just happened? Ema quizzed herself when she was outside.

The city was messed up.

Ema watched her father get into the truck and start it, a scowl on his face.

She joined him knowing how rash her father could be when he was disturbed.

"What was that about?" Me Contreras quizzed his daughter.

Ema didn't even know herself. Everything was so messed up right now.

"I don't know Dad but they all seem to think I'm Adriana like your boss called me. It makes me wonder who the girl was."

Her father gripped the wheel and swerved it slightly making the truck turn where he directed.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" Ema quizzed, seeing how quiet her father became.

"I'm just as shocked as you."

The car started, making its way slowly out of the building, first slow then slowly gaining momentum.

Suddenly a man crossed the path the car was headed at.

"Father stop!", Ema screeched, closing g her eyes from the horror that was sure to follow.

The brakes didn't fail this time though. The Tyre made a scratching sound as it slowed down.

The man who would have died, looked at the windshield to see his saviors.

He gave a smile and went on his way as nothing happened.

He didn't leave everyone the same though, Ema was terrified seeing that man.

Flashes she could not explain came up and her head throbbed. His scar, His smirk.

It was part of that nightmare she had each night.

She felt her throat tightening. The lack of oxygen to her lungs made her gasp for air.

More flashes.

Her eyes blurred and the darkness enveloped her.

"Ema! Ema!"

Mr. Contreras stooped the car to aid his daughter.

She was unconscious.

"How is she?" Mr. Contreras asked the doctor in a white coat.

"She's fine Mr. Contreras but I'm worried about her. She seems to have a brain lesion. Did she have an accident?"

"Hmmm. Yes. She fell from a cliff but she survived." Mr. Contreras replied, running his hand through his thick grey hair.

"Well did she lose any memories after the incident?"

The doctor's words got Mr. Contreras disturbed.

"Are you sure she's ok?"

The doctor nodded affirmatively.

"She is. She only fell unconscious because—well her memories are returning."

"Wait what? She's going to remember everything."

"Yes Mr. Contreras, albeit slowly."

This was bad, very bad.

"Oh. Where's the hospital telephone? I need to call someone."

"It's over the counter outside." The doctor answered.

Mr. Contreras took a second look at his daughter.

It was good her memories were returning but he didn't know how she would react.

Could she be the Adriana everyone seemed to be so interested in?

He had to call his wife.

Rodriguez was on edge hearing Miranda on the phone.

"He met who?" Rodriguez demanded, almost praying to the almighty it wasn't that girl.

The line seemed to be static for an eternity before the receiver said,

"He said he saw Adriana and the maid confirmed it. I just showed her a photo of Adriana. For the first time, I think he's getting better. He remembers how they met."

No! This was bad. This was very bad.

"Wow, that's awesome. So what do you plan on doing now?"

He hoped she would spill enough to let him plan how to get around this sh*t.

"I never believed in lookalikes but maybe she is one. If I can find her, I'd hire her."

Oh, sh*t!

Could it get any worse?

"I'll try to help I'm anyway I can Mrs. Tocci. Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Now that that girl was a threat. She has to die.

All he needed was proper planning. He knew where she was. He'd just send an assassin after her when he knew enough about her.

Too bad you were born with the wrong face.

Mr. Contreras ran his hand through the telephone wondering what he would tell his wife.

After the death of their Ema, That girl. had been their redemption. A gift from the river goddess.

"Hello." He placed the phone to his ear, praying he dared to tell his wife what was happening.

"Who's this?" She asked.

"It's me, honey. I have to tell you something."

"What?" Her voice sounded dire.

Can I go on?

"It's about Ema, She fell unconscious..."

"What!" His wife's voice rang repeatedly in his ear, "What happened to her?"

"The doctor said she has a brain lesion apparently from her accident and it might be healing so—"

"So what?"

"Her memories are coming back."

"What? No! We'll lose her." She was hysterical.

"We won't." Mr. Contreras assured.

Wait till you hear this.

"And she might also be from here. She's met two people today who called her Adriana. I think it triggered her memory."

"Then get her out of there. We are going to lose her honey."

"Calm down. Don't exaggerate. She's still resting. We'll get out as soon as we can."

"Ok."

Mr. Contreras placed the telephone back and sighed.

Could he continue this lie? He didn't know what was wrong and what was right.

He knew he was denying the girl her truth but he was only doing this to please his wife.

He could only ask for courage and her forgiveness behind closed doors.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

"When Snow-White was reincarnated, She killed her enemy. It wasn't the Queen, It was her bastard father."

Ema woke up trying to get a hold of where she might be. The beeping monitor close to her and the mask to her face told her where.

An image flashed in her mind again, giving her the worst headache she could ever imagine.

That man in the car!

Ema couldn't just take her mind off the man's face. It kept on replaying in her head.

She got up from the bed getting a sharp pain from her foolish move.

She was on drip medication.

What happened?

The ward door opened and her father's gloomy face peeped inside.

"I see you are awake."

"What happened?" Ema asked her father, resting back to the hard bed now that she knew it wasn't an accident.

"You fainted seeing that man."

"Why?"

I wish I knew Ema.

"The doctor said your memories after the accident might be returning. Do you remember anything?"

Ema thought hard.

"No! I feel pretty much the same. I—"

"What?" Mr. Contreras quizzed.

"I just can seem to shake off the image of that man we almost hit. Why would I remember him?"

"You used to wo—rk in the city with your mother remember..." Mr. Contreras stammered.

"But mom has never mentioned it to me," Ema said, doubtful.

"Yes. You had the incident when you and your mother were returning three months ago. You were attacked by muggers. You Sustained a grave injury to the head and a bullet wound."

"Oh. So when are we going home?" Ema changed the topic.

"I'll go call the doctor." Her father got up and walked out of the room.

Mr. Contreras walked in shortly with the doctor.

"How are you doing Miss Ema?" The doctor asked concerned.

"Just tired."

The doctor scribbled inside his large notebook.

"Noted Miss Ema. I'll prescribe some medication to help with the tiredness. I'll also suggest some mental exercise to help with your memories and if you do come back, you can visit here anytime."

"Thank you, Doctor."

"Thank you, Doctor." Her father repeated.

The nurse came in to help the patient with the necessary things.

"Dad..." Ema said when they were outside the clinic. Mr. Contreras turned to face his daughter, a worry of the unknown boldly plastered to his face.

"What?"

"I've been thinking. The doctor said strong emotions can bring back my memories. Could that man have been one of the muggers?"

"I don't know." Her father said nonchalant," But what most important is that you survived."

The rest of them walk to the car was uneventful.

Her father ignited the old lad's engine and it squealed like it was in pain before starting but heavily vibrating.

Ema felt like the sorry old vehicle that deserves the title car, Why couldn't she just remember something.

She felt like she needed to for a just cause.

Call it a hunch but she felt something bad would happen if she didn't remember.

Fuck! Rodriguez muttered to himself.

This time his wife heard him.

"Is anything wrong?"

"No." He dismissed her concern and dug into his food just to get his wife off his back.

"How is Miranda?" She asked, joining him on the table and sipping a cup of milk like her heavy and round stomach needed it.

"How is the baby?" Rodriguez changed the subject not wanting to remember Miranda or Nathan right now in his dastardly mood.

"It's fine. I asked how Miranda is doing, you didn't answer. Is anything wrong with her?"

"No!" Rodriguez shrugged, dropping his fork heavily on his plate such that it made a clang.

"You just made me lose my appetite."

"Sorry." His wife apologized, still not getting what caused his mood swings. "Did anything go wrong at work today?"

"Yes. Just a business deal. Nothing to worry about." He lied.

She's getting closer to finding out. No need to make her suspicious.

"That sad. I'm sure you executed it perfectly."

Executed! That right. All he had to do was kill her, just in case Miranda happened to find her.

"Oh my God. You are a genius, honey." He rushed to hug his wife lovingly.

"Careful with the baby." His wife warned but still hugging him affectionately.

"I don't know how I've helped Rodriguez but I'm glad I did."

"I have to go to the study to execute what I need to."

"What about your food?" His wife sent her gaze at the half-eaten food.

"I'll take it."

In the study room, Rodriguez searched his phone contacts for Mr. Contreras. He always kept tabs his workers.

Yes! He smacked his lips when he found it.

He called.

"Pick up! Pick up!"

"Mr. Rodriguez, Hello?", Mr. Contreras finally picked up.

"Hello, Mr. Contreras. How are you?"

"Great. Is anything wrong?"

"Well not really. Well, the thing is you went early and didn't collect your payment for the day."

"Pay for the day? I thought you paid weekly."

" Well, you are one of my hardworking workers Mr. Contreras, it's just a little something to appreciate your hard work and honesty."

"Oh ok. Just drop with your secretary. I'll come to get it tomorrow."

"Well, some of my workers are leaving the city to distribute our goods in rural parts. I could send them to give you the money if you are close by. Where do you live?"

"It's not necessary..."

Just give me your location Duncle!

"I insist."

"Ok. Izamal. By the village head's house."

"Thank you."

The call ended. Rodriguez got to work.

"Hello Chale. I have a job for you and this time, Make it clean."

"Who was that?" Ema asked her father when the call ended.

"My boss."

"He's a very good man." Ema expressed as they slowly pulled up at their house.

Like Ema had guessed, her mother came out to welcome her like she had traveled abroad and was just coming back.

"How's my baby?" Mrs. Contreras hugged a tight.

"Fine." Email pulled away from her mom's tight hug before they started getting attention.

It was already getting dark and nobody might see her but she had a bad girl reputation to protect. Hugs could ruin that.

Ema's mum still wouldn't let her rest even when they got inside.

"So how do you feel?", She asked for the umpteenth time.

"Tired mom! And I need to rest."

"Ok." Mrs. Contreras agreed, "I made shrimp enchiladas."

"Geez Mom, can't we have something decent."

"Like?"

"Posole," Ema answered, taking her seat at their small dining table.

Mrs. Contreras gave a worried look to her husband.

"But we've never had that Ema."

"Maybe I had it in the city." Ema considered.

"The city?" Mrs. Contreras was concerned as well as afraid, "Honey can you help me with the food here in the kitchen?", Mrs. Contreras gave her husband a sign to make him understand what she meant. They needed to talk.

Ema watched her father disappear into the kitchen with her mother and she made use of the time left to enjoy the silence, the sweet silence.

The silence broke when someone hit the door. Yes, hit! Knocking was nothing like that, it was like the lad didn't have manners.

Ema bet it was probably that pompous Village head' son.

She made up her mind to waste his time so he would earnestly get going.

She was glad her mother wasn't around to welcome him.

To be sure if he was the one. She peeped a hole she had made in the old wooden door.

Her heart leaped out of her mouth when she saw the scarred man from the would-be incident earlier.

What was he doing here?

She was about to open the door to question him when her spying little eye caught the sight of a metal object glistening thanks to the moon.

Her entire existence froze when she saw a gun.

It brought back a memory, one that involved a gun.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

Ema spun around like a drunk lad. Her head being bombarded with the erased files her rusty SD-Card forgot.

The shooting, The man, he had to be here to finish the job.

Ema landed on the dining, crashing the cheap vase that adorned the plain table.

It caught the attention of her parents. They rushed in to see their daughter unconscious.

"Ema! Are you alright?" Her mother laid a palm over her head, yet no reply.

The men at the door knocked again, this time, the edges almost rooted out, if they continued this way, the house might even collapse.

"Open this door!" The men outside commanded.

Mr. Contreras rushed to see who was there and praise God, he checked the hole in the door to see who it was.

Isn't that the man from the mall?

The moon seemed to be the evil men's nemesis and Mr. Contreras's eyes caught the silver weapon that would put an end to his entire household's life if he dared opened the door.

He rushed to his wife and whispered the danger they might be in.

"We have to leave now. The men outside have a gun."

Mrs. Contreras did not argue. If they had enough time, they would be able to escape through the backdoor.

The men at the front door were already hitting the door with such force that they were going to break it down.

Surely someone caring enough would have called the police but it would take them hours to get here and nobody would be dumb enough to get out and make a confrontation.

Mr. Contreras carried the unconscious Ema outside and quietly too with his wife following closely.

The old truck was at the back and Mr. Contreras thanked the heavens for letting him leave it there. He opened the door leading to the backseat and dropped Ema comfortably inside.

He then proceeded to the driver's seat. His wife was already inside, rubbing her hands madly like they were stone cold.

"Start the car!" She almost yelled at him.

It wasn't a natural occurrence but he knew why she was so at the edge,

They were being hunted.

The man suddenly burst out the back door, firing wildly at them.

Three shots and the windshield collapsed like regular glass. Punishment for using a fake.

Mr. Contreras started the car and zoomed wildly to any place deemed safe.

The men did not relent and out of nowhere, a motorbike appeared trailing them closely.

Fuck! They have bikes.

Who could be this after them?

"Honey...Drive! Drive!"

The tiny road was getting bigger and Mr. Cotreras could begin to smell industrial waste. They were slowly making it back to the city.

"Where are we going?" Mrs. Contreras asked, casting her attention to her still an unconscious daughter, "We need to go to the hospital."

"Agreed." Mr. Contreras said, keeping his gaze at the road, "But first we need to lose this person."

He tilted his head outside to view the rearview mirror.

Oh shit!

Four biker assassins were still madly on their trail.

"Madam." The maid called softly to her boss who was sipping a glass of red wine and her gaze focused on the Show on the TV.

The maid could tell she wasn't watching. Mrs. Tocci was probably just trying to get away from her miserable reality.

"What now?" Miranda complained, spilling her wine on the white thick rug.

"Sorry to disturb you." The woman apologized, "Sir Nathan has refused to sleep. He says he wants you to read him a bedtime story."

"That boy is something. Don't you think?" Miranda muttered, mostly to herself, the maid could see the mockery the wine was making of her.

"Yes, ma'am." She still replied, a diligent worker she was.

"I'll be up shortly. Get him the Little mermaid. I guess I'll read that this night."

The maid nodded and rushed upstairs to do her master's bidding.

Miranda groaned loudly before getting to her feet and proceeding to meet Nathan.

"...and they lived happily ever after. The—end." Miranda recited exaggeratedly before shutting the book. It made a small clap when she did.

"Will you sleep now?" Mrs. Tocci asked her childish man feeling tired herself.

"I want to end just like the prince in that story Mum," Nathan mumbled.

Miranda at least got to enjoy something. Nathan had never been this free and bubbly when he was a child, it was like he was reliving his deprived joyous childhood.

"I know you will."

Miranda kissed her son goodnight, tucked him in smug and warm, and put off the light on her way out.

If only you knew how the mermaid ended, you wouldn't wish to be the prince.

Miranda returned to her Latina TV show, soaking the goodness of Bad TV and the hunks that came with the package.

Her wine was almost drained and she couldn't just lay sober in bed and wait for sleep to take her on a ride. She had to drown herself to sleep. She went to the counter to get another bottle.

Her eyes caught something different outside her yard.

She moved closer to the tainted window to inspect what it was.

A car that wasn't hers was packed outside.

Maybe it was the wine or her, it sure made her blood boil.

Free parking on me, you bastard. We'll see about that.

She covered her bare skin in something appropriate for outdoors.

A red robe that signified what was sure to happen in the next five minutes, a bloodbath.

Miranda opened the front door, armed with a spatula to beat whoever would defy her.

"Hey!" She screamed to make her terrifying presence known.

The people in the dirty old white truck turned in her direction and the driver attempted to start the car but heck, it failed to start.

Good for them, freeloaders!

"Trying to run away right? Well, luck ran out on you today." Miranda ranted and banged the windshield before she noticed there was none and she misses whoever was next to the driver's face by a hair length.

"Madam, please.." The woman begged and showed her face. Glass was in her hair and fear were written all over her wrinkly face. She seemed dire.

"Help us." The Driver pleaded.

"Who are you running from? The cops?" Miranda demanded, refusing to take pity just because they asked for it.

"If you are a mother, You'll help us. Some men are after us. We don't know why...Please."

They didn't sound legit enough but they were stammering and seemed to be genuinely afraid plus the mention of motherhood made something in her burn.

"Okay. Come inside quickly."

Miranda made a mental note to call the police on once they got inside. If they were being hunted, she wanted nothing to do with it.

The driver got out and went to the backseat.

He opened the door and began to drag a young girl out.

Miranda flinched.

She could be helping kidnappers.

She needed to question everything now.

"Who's the girl?" She demanded, moving closer to catch a glimpse of what the unconscious girl looked like.

Her spatula dropped when she saw who it might be.

Adriana?

"Our daughter, Ema." The elderly lady replied.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

"Who's Adriana?" Mrs. Contreras asked.

"I'm sorry. Your daughter looks like someone I know." Miranda said, getting a hold of herself.

She led them in and Ema was dropped on the sofa.

"So Ema looks exactly like this girl you are talking about?" Mrs. Contreras quizzed further.

"Yes." Miranda answered, "If I didn't know better. I'd say they are identical twins."

"So do you happen to know where this girl is?"

Miranda choked on what she was about to say. It brought too many unpleasant memories but she just had to spill,

"She's dead."

"Oh... How did she die?"

"Now the questions we're getting strange. Why did she want to know so much?" Miranda thought.

"She fell off a cliff."

"That's very sad. I'm sorry for asking but I just feel intrigued that someone could look exactly like my daughter, who was she to you?"

Mr. Contreras came for his wife and dragged her away from Miranda.

"What are you doing?" He demanded, trying hard not to be suspicious since Miranda could still see them on the sofa.

"I'm trying to find out if this woman knows anything about..." She turned in Miranda's direction before saying, "Adriana".

Mr. Contreras was quite sick of his overbearing wife's attitude so he let her have it.

"Nobody suspects anything honey, Don't make them!"

"Whatever you say but we are leaving here early tomorrow."

Mr. Contreras nodded knowing his wife was right. If Ema and Adriana were the same people who they must be, They better avoid any place that had a connection with her especially if it could trigger her memories.

"Ok." He acknowledged.

Miranda walked up to the family she just assisted to tell them the latest development.

"I've prepared a room for you to spend the night and I've also informed the police about what happened to you. They'd be coming tomorrow to get the details."

"What time exactly tomorrow?" Mrs. Contreras quizzed.

"I don't know. Will you be leaving early?"

"Yes."

"Oh...Ok. Well, the maid will show you your rooms."

Mrs. Contreras face was white,

"Rooms? Aren't we sharing the same room?"

Miranda giggled,

"Well we have a lot of room to spare and I figured out You might need space."

"Oh, we don't. I have to stay with my daughter, As you can see, she's unconscious."Mrs. Contreras retorted, much to her husband's displeasure.

"Which reminds me, What happened to her? She's been unconscious for quite some time. You need to take her to the hospital."

Miranda saw the whole family puff up at the mention of the hospital.

"Email doesn't need a hospital. This happens regularly but you know because we were being chased, it must have been stressful for her. She'll come around."

Weird.

"Are you sure she's ok?" Miranda asked again just being a concerned fellow and she got the most shocking reply.

"I appreciate the concern but I'm her mother! I know when she's ok and when's she's not."

Miranda was speechless. She even almost considered throwing them out but she considered the girl, she had plans for her and she was very sure her mother would not agree to her demands especially if she was this clingy to her adult child.

The girl had to wake up.

"Ok then, when you're ready, the maid will escort you to your rooms. Goodnight."

Mrs. Contreras got up even before the stupid alarm beside her began to screech.

She turned to Ema who was on the bed with her. Her pulse was better and even if she wasn't a nurse, she could tell the difference between last night's one and this.

She gently ruffled her to get her to wake up.

It worked and Ema's eyes fluttered open.

"Where am I?, Heaven?"

"Hardly Ema. How are you doing now?"

"Great. But...where are we?"

Mrs. Contreras thought of a good excuse to put into her daughter's question.

"Someone saved us from those monsters. Well, be going soon. Stay here, I'll go get your father."

"Wait...Who? Who saved us?"

It was getting to this!

"I understand how you feel, You fainted yesterday, how do you feel? You must be tired. Rest, we'll be going soon."

"Better," Ema noted, taking a hint that her mother was badly trying to hide something.

"Good. Just stay here, I'll go get your father."

"Ok." Ema agreed.

Mrs. Contreras walked out of the room but not before grabbing the keys from the tye door and locking it when she was outside.

Now she was safe.

The room Mr. Contreras spent the night in was not far from Ema's. It was the room opposite her.

It isn't locked.

Of course! Her husband was a free spirit who hardly cared about his life.

Sleeping in a stranger's house was bad enough.

Mrs. Contreras opened the door and crept in.

Her husband was sadly snoring away.

It's 6 for goodness sake.

She ruffled her husband badly to get him up as quickly as she could.

There was no time to waste if Ema ever had a past here, it was foolish to keep staying anywhere that could trigger back her lost memories.

"Wake up, you sleepyhead!"

Her yells and ruffling only got an exaggerated yawn.

How did she even get matched up with him?

Mr. Contreras came around and finally cleared his drowsy eyes.

"It's so early. What's all the fuss about?" He grumbled.

"We are still here in case you forgot."

This got her husband up faster.

He sat up and stretched again.

"Are you really going to do this?"

"Yes—i—am!" Mrs. Contreras maintained. "If Ema has any history with these people, we can lose her forever."

"No, we won't. But..."

"But what?"

"With the way you are acting, I think you'll push her to what might not even be true."

"Are you insinuating that I'm acting suspiciously?"

"No! But I'm just saying."

"Just get up and let's leave here. I don't want Ema to be here for too long."

"Ok."

Mr. Contreras slipped into his shoes and followed his wife outside.

Mrs. Contreras dropped the keys clutched tightly in her hands when she found the door ajar.

Ema was gone!

"Where is she?" Mrs. Contreras asked no one in particular as she rushed in to confirm her suspicion.

Her suspicions were damn right.

Ema wasn't inside.

How did this happen?

Mrs. Contreras checked the door to know exactly what went wrong.

God! She didn't even lock it.

Her husband gave her the 'you'll be your own undoing' look.

She hated him for doing this to her.

"Come on. We have to find her before she finds them."

"You need to see her. She looks just, Adriana."

"Really?" Rodriguez asked, taking a sip of the orange juice he was given, "So what do you plan to do now?"

"Call me wicked but since I helped them from whoever was after them last night, I plan to use it as leverage to keep their daughter for some time just to help Nathan," Miranda revealed, passing an orange juice to Nathan who was more than happy to get his share.

"Mom, Do you mean Adriana is here?" Nathan asked giving her puppy eyes.

"Sure son. You'll see her soon." Miranda assured.

Rodriguez could only imagine what a fool he was for sending amateurs to his aid.

They even knocked.

Now...Now, he'd do the job himself.

Rodriguez took a sip of his orange juice waiting expectantly for the said girl to come out already.

"Here she is." Miranda finally said.

Speak of the angel!

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

"You again," Ema said to Rodriguez.

The latter made sure he had another sip of his orange juice before speaking.

"I'm sorry, Have we met?"

Ema became a bit confused. He had to be the one from Tower, the one who called her Adriana. She couldn't be losing it so quickly.

"You from the company where my father works. Are you the one that helped us...you know from the goons?"

"Actually..." Miranda cut in seeing Ema wasn't even taking notice of the others on the table, "I did. How do you feel now?"

"Better I guess," Ema answered.

Ema stole another look at Rodriguez as she walked sluggishly to the table.

"Adriana!" Nathan joyously exclaimed in his usual bubbly nature.

Ema did not miss it. He called her Adriana so she had to be in the right house since the man in front of her called her that last time.

Miranda could smell the tension in the room, especially between Rodriguez and Adriana's lookalike.

What could be wrong?

"Are you alright?" Miranda questioned Ema.

"Yeah... Nothing."

Getting nowhere Miranda changed the topic,

" You must be starving, You were out cold all night."

"Sure."

"Where are your parents?"

Like on cue, they stepped in, clearly running and worried sick.

"Ema! Don't ever do that again. What if something happens to you?" Her mother cautioned.

It made Miranda wonder if Mrs. Contreras was that sick or she was just an overbearing mother like she had been once. She couldn't help but think that if Ema's mother continued this way, she might regret destroying her daughter.

"I'm fine Mom." Ema groaned, embarrassed by her mother.

"She's still in the house, She's safe," Miranda said, taking sides with Ema. She earned a smile from the girl and God, she even looked more like Adriana.

Mr. Contreras saw his boss and Immediately acknowledged his presence.

"Sir. I didn't know you lived here."

Rodriguez hated seeing him alive but he had to play his role to avert suspicion.

"I don't live here. I'm close friends with Miranda here. I'm sorry about what happened to you, I'll do anything to out those things to justice. I'll also get your money, my men couldn't make it their last time."

That had to do the trick, Rodriguez sighed.

"Won't you sit for breakfast before the cops arrive?" Miranda quizzed, seeing them ready as a race car.

"Thank you, Mrs... But we have to be going. We have things to do."

Rodriguez liked that idea so he spoke,

"You don't need to keep them waiting. They're tense right now. I'm sure they will see the police if they need to. Right?"

Mrs. Contreras smiled at him gratefully before backing him up,

"We will."

"Now my men will finish the job they failed to do." Rodriguez thought.

But then Ema foiled his plans again.

"Can't we just stay for breakfast, I mean, we just escaped death."

Ema then gave her mother puppy eyes she knew she could not resist.

"Ok!" Her mother said, defeated, "we'll stay for breakfast, and then we'll go home."

"Deal."

Ema couldn't comfortably eat, not with Nathan staring at her all through.

She noticed he hasn't touched his food and just kept watching her eat like she was some zoo animal.

It was worse, she was so close to him and he didn't even hide it.

"Are you ok?" She finally asked finding courage within.

"Are you?" The man said.

A question for a question, How plausible.

If he wasn't going to acknowledge his staring, she was going to.

"I don't like the way you're staring at me."

"Sorry, but he might kill you this time. You have to be safe."

Ema didn't know why but she suddenly felt the chills, her skin inflicted with tiny bumps that made her hairy skin stand erect.

"Who?" She spat even before she could even think.

He didn't answer. He just smiled and continued eating like their conversation never happened.

Creepy.

Ema resumed to her food but she could shake his words off.

It was probably because someone she didn't even know wanted her family including her dead.

Ema stopped eating again. She could feel eyes watching her every move. She looked up and saw Rodriguez.

He was eyeing her as a lion would to a gazelle.

He just felt so mysterious and sinister. It reminded her of a question that lingered in her mind.

"Who is this Adriana everyone keeps calling me?"

"Someone that almost ruined everyone's life," Rodriguez answered with an intensity that tasted like hate.

"She sounds like a really bad person, definitely not like my daughter." Mrs. Contreras added, clearly in support of Rodriguez.

Ema could finally say her mother had met her better half, it was unlucky that she was already taken.

"She did at first." Miranda acknowledged," but she was a bad person. She just thought she was making the right choice and when she did. Something terrible happened..."

When Miranda paused, Ema could not take the suspense.

"What happened?"

"She was shot along with my son," Miranda revealed, biting her lip as those terrible memories came afresh.

Ema knew it was rude but she could stop herself. Her son was different and she knew it, he acted like a child and it could as a result of the accident so she had to be sure.

"Is that why he is like this?"

"Yes." Miranda attested.

Miranda saw this as the perfect opportunity to throw her offer to Ema.

"But there is a possibility he can get better through you."

Ema didn't understand. How could he possibly get better through her?

"How can I help him, Did Adriana hold a special place to him?"

"I think she did. She was his wife."

That was unexpected.

Mrs. Contreras stopped eating, seeing her daughter stop for once to think.

She couldn't be considering it, Could she?

Mrs. Contreras turned to her husband who was surely warning her not to interfere but she couldn't help it.

"I don't think that is possible."

Ema gave her mother a furious look before speaking for herself.

"Mom! I can think."

To be fair, Mrs. Contreras was taken aback.

Ema had never snapped at her before and this new experience made her sore.

Was she starting to lose her? She pondered.

Ema, having cautioned her mother from jumping far too much in her business.

"Are there any financial benefits?"

Miranda could see where this was going to. It had happened once before.

"Yes. A month here and I promise you a hundred thousand."

Ema's jaws dropped. It was a generous offer. That could surely help her but she had to stay cool. Rich people tended to look at one less if one was desperate.

All she said was,

"I'll think about it."

Miranda smiled hoping for the best.

Breakfast time was almost over since everyone was done with food and Ema knew it was time to go.

She made a mental note to get Miranda's phone number just when the cops came in.

"Great, Cops!" Rodriguez muttered under his breath.

"Good day." One of the two men greeted the house.

The men got to the point and soon began to question the Contreras.

It was all unnecessary. They wouldn't get anything, Rodriguez was sure.

Well...until they were asked if they could recognize the criminals.

"One of them." Ema boasted with certainty.

"He was the same man that attacked me and my mother three years ago."

Rodriguez held his breath.

She couldn't remember the cliff, Could she?

She then began to describe Chale, his every features she got right, for someone that passed out while all that's happened.

Rodriguez knew little about Adriana but he learned from the former Nathan that she could be a cunning bitch.

What if she was just playing tricks?, What if she remembered?

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Rodriguez exited the house before he could hear more of what Ema or Adriana had to say.

She's playing a game.

Rodriguez knew it and he had the proper way to deal with it.

She would wish she remained dead.

His driver opened the front door of the car to let him in before shutting it.

"Where are we going?"

"To meet someone."

Chale failed him horribly and he and his family was surely going to suffer the consequences of the inconvenience.

Now he had to make new schemes. Ema finally made it to the Tocci house, he needed a new plan and surely one that was fail-proof.

Ema's family especially her mother was reluctant and had this distrust about Miranda. He could surely use that to his advantage.

But Nathan...

Yes! Even if Ema was just a lookalike there was a possibility she could help Nathan remember. He had to remind the maid to fulfill her tasks.

He picked up his phone and called.

"Hello, Baby."

He could feel her flushing already. He just had that thing with women.

"Rod, you're calling early, is anything wrong?"

Of course, things were not favorable for him right now and she of all people should know that.

"Camille, Don't be such an idiot. Of course, there is a problem."

"I knew it. You never call to say hi or just be romantic. Why did I agree to us?"

She was seriously not pulling that card out now!

Women were like dogs, faithful and fierce but they could also be distrusting. Camille was at his side, he had bought her over with love and she had bought it, he couldn't lose that, at least not now.

"Baby you know the situation at hand. As long as that girl is in the house, I'm at risk of losing everything."

"I know." She admitted, "But what can we do? Mrs. Tocci wants her to stay."

They could do something but Rodriguez wanted Camille to hammer the nail hard.

"Discourage the Contreras, especially Mrs. Contreras, and if that doesn't work...Just increase Nathan's dosage."

The driver turned at him wide-eyed when he said this.

"What are you looking at? Do you want to end our lives!" Rodriguez snarled.

The driver returned his attention to the road, apologizing for his wrongdoing.

"Ok. Love you."

"Love you." Rodriguez ended the call and continued to think deeply.

"Boss, Why do you want Sir Nathan dead?" The driver dared to ask.

Rodriguez smirked and watched him shiver in fear.

"What do you ask that? Is your conscience pricking you that bad?"

The man didn't answer. He just held onto the wheel and continued to drive probably hating his emotions for speaking in his place.

Rodriguez still had to answer his question, it wasn't like he was going to tell someone unless he wanted death. Moreover, Rodriguez wanted to spill out his travails.

He couldn't tell his wife so a petrified driver was the only left option.

"I don't want him dead but circumstance says something different."

The driver nodded but didn't utter a single word.

Rodriguez took it as an opportunity to instill fear into the poor man.

"I might have told you this but if you ever tell a soul, It—will—be—your—undoing!"

The driver swallowed hard and whispered,

"I won't tell anyone."

I know.

The police exited the house with the promise to find the culprits and put them behind bars.

Easier said than done, Ema thought.

"Well, that's gone. Now we can go." Mrs. Contreras said.

Ema didn't know why her mother was trying so hard to leave the good Samaritans that saved their lives.

She didn't want to sound imposing but she was dying to accept the unconventional business deal Miranda proposed.

All she could think about was the money but Ema knew quite well, it would be foolish to say it now.

Her mother would freak out, She was already tense.

"Whatever mom. I just need to pee." Ema disclosed and proceeded to walk back upstairs.

"I'll follow you." Her mom offered.

It confirmed Ema's suspicion that her mother was scared of something.

"It's just the bathroom, I can handle it."

"But you're delicate as of now..."

"Mom! I said I can handle it."

"Ok." Her mother finally surrendered and Ema strut upstairs in peace.

With a clear mind, She examined the decor of the passageway.

She didn't know the way to the bathroom but she didn't ask for help because she made up her mind to explore the big house.

One day, She wanted something like this. It wasn't her mother's plan for her though. All she wanted was to get her married and tied to a man as quickly as possible.

A room called out to her. Her vision blurred for a second and she spun around for a second feeling dizzy.

Maybe mother was right, I felt delicate.

I walked into the room feeling sick to my guts. I suddenly felt the urge to throw up.

It turned out to be Nathan's room.

He got up his bed when he saw Ema.

"What are you doing here?"

Ema approached him to say what she had to. She could shout or talk, whatever was about to come out would spill for sure.

"—bathroom."

Nathan walked closer to her to get what she was trying to whisper.

"What?"

Ema felt it forcing its way up, The sour taste of orange juice on her tongue.

Could she do this?

"I want..."

It came out like it was from an open tap and all on Nathan.

"Oh my God! I'm so sorry." She quickly apologized, feeling embarrassed and frightened at the same time.

"It's ok." Nathan shrugged, "It's just karma. Remember our wedding, I literally humiliated you in front of all those people."

He didn't think she was that Adriana, Did he?

"Oh! Karma then."

Ema was still abashed to ask Nathan for the bathroom. One look around and she discovered his room had one.

Nathan was just standing there, covered in vomit and grime staring at her like his dead bride.

It was now or never.

"I have to use the bathroom," Ema said and rushed in.

Safe at last.

Ema then sat on the toilet seat. The desperate urge she felt to pee before was gone. It was replaced by an awkwardness she couldn't seem to displace.

She got up expecting Nathan to come to knock on the door soon since he would need to clean up. He didn't come so she got up and washed her face in the sink.

Getting her head cleared, Ema stared into the mirror placed in front of her.

She imagined meeting her lookalike alive and wondered if the experience would have been thrilling or dreadful.

It would probably be the latter.

Ema got over her 'shock of the moment' and got out of the bathroom.

She almost screamed when she saw Nathan in the way.

Had he been peeping inside?

She was about to raid him with questions when her eyes caught a paper-like thing he held.

A photo.

A photo of the girl that looked exactly like her smiling at the camera and hugging Nathan. Nathan the other hand, looked serious-minded like he was off for a seminar.

Her head suddenly began to hurt and images flashing all in a rush.

She received blurry images of her and a man together, all looking like something in a shattered mirror but she could make out what was going on in the pictures her head concocted.

They were...kissing.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

"Are you ok?" Nathan asked, catching Ema before she could fall.

"Yes," Ema assured, getting back on her feet.

Was that a memory?

If it was, who was that man?

The photo that had triggered that memory was a wedding photo, Was she...

"No!.." Ema cut that thought off almost immediately.

Why in the world would she be married? It was just so absurd.

"It could be a wedding she attended in the past." Ema finally concluded and let go of the awful thought.

She took the picture from Nathan and examined it, her focus mostly on Adriana.

How could two people have such a striking resemblance?

"What was she like?" Ema asked Nathan.

She was certain he wouldn't be able to answer her due to his condition but at least, he would be able to say something nice or something he remembered about her.

"She was very stubborn but she had a good heart." He replied in his infant's voice.

"That's nice. What exactly happened to her?"

Ema didn't know the whole story. All she knew was that she died along with Nathan but Nathan survived.

"She..."

The door suddenly creaked and Ema turned to see her mother peeping in with half of her face already in.

God!

"Mum, What are you doing here?" Ema stiffened.

Her mum was strangely becoming far too clingy than her usual self.

"You were taking time. I got worried..." Mrs. Contreras defended herself.

"Well, I'm alright mum.", Ema spat obtrusively.

Her mother frowned but didn't take Ema's infuriation as anything serious.

"Whatever Ema, your father is ready to go, I came to call you."

Ema rolled her eyes before saying,

"At least, let me say goodbye."

"Ok." Her mother obliged and then closed the door to give them privacy.

Some privacy!

Ema could see her mother's shadow through the small slit under the door. She could already guess what was going on in her myopic mind.

She didn't even know why she was this concerned. The former 'Mrs. Contreras she knew would be twirling if her daughter was actually talking to the opposite sex but now, All she did was worry.

It was better she said her goodbyes and end the moment.

"Goodbye Nathan. It's been nice talking to you."

Ema then turned to go until Nathan said,

"Goodbye, Adriana."

Ema paused, vehemently wondering why she was still being called that name.

It was fascinating but still very disturbing.

She tilted her head back to Nathan and smiled at him before leaving the room.

Mrs. Contreras was just outside waiting for her.

"Let's go." Mrs. Contreras said then she grabbed Ema's hands to lead her out.

Ema wriggled her hands from her mother's firm grip.

Now she had enough of her mum's clinging.

"Is anything wrong Mum?" Ema snapped.

"Lower your voice, Ema." Her mother warned.

She ignored the insignificant comment and continued complaining.

"You've been doing this since we came here. Why?"

Ema saw her avoid her gaze and she knew instantly that she was right.

Ema immediately knew what was going on.

"I know how you feel mum but I'm not Adriana. You're not going to lose me." She assured.

If only she knew how much truth her words held.

"You're right." Mrs. Contreras said, playing along with Ema, "Forgive me."

"I do."

"Now let's go. Your father would be irritated."

The duo got downstairs and we're met by Miranda.

Miranda turned to Ema and whispered words what only them three would understand.

"I hope you take the deal, Ema."

Ema felt her mother's hands tighten in hers and she held it tighter.

"I'll think about it, Mrs. Tocci."

Miranda nodded sincerely understanding her reasons although pained.

"Here's my number if you've reached a decision." Miranda handed a business card to her.

"I will."

Rodriguez got down from the car and approached the house his failure resided with unmatched speed.

The idiotic fellow he was searching for was relaxing outside, sunbathing, and with a cheap beer to his mouth.

Getting to him, Rodriguez dealt him a punch that sent him off the chair he was resting from.

"Arrghh!" The man groaned when he finally got up.

"You lowlife. You ruined everything." Rodriguez snarled at him.

"I'm sorry boss but..."

"But what!" Rodriguez cut in.

"Don't yell at me!" Chale retorted, getting back his injured pride.

"I shouldn't yell at you, Did you just say that?" Rodriguez approached him slowly, stalking him like he was prey.

"Yes. If I wished, you could be in jail now." The fellow replied.

Rodriguez pealed mock laughter, surprised at how Chale just answered him.

The boy had some nerves.

Rodriguez reached out into his pocket which was wat too bulgy to be holding a wallet and pulled out a gun.

He pointed it at Chale and watch his stubbornness melt away.

"Please Rodriguez... I—"

"Hush!" Rodriguez ordered.

The only reason Chale would be begging right now was that he lost the game. He probably had no weapon with him or he didn't know how to make one from a bottle of beer. Either way, he knew he had the upper hand now.

"I don't want to hurt you Chale, We go way back but you have to do something for me. The police are searching for you and the rest right now, I want you to get the fuck out of town and don't come back until I tell you to. Do you understand?"

Rodriguez then corked the gun to get his stiff and trembling to open and spit words.

"I—I d—o."

"Good." Rodriguez put the weapon back into his pocket and went back to the car, still keeping an eye on Chale with the back of his eyes in case he tried anything funny.

All that was left now was Adriana.

He couldn't send assassins to her presently, She was protected but there was this doubt in humans that could be twisted to something sinister.

Very sinister.

Rodriguez hit up his phone and found what he needed.

Let's we how this goes shall we?

"Hello?", A feminine voice answered the call.

That was a good sign.

"Hello Ema, How are you doing?"

"This not Ema." The woman replied, "It's her mother."

Doubt and fear walked hand in hand. Rodriguez knew there was a fifty percent chance that Mrs. Contreras would hold on to the phone the family shared just to keep Adriana from contacting Miranda and...he was right.

"Oh Mrs. Contreras, I also wanted to talk to you."

"Who is this exactly?" The doubting woman inquired.

"Rodriguez from this morning."

"What do you want?" The woman snapped not hiding her displeasure for his call.

"I wanted to know how Adriana is faring."

Rodriguez almost burst out in laughter when he heard Mrs. Contreras choke on something.

This feels so good.

"Stop calling her that, She's..."

"Not your daughter and we both know it and before you cut the line, I want you to know I want to help."

"She's..."

"Don't lie Mrs. Contreras." Rodriguez cut in.

"I don't want to lose her, please."

So now you admit.

"You won't be losing her. We both know she is drawn to the Tocci's so you must prevent them ever meeting again."

"But...why would you help me?"

Rodriguez had totally expected the question but he also knew she would believe any shitty script he prepared just to get his help.

"She's not as innocent as you think she is. She almost ruined my best friend, Nathan's life. I would do anything to keep history from repeating itself so the question now is, Are you with me, Mrs. Contreras?"...

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Mrs. Contreras didn't answer and the awkward silence was getting disturbing.

She could say no and he, could not let that happen.

"Are you having second thoughts, Mrs. Contreras?" Rodriguez said to the phone.

"I—just don't want her to hate me, I feel bad enough hiding the truth from her."

She was indeed having second thoughts.

Rodriguez then instantly knew he had to step up his game if he was going to stand a chance in pushing her to his side of the battle line.

"I know Mrs. Contreras but you don't know what family she comes from. If you have the internet, just search on the Romero's. She comes from a wealthy and influential family herself and I'm sure even if she remembers nothing, She still has her flaws."

Rodriguez then went on to mention some of the flaws.

"But if I manage to stop her from seeing the Tocci, How do I stop her from remembering?"

"Hypnotism," Rodriguez answered. "I have researched the best in the country and if we succeed in keeping her from Nathan, It will be my way of saying Thank you."

"Ok." Mrs. Contreras said, giving in to his demands.

Rodriguez smiled to himself, happy to have won her over.

"Well then, Mrs. Contreras, we have a deal."

Mrs. Contreras ended the call and tried to think.

Did she make the right choice?

She had just thrown morals that had been instilled in her since childhood to keep her secret.

She didn't want to be the monster under the bed in Ema's story but she also didn't want to lose the gift given to her by God himself.

Why then would he want to strip it away from her?

"Heaven helps those who help themselves" she muttered to herself, an evasive mechanism to deny the evil she just did.

The phone buzzed and she received a text from Rodriguez telling the next line of action.

The first task was to question if Ema considered the deal Mrs. Tocci offered her.

Mrs. Contreras did just that at dinner.

"Ema, you've been quiet all day. Is anything wrong?"

"I'm okay mum." Ema hurriedly replied to get her mother off her back.

"Evasive, What's wrong? Are you considering going to the Tocci's?"

Ema sighed knowing where her mother was going to once again.

"Mom, stop it! You don't have to be so jealous. There is absolutely nothing to be jealous about. Just because I look like someone doesn't mean I am the person. I am your daughter and will always be. Stop being so insecure about it."

Mrs. Contreras turned to her husband who ignored her. She knew she had overstepped her bounds once again but at least she was sure that wasn't what was in Ema's mind.

"So what's on your mind then?" Mrs. Contreras quizzed.

Ema stared into her mother's eye trying to remember the hazy pieces of the memory that came to her when she was with Nathan.

"It's nothing but when I was with that boy, he showed me a picture of my lookalike and it—triggered a memory."

Mrs. Contreras Immediately felt chills despite being in a small and warm room.

"What are you talking about?"

"Now I don't remember quite vividly what I saw but I can know someone was getting married to a man. It felt like I was..." Ema trailed off unable to piece the rest of the memory together.

"Maybe it was from one of your cousin's wedding." Mrs. Contreras stated, trying to get Ema to stop thinking deeply about it.

"I don't know mother, it felt like I was the one getting married."

Mrs. Contreras laughed hysterically,

"We told you to but No, you're way too classy to marry a strong boy here."

"I am." Ema proudly agreed.

"Oh, so when exactly do you plan to settle down? To have kids?"

"Eventually." Ema replied, "but I want to make it myself so I don't have to rely on anyone you know."

"That's our ambitious girl." Mr. Contreras commented, proud of his daughter's plan for the future.

It, however, did not sit so well for Mrs. Contreras. It only confirmed what flaws Rodriguez had mentioned to her earlier. It only reminded her to see had to fight tooth and nail to keep Ema forever.

Ema got up finishing her dinner and picked up the dirty plates to place outside. She was far too disturbed to do the dishes tonight.

That would be tomorrow's duty.

She sat down alone outside, staring into the starry sky.

The sky was a purple blanket filled with glistening stars scattered around the bush blanket that spread over the world.

She took out the business card she had hidden in her clothing and away from her mother's reach.

She had to do this for her family. She couldn't just sit and watch this opportunity slip away from her hands.

She knew very well that her mother would freak out but still, she would have to forgive her. It is for the better good.

Tonight, she swore to herself.

Nathan awakened. The bed was getting too uncomfortable to remain unconscious.

He turned to his bedside to see the maid dish out the pills he was meant to take for the night.

He knew he couldn't complain. He had been forced to believe it was for his own good. He had to take those awful medicines each day in a bid to get better.

He didn't understand this though, He was himself.

Memories came flooding back so quickly that he had a spasm that made his head hurt and pulse badly.

He didn't understand why Rodriguez wasn't rotting in jail now.

His fickle mind went back to Adriana.

How he longed to see her again, Why didn't she expose Nathan when she had the chance?

"What is going on?" Nathan finally mumbled, getting off his bed to breathe better.

His head burned as he remembered what Rodriguez had done.

"Where is my mother?" He demanded and the maid instantly knew what was going on.

The old Nathan was returning but that would surely ruin her and Rodriguez's plans.

She poured out the pills that repressed that side of him each time he took it and shoved into his mouth while he was still stunned, Before choking him to make sure he swallowed the pill.

Nathan felt his vision get fuzzy,

"You're working for him."

The maid heaved heavily when the threat was successfully taken care of.

"I can't wait to get out this miserable hell hole," Camille grumbled.

The house telephone suddenly rang.

For someone who had just done something terrible, Camille shivered.

"Who's it?" Her boss Miranda yelled from downstairs.

"I'll check," Camille replied, making a stupid face intended for her boss.

"Hello, Who am I talking to?" She said when she picked up the phone.

"This is Ema, the girl from earlier today. I—'ve been thinking about your deal and I accept the offer."

Camille almost threw the phone at the wall.

She couldn't believe the bitch had jumped so quick at Miranda's offer.

She couldn't tell Miranda about this now. It would jeopardize their plan.

She had to act fast.

"I'm Camille and about Mrs. Tocci, Well—Sorry but she's presently not at home. I'll relay your message when she returns." Camille said slyly.

"Oh— ok "

Camille could tell she was disappointed and might not even call again.

That would be a relief but still 'Rod' had to know.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

"She called Miranda." Rodriguez read the text again.

It had taken him from his wife's warmth at 10 in the night.

It didn't take him to guess who Camille was referring to.

He stretched his aching joints in the small space the closet had.

What to do now? He muttered to himself as he searched for Mr. Contreras' contact.

"Hello, Mr. Contreras." He acknowledged when the call went through.

"It's me." A hushed voice whispered back.

Rodriguez could not believe she still held on to the phone. She must want Adriana badly. All in favor of him though.

"Adriana reached out to the Tocci's. How?"

"How am I supposed to know? The phone was in my hands all day." She snapped.

"We'll fix it." Rodriguez retorted and cut the phone.

Immature, He mumbled before the closet's door creaked open.

"Rod, Why are you here?"

"I was just checking—what to wear tomorrow, I'll be leaving quite early."

"Oh... But you were talking to someone." She chipped in.

"Babe, You worry too much. It's just a client."

"At 10?" His wife quizzed, still doubtful.

"Yes. Why are you getting so worked up?" Rodriguez said and approached his wife, leading her outside the closet and back into the bedroom.

"I don't know. It's just that these days you've been...distant. You haven't been eating, you've been so stressed and we don't have time for us anymore, Now night calls."

Rodriguez could tell she let it all out. He hadn't noticed she was disturbed by his new habits.

It was best he kept her out of it. She was heavily pregnant and he knew she would rebuke him. This was his cross to carry.

"I know." Rodriguez admitted facing her, "But tomorrow I promise you I'll take a break from work and we will go on a date."

"I don't want to be a bother..."

"I insist." Rodriguez cut in.

"Ok. Since we haven't had time for ourselves, I was hoping you'll just stay at home with me and we'll continue designing like we used to."

"Ok then." Rodriguez smiled at her and got ready for bed.

She did the same and when she was comfy, she said,

"And no phones. It always distracts you."

"I surrender."

Rodriguez remained awake until his wife drifted back to sleep.

He hoped Mrs. Contreras had a way to fix this or he would.

Mrs. Contreras paced around the room wildly and continued complaining to her husband about how betrayed she felt.

"How did you even know she called them?" Her husband asked, sipping a cup of scented tea and being less concerned about what Ema had just done.

"It doesn't matter but when she comes I'll give her a piece of my tongue." She fumed.

Just then, Ema walked in.

"Are you ok mom?" She asked seeing how perturbed Mrs. Contreras was.

"Where were you?" Mrs. Contreras demanded, hoping to sound like a concerned mother but only getting the part of a jealous boyfriend.

"You saw me go outside," Ema replied as sweet and innocent as she was, still wondering what made her mother so cold.

"So you're telling lies now?" Mrs. Contreras immediately yelled, throwing sanity out of the birdbox she called a brain.

"I don't understand what you mean mum..."

"You promised me that you wouldn't lose you and you just went behind my back to accept the deal—"

"How did you even know that?" Ema Immediately demanded.

She had used a neighbor's phone and unless her mother was spying or had other diabolical means to find out what she did, she should be clueless.

"That is not important now. What is important is that you betrayed my trust, all my hope in you, you threw them out the window."

Ema watched her mother begin to cry. She was supposed to feel sympathetic, every good child should but instead, she just felt a rage she could not comprehend burn up the sympathy.

"You know what mom, you're right. I want behind your back and called the Tocci's and even if I didn't reach her, I did something wrong."

Mrs. Contreras immediately sealed the valve on her crocodile tears sham.

Ema smiled seeing her mother look up to her.

She was already expecting an apology like she always did.

"But what I don't get is you not giving me the room to breathe and it all started when I went to the city."

Ema spotted her mother open mouth. She was not expecting the backlash so Ema continued before her conscience returned,

"What are you so afraid of mom? What are you hiding?"

Mrs. Contreras didn't expect what her daughter said next.

She wasn't acting suspicious, was she? She turned to her husband whose face was buried in his palms.

He was disappointed. Was she losing it?

"I'm sorry Ema, I—just don't know what took over me." Mrs. Contreras apologized and took a step closer to Ema but the latter took a step backward.

"I know Mum, you're always sorry but one thing is for sure mother, I am going to the Tocci's."

Mrs. Contreras gritted her teeth.

Ema was being unreasonable here yet again. It reminded her of the selfish nature that Rodriguez informed her about. Mrs. Contreras could not help but wonder if the old Ema which happened to

be Adriana was returning. She was burning with brimstone inside but she had to pretend to be alright.

"What are you doing this to me, Ema?"

"I'm not doing anything wrong Mother. This is an opportunity of a lifetime. What would you not want me to do this?"

Brimstone was something Mrs. Contreras couldn't chill down with eyes, however.

"I just don't want you with those creeps! Understood?"

Ema wanted to speak but she had lost the will. This was the exact reason why she didn't want to tell her in the first place. Ema felt her eyes throbbing and for the first time, she cried.

Mrs. Contreras stopped to see the damage she had done,

"I'm sorry Ema..."

"I don't need it and I'll never need you again."

Those words were just enough to stun Mrs. Contreras and give Ema enough time to escape the house.

She doesn't need me anymore... No... She's ours.

"Come back, Ema!" Mrs. Contreras wailed but it was too late. All that was left of Ema was a speck far off.

The road was quiet and desolate which should be comforting for someone who hated traveling long distances but not Mrs. Romero. She was pale and green all over.

"You don't look good Madam." Her driver commented, using an eye to inspect her through the driver's mirror.

Mrs. Romero forced a smile and got a plastic bag ready in case her body couldn't take the suffering anymore and it decided to make her puke the little she had managed to eat.

"I'll be okay Walter. Just keep your eyes on the ro—."

Before she could finish, a crazy being just jumped into the middle of the road, out of nowhere.

"Watch out Walter!" It was however too late for her warning to be put into action.

Walter tried his best to maneuver the car but the lady in front of the car being stunned moved away from the danger but in the right sense, she was only going right at where Walter turned to.

The car hit her and sent her flying a foot away.

The car stopped right then. Walter was unconscious, the airbag had taken the air out of him and he was facedown to the wheel and causing the horn to honk due to the pressure his head applied. Mrs. Romero was for a moment happy to be alive. Other than hitting the chair before her hard until she got a knot in her head, she was fine. The sickness she felt before suddenly disappeared, replaced by fear of the unknown.

A thousand thought immediately cascaded her mind.

She hit someone with her car, she could be charged for manslaughter, Was the girl dead? She had to find out.

She got out of the vehicle and approached the girl.

Mrs. Romero could see that she was limp and began to fear the worst.

She took the victim's hands and felt its pulse.

Good Lord, there's a pulse.

It was weak but it was something.

She hadn't wanted to see the person's face should the person have been dead since it would haunt her nightmares.

When she turned to have a good look at the person's face. Her breathing stopped.

This was the worst thing that could possibly happen to someone.

The bleeding head and the swollen lip could not hide the fact that she was staring at her Adriana.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The ambulance made it early to the scene after being called by a good Samaritan who lived close by.

Police sirens also screaming into the night.

Mrs. Romero watched Adriana being carted away in a gurney for treatment as the police questioned her about the accident.

She explained to the detail what happened to blame Walter for being reckless.

Just then she remembered Walter.

She turned to the mangled vehicle to see Firemen trying to get Walter out.

"Were you also involved in the accident?" The policeman asked.

"I was in the car." She rudely retorted wondering why he would ask such a dumb question.

"Then you better get a checkup."

Mrs. Romero took the officer's advice and joined the ambulance before it left.

The vehicle took no time in getting to the hospital. Walter and Adriana's lookalike were rushed to the emergency ward.

Ema is immediately hurried to the room prepared for her.

The doctors burst in and begin to do their job; Checking for vital signs. Luckily she was still breathing.

Clinging to life like she had one last mission to fulfill.

This gives the doctors hope and MRI scan is swiftly called for.

The scan shows a lesion which was probably gotten from the impact of the accident. It wasn't fatal though.

She might just survive.

Mrs. Romero waited outside unable to keep calm. The doctors had remained inside for thirty minutes, it was getting worrying. She had received confirmation that Walter was alright and had even regained consciousness but she couldn't go and check on him. She was so disturbed.

If that girl died, it would be a punishment from the heavens.

She could kill her daughter twice.

That tore up the sealed wounds.

Mrs. Romero cried, taking her seat again to think.

Mrs. Romero cleared her teary eyes and rushed to the doctor immediately she saw him get out of the ICU.

"Is she alright Doctor Suarez?"

Mrs. Romero happened to know the doctor. He was her close friend.

"Yes." Doctor Suarez replied, " She has a severe brain injury and we had to place her in an induced coma. Hopefully, she should be alright in the next twenty-four hours."

Mrs. Romero heaved, slightly relieved.

"But she did look a lot like Adriana. Did you notice?"

How could she not notice?

"I did."

Mrs. Romero spotted Doctor Suarez's brows puff up. That only happened when he was worried.

"Are you sure you'll be ok?"

Frankly, she didn't know how to react. She had tried to move on. She had blamed multiple people and most importantly, Nathan for destroying everything she ever cared about, Adrian, Adriana and Thomas but she knew she couldn't dwell on the past, and just when she decided to move on, 'she' showed up.

"I'll be." Mrs. Romero assured and smiled at Suarez just to stop him from getting all worked up.

"Can I go and see her?"

"Sure just be alright." Dr. Suarez replied, patting Mrs. Romero's back.

Mrs. Romero struggled to keep her sanity together as she approached the room. The door was red and fucked up like her. It felt like the room she locked every evil.

She opened the door and was immediately sent into nausea thanks to the strange smell the room gave.

Drugs.

She bled seeing Adriana connected to machines to support her.

The heart monitor beeped.

She walked towards the bed just to see her face. She burst into tears once again remembering her little girl.

"You know, you look just like my Adriana." She mumbled to the sleeping beauty, "she was a brave girl who tried to be everyone's angel and it killed her, Her father took her life."

Mrs. Romero clutched the asleep girl's hands as tears poured out freely.

"I hope you're ok."

Just then she felt the girl squeeze her hands almost as she could hear her.

It has her a joy she could not comprehend.

Mrs. Contreras let worry into her heart and maybe she was right to.

She hadn't slept all night hoping Ema would come back home but the girl's shadow hadn't even shown up.

For the first time, her husband also showed concerned. Not that he didn't blame her for it all but she knew he

was right, she deserved it.

"Where could she have gone?" Mrs. Contreras pondered.

"Maybe where you pushed her to, The Tocci's." Her husband commented.

She brushed his thought off but still, he could be right.

She picked up the phone she had abandoned on the table and dialed him.

Fuck he wasn't picking.

This only escalated her fears. Maybe he was mad at her, she must have failed. She couldn't lose Ema now.

"Maybe we should visit the Tocci's to question them?"

Her husband seemed to take the idea quite negatively,

"Are you sane? You went to accuse people when we are not even sure she's there? You need help."

This was just like him, a pessimistic being.

The phone rang and Mrs. Contreras rushed to see who was calling.

It wasn't Rodriguez, just some random number.

Nonetheless, she picked it up.

"Are these the Contreras?"

"Yes. Can I help you?"

"Your daughter Ema Contreras was involved in an auto crash."

"What!" Mrs. Contreras shrieked.

"She's at the general hospital."

Mrs. Contreras felt her heart forcing itself out of its cage after she hung up.

"What happened?" Her husband demanded, seeing the swift change in her expression.

"Ema had an accident." She stammered.

Mr. Contreras turned glum before he proceeded inside to get his keys, cursing, and swearing on the way.

Mrs. Contreras blamed herself, if only she hasn't let Ema out of her sight that night.

I hope you're alright Ema.

Camille added the usual pills to the ones Nathan had to take to get better.

He took it all down without hesitating and returned to his childish self. Camille always wondered what was in the pills that made Nathan so retarded.

"Well let's go downstairs for breakfast." She said to the man like he was some child.

Nathan got up, walking like a drunkard.

The drug was just kicking in.

"I don't feel so good." Nathan voiced holding his head to soothe the pulsing veins that made his headache.

"No, you're alright Nathan. Just come with me." Camille tried to shrug his word off. He was only being childish, she thought perhaps until he collapsed right in front of her.

"Get up." She immediately rushed to his side, shaking him violently in her bid to keep alive.

This was bad, very bad.

"Wake up Nathan, please."

Miranda happened to hear the ruckus and rushed upstairs.

"What happened to him?" She quizzed Camille.

"I don't know." The maid stammered.

Miranda began to fear the worst when she saw Nathan foaming.

"Call 911" she ordered the maid who got up and scampered outside.

Camille got her phone and called Rodriguez.

Miranda planned on getting Nathan to the hospital and that could be disastrous for her especially after all she had done.

Unfortunately, he wasn't picking.

In a panic, she discovered that he had sent a text earlier saying that he would not be able to pick her calls.

Of all days.

"Have you called 911?" Miranda yelled from inside.

Camille weighed the consequences. She would be done for if Nathan survived, Maybe it was time for him to go.

Yes, Nathan had to die.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

"Get my phone!" Miranda yelled to the passageway that Camille disappeared to a minute ago.

She discovered Camille wasn't answering. Her son continued to slip away, the quick Revelation that her son might be no more in the matter gave Miranda the distorted memory she lost. She immediately reached into her pocket and brought out her phone before dialing the emergency number as quickly as she could.

Soon the loud silence is replaced by the loud siren noises.

The three minutes were the longest Miranda had ever faced as she watched her son being strapped into the vehicle for treatment.

"Is he alright?" She frantically quizzed a paramedic attending to him. The woman ignored her and continued to do her work.

The ambulance started to move and Miranda took her seat praying to God to save her son.

"Your son is alright now." The doctor assured Miranda in his office.

"But I have to ask you a question, Your son was being poisoned. He was being fed ketamine."

Miranda wasn't the brightest learner but it had to bad.

"What's that doctor?" She quizzed.

"Well, use of the drug can cause hallucinations, brain damage, and in your son's case, even near death."

Miranda could not believe this. It could not be.

She didn't know Nathan to use hard drugs and she bought his medications... Only...

Oh my God!

"Camille!"

How could she be so dumb? Miranda instantly knew her maid was responsible. Why would she want Nathan dead?

"But he's alright now," Miranda asked the doctor and immediately browsed through her phone.

She intended to call the police.

That would ensure the murderer would not get away with what she did.

The doctor noticed her distress and queried her.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes. I just need to make a phone call." She replied.

Camille tried Rodriguez's number for the up tenth time.

She cursed herself for ever believing his sweet talks and promise of power.

It was game over for her now and she was sure Miranda would have sent the cops after her now.

She resumed packing.

She then heard a knock and craned her neck backward.

God! Could the police have arrived?

She has little or no time left.

She picked up her phone, filled with rage. Rodriguez had abandoned her at such a dire moment if she was going to fall, she was not going alone.

"If the police are at the door, you're going down :("

She then hit the send button.

Taking a deep breath, she got downstairs and went for the door.

She peeped into the spy hole and saw an unidentified man. He wasn't wearing a uniform nor could she see a badge but she had to be sure.

"Who are you?" She demanded.

"Rodriguez sent me."

Those words sent a wave of relief to her soul and spirit.

Might not be going to jail after all.

"I'm coming." She sent and rushed back upstairs to get her luggage before spiraling back like a boomerang.

"Where are we going?" She asked when she has settled in the man's car.

"Out of the city." He answered and started the car.

The journey was more like smooth sailing for Camille. After all, No jail time for attempted murder was a great cause to be celebrating.

Her phone vibrated and she checked it.

It was a message from Rodriguez,

"You failed me. I hope you get what feisty bitches get."

Camille was speechless and so carried away that she didn't notice when the man stopped the car not until something cold and metallic stopped her from breathing.

She struggled to get the garotte off but it was a lost cause.

She needed air, She needed strength, and one being withheld killed her strength.

She slowly stopped fighting and accepted death. He always won the battle in the long run, He was always the Victor.

"What's wrong Rod?" His wife asked, seeing that his mood had changed after his little time in the bathroom.

"Nathan was admitted to the hospital," Rodriguez replied.

His wife let out a muffled gasp.

"What happened? And you used your phone!"

"I'm sorry but on the bright side I found out what happened to Nathan." Rodriguez tried to cheer his wife up but she was too disappointed to even think of forgiving him.

"But you lied. It's terrible what happened to Nathan but I don't seem to get you anymore. After Miranda made you the CEO of Boulderfist', you've been distant, You're changing Today and I don't like it."

Rodriguez knew he had to calm her down but his mind was a bit distorted to think of the right words.

Camille had threatened to reveal him, hopefully, Chale would have taken care of her but he also needed to get to Nathan as quickly as he could. If Nathan was a day or hours without the pill, it would be a catastrophe to everything he had built.

All his lies would be discovered.

"I'm sorry Babe but I have to go."

Rodriguez then grabbed his coat and proceeded to the doorway ignoring his wife's silent sob.

He had to be strong. He was doing this for her and their child.

It wasn't a quick drive to the general hospital. It was one filled with Rodriguez's most dreaded thoughts.

Nathan could have revealed him for all he knew but he had to take a leap of faith.

God was on his side, he was sure he would succeed.

"Where is he?" Rodriguez asked Miranda when he sighted her.

He trembled when he saw her angry face.

Lord, please!

Her expression softened when she saw him.

"Rodriguez, What are you doing here?"

It slipped his mind. Miranda hadn't informed him of Nathan, Not yet though.

He had to think of something fast.

"Camille told me. What happened?"

"That bitch!" Miranda snarled.

Rodriguez had never seen her so mad.

"What did she do?" He asked, feigning ignorance.

"She was poisoning Nathan! I just want to know who paid that bitch the money to kill my son and when I do, they'll both rot in jail."

Rodriguez smiled, happy he wasn't hesitant to finish off Camille.

There is no finding anything Miranda.

"Where is Nathan? I need to see him."

Miranda pointed to a ward and Rodriguez rushed over.

It was now or never.

The ward door flung open before he could enter and a nurse highlighted.

"Sorry sir but nobody is allowed in as now." She said.

Rodriguez could almost pull out his hair from their roots when the nurse said this.

"But if you want, I can get you a cup of coffee."

"No! I don't want coffee." Rodriguez retorted but quickly got himself together.

Everyone was staring at him.

He couldn't let anyone get suspicious of him, he had to lay low.

"I'm sorry. My best friend is just there and...I'm stressed out." He apologized.

The nurse smiled and walked away.

Rodriguez returned to Miranda and tried hard to breathe.

He needed to get in there before Nathan revealed his truth.

Help me, lord.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

Nathan flinched feeling a sting in his wrist. He forced his tired lids opened. His eyes burned not used to the light.

The first question to pop into his mind was 'where was he?'

He sat up and his arm stung again. He turned and ripped away the needle that caused the pain.

He could now make out that he was in a hospital but he couldn't make out why.

I survived.

Nathan remembered being shot. He checked the spot to see the bullet wound.

It was odd to just see a scar in place of what was supposed to be a fresh wound.

He let his finger linger around the scar wondering why it healed so fast.

He got out of his bed trying to stretch and ponder on what was happening.

Someone at the left whimpered, like they were in pain.

He turned to where the noise came from.

"Adriana!"

He rushed to her bedside. Her face was squeezed and she continued to breathe heavily.

It had to be a nightmare.

"Nathan!" She called out.

He held her hands to ease her pain.

If Adriana was here, that means they both survived.

The door flung open and Rodriguez walked in.

"They're in the same room?" He thought.

He was so fucked if Nathan remembered anything.

It was a shame Nathan was awake. Rodriguez had planned to overdose his drip, anything that could cause him severe damage.

"Nathan." He called out and waited for his response.

Nathan craned backward and smiled.

"Rodriguez, what happened?"

He wasn't talking right, that high pitched childish voice was gone.

"Are...you...ok?" Rodriguez stammered.

He watched Nathan leave Adriana and walk up to him.

Rodriguez knew whatever happened next would determine his fate but what he was sure of was he wasn't going to down without taking blood.

He dropped his hands into his waistband where he had managed to hide a penknife.

"Why are you sweating so much Rodriguez?" Nathan asked, putting his hands on Rodriguez's shoulder.

Rodriguez's line of sight blurred for a second and his throat became obstructed.

He was being strangled.

"Are you ok?" Nathan quizzed seeing Rodriguez was silent.

Rodriguez returned to reality and gave Nathan an awkward smile.

"I'm ok."

He doesn't remember what I did.

This gave Rodriguez the inner peace he so desired.

"I don't remember much, How long have I been unconscious?" Nathan asked, his hands rubbing the gunshot scar.

Rodriguez got what was happening instantly.

The old Nathan was back but not completely so that meant they were still friends and that meant, even God was on his side.

"Where were you?" Miranda demanded from Rodriguez when she came in.

Her worried face turned light when she saw Nathan standing.

"He's awake!" She muttered.

"Why is she staring at me like that? It was just a bullet wound."

Miranda turned to Rodriguez, puzzled.

"Nathan... you're... ok." "Oh my God! You're back."

She jumped to her son and squeezed him like she intended to break his ribs.

The darkest night just turned to the brightest day.

"So you mean I acted like a child for three years?" Nathan cut in.

"You don't remember?" Miranda quizzed.

Nathan nodded.

"But if it's three years, What is Adriana doing here?" Nathan said pointing to the other bed.

Miranda hadn't noticed someone was there. She walked up to the bed and gasped.

"Ema! What is she doing here?"

"Ema?" Nathan was puzzled.

Why were they calling her that?

"She's not Adriana. Just a lookalike." Rodriguez chipped in, seeing Nathan's dilemma.

"What!"

That was impossible! There was no way anyone could look like his wife. He knew her and this had to be her.

"Yes. She's not Adriana."

This was all too much for Nathan to bear.

"So where is Adriana?" He demanded, he was almost shouting.

Miranda remained quiet. There was no way she was going to be the one to break the news to him but there was someone else who thought differently and he didn't hide any unpleasantries.

"She's dead Nathan. Gunned down by her own father." Rodriguez spilled, not the slightest hint of sympathy in his voice.

No! This could not be true. Adriana was a fighter. If he survived, there was no way she could end up dead.

"I need air," Nathan informed and went out of the doors.

Miranda went after him but Rodriguez stopped her.

"I don't think you should. He needs to take all this in. Give him some time alone."

While all these were being said, Miranda did not miss the malevolent grin he gave.

Nathan tried to process everything he had to endure since he regained his lost memories.

Adriana was dead and by her own father, it was difficult to believe.

He dropped to the floor not caring any who watched.

He could scream at the heavens for letting this happen.

If there was a Good, he wouldn't do this.

A couple approached him.

"It's him." The woman mumbled.

They were both in their middle age and the silver stains that ran from their eyes to the cheek implied that they had been crying.

"Who are you?" Nathan asked.

He didn't remember knowing them, He was useless.

"Stop pretending like you don't know us. Where is my daughter?" The woman snapped.

The man with her continued to sob.

"Who!"

"Ema!" She retorted.

The girl in his ward. Who were they?

"What do you want to see her?"

"Because—we—are—her—parents. What are you trying to do? Trick us?" The lady replied.

He didn't get what the last was so worked up but he directed them to his ward.

They rushed in without thanking him and he followed them.

"Ema, They did this to you. Didn't they?" The woman Immediately accused, " They did this to my baby."

Nathan immediately guessed she was a drama queen.

He still couldn't believe Adriana had someone that looked exactly like her.

It made him want to ask some questions.

"Is she your biological daughter?" Nathan quizzed.

He immediately got a glare.

"Just because she looks like your dead wife doesn't mean she's your wife. Read the facts boy and leave us out your fucked-up family problems!"

The noise got so intense and the nurse had to lead the couple out.

Nathan was placed back on a drip for a full recovery.

"Thanks, the doctor will be here to check on him soon. For now, it would be nice if you leave the room so he can rest." The nurse informed.

Miranda nodded and walked out with Rodriguez.

Rodriguez gave a hint to Mrs. Contreras to follow him and she did.

He stopped when they got to a secluded part of the hospital.

"Why did you call me?" She demanded shaking.

Her husband could catch her at any time with this man and she was sure he wouldn't want to listen to any explanation she rendered.

"Well, Nathan has regained his memory and wants his wife back. What are you going to do about it?"

"You mean we, we are in this together right?"

Rodriguez nodded and continued,

"Of course we are but sadly you'll have to do the work. What Nathan wants, he gets."

There was a bit something strange about all this, Mrs. Contreras could not help but notice.

"If she almost destroyed Nathan, why would he want her back?"

Rodriguez had to admit. She was beginning to catch on his lies. He still had cards up his sleeve.

"I don't know what goes through his head but Do you want to lose her?"

He was talented in playing on her weak side, her addiction. It was the only way he could lure back into his game.

"No, but what he doesn't need her anymore, he's regained his memory..."

"Not all of it." Rodriguez cut in, "He doesn't remember the incident at the cliff and neither does Adriana. Now if they spend even little time together, it could trigger something. It's up to you to stop that. Can you do that?"

"I'll do anything. I can't lose her."

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

So now she's awake.

Nathan watched Ema stretch out her hands and run her eyes before she opened them to reveal the darkest chestnut brown orbs.

This kind of beauty only belonged to his wife. If she was truly a lookalike, they couldn't share the same features.

"Where am I?" Ema mumbled, shocked to see herself in the hospital.

"The hospital. Isn't it obvious?"

Ema turned to see who was talking.

"Nathan..."

"I see you know my name. Do you like it?"

Nathan got up the bed he was in and approached her.

Ema could feel her breath slipping away when he got too close for comfort.

He was so close to her face that she could see his peach soft lips were natural.

"You must be Ema, Ema Contreras," Nathan noted.

Ema ran her hands her short hair just to get the awkwardness of the situation out of her mind.

What she didn't understand was why he was talking differently. His stance had even changed. She suspected he wasn't the man with a fragile mind she had met earlier.

"You're ok...How...Why are you here?"

Nathan went for Ema's ear and whispered,

"You can stop pretending now Adriana."

What the heck was he talking about?

She already found it hard trying to concentrate with his lips gently pricking her ear and sending sensual sensations she didn't want to feel.

"If you know my name, You must know I only look like her." Ema retorted.

Nathan walked back to his bed, making a sudden stop right at it.

"Did you grow up in the village?"

"Yes," Ema affirmed.

" So you must have friends?"

Ema was beginning to wonder why she was even answering his questions. He was surely heading somewhere so she kept playing along.

"My mom said I wasn't the most social as a kid."

"She told you all that. You must be dumb if you can't remember your childhood."

His words enraged Ema and she got up to face him.

"How dare you!" She spat, pointing a finger at his face.

"Calm down Adriana, why so angry? I was just wondering why you have no memory of your childhood."

Ema dropped her hands on her waist in a seductive manner.

"I lost my memory." She bluntly said.

"Oh...really..."

"Now I see where you're going. You just want to prove I'm here."

Nathan grabbed Ema's hands and pulled her closer, so close that they could feel each other's breath.

"I know you are Adriana. I just want you to think hard. Have you..."

Mrs. Contreras burst in suddenly.

"Ema, the doctor... Holy crap!" She gasped at such an eye-opener.

She rushed at the two and pulled Nathan's hands-off Ema.

"What are you doing?" She demanded, sending her glared at Nathan.

She then turned to Ema,

"Your Dad is waiting for you outside."

Ema obeyed her mother and walked out.

"Stay away from her, You hear me!" Mrs. Contreras warned when she was sure Ema was outside.

"Why? Does it make you afraid you'll lose her?" Nathan teased, enjoying her torture.

"I can't lose Ema..."

"Adriana!" Nathan corrected, getting up to face the lady.

"And you will lose her. I'll make sure of that, I promise you."

Mrs. Contreras scoffed and walked out.

Nathan sighed, his heart felt like it was being ripped out, losing his soulmate when she was so close to him.

He would get her to remember, that he could not fail.

"I just want a DNA test." Mrs. Romero said.

"I know Duena but it's against the rules." Doctor Suarez responded.

Mrs. Romero was getting sick of his strict policy rules. She could lose someone if he didn't let go of those rules.

"Suarez, I'm begging you. She looks just like Adriana. I know this is not a coincidence."

"I understand your plight Duena but I'm trapped as it is." The doctor refused to comply, upholding the rules he had to follow.

Mrs. Romero knew she had enough,

"If she happens to be Adriana and I lose her...again. I hope you rot in your grave."

"Ok." Suarez finally gave in, "But I'm only doing this to get you off this path."

"I think I'm sure of this Suarez. Adriana's body was never found and someone who looks just like her just pops up. Not possible."

"And if she happens to be Adriana?" Suarez quizzed.

"I don't know what I'll do. But, one thing I'm sure is, we have to do the test. I need to get this weight off me."

"It's ok." Doctor Suarez assured, holding Duena's hands.

"Thank you, Suarez."

Miranda house was a bloomy area today. The gloom was gone, her child was back.

She had prepared the best meals for his arrival back into the house but for some reason, he didn't want to eat.

"Aren't you hungry?" Miranda quizzed.

"Not really. It's just so weird that I hardly remember anything from the accident till now."

Miranda could still see there was something he wasn't saying.

"Is that all?"

"No... You said Thomas shot me. I don't think it was him. It was someone else. I just can't seem to remember."

Miranda stopped eating.

"I think you're just stressed out. Rodriguez told me what transpired that day. Just think about tomorrow."

Yes, he was resuming tomorrow at the place that brought back so many memories.

"Mother, I was also thinking about Ema."

Miranda groaned.

"Can you forget her Nathan? She's not Adriana and besides, why would you want Adriana back into your life after everything she made us go through?"

"Because she's still my wife. I don't trust that woman.."

"Who? Ema?" His mother inquired.

"No. Her mother. She's hiding something, I know it."

If he was threading this path, she had to stop him.

"Don't do anything rash, Nathan. She's just overprotective. It must be a lot for her to process knowing that her daughter looks like someone who is dead."

"Ok."

Nathan was sure of one thing, he wasn't going to back down.

"Mom, I was thinking, I haven't seen any of my childhood photos and it never occurred to me to ask," Ema said from the backseat.

"Why? What do you need them for?" Mrs. Contreras quizzed, a light smile knitted on her petite face.

"I don't know Mom, maybe it can trigger something."

Mr. Contreras hit the brakes and swiftly turned to the side of the road.

"Ema, Did that boy say anything?" Her father demanded. For the first time since she had known him, he was authoritative.

"No! Does he have to say anything before I ask? Or is it too much to see my childhood photos?" Ema asked, puzzled.

She didn't understand why they kept on trying to cover up her past like it had skeletons.

Ema had grown to trust them both but something was getting fishy and she had to admit, it all began when they met Nathan.

They were hiding something.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

Gasps and look of pure shock were all Nathan saw as he walked up to his office.

The surprised looks of his workers were funny at first but with him receiving it everywhere, it was becoming disturbing.

It was almost like no one wanted him back.

He wasn't the most social but at least they could pretend to care.

Nathan got over their stares, focused on getting to his office.

He adjusted his black three-piece suit and unlocked the knob to his office.

The place was just like how it left it

Except for the position of his office chair.

Nathan wasn't a fan of that check so he tried to change it himself.

At that moment, someone knocked on the door before opening,

A woman in her mid-twenties walked in, caramel-skinned and very lanky, the model body structure.

"Good morning Mr. Tocci, I'm the new secretary" she informed in a professional voice.

"Good. I'd like to have an appointment with the top workers in ten minutes. The conference room."

"Ok, Mr. Tocci. I'll get right at that."

Then she walked out but returned to say the customary 'welcome back'.

Nathan smiled and she walked out again.

Nathan spent his free time drinking a cup of coffee before heading to the conference room.

"Welcome back Mr. Tocci." The workers greeted like barbarians when he came in.

About time.

Nathan took his place at the front row of the magnificent desk.

"Well, I called you here to announce that I was back, obviously, and to get any recent projects we might in presently."

"We've begun a furniture line," Rodriguez replied.

The rest nodded affirmatively.

"Really? That's nice. How's it going?" Nathan quizzed further.

"Well, it's better I show you. We store the planks at a newly erected shed here." Rodriguez responded.

"Ok. Can I see it now?"

"Sure," Rodriguez affirmed.

The new shed was erected behind Tower where the ugly metal scrap could not be an eyesore.

Nathan monitored the hardworking menial laborers take the planks into the shed.

"This is great Rod. I hope it works out." Nathan said.

"It will Nathan. I know it will." Rodriguez chipped in.

Rodriguez received a phone call and he excused himself to pick it leaving Nathan on his own.

Nathan continued watching the menial workers do their job until he felt something rough hit his head lightly.

He turned to face the careless worker.

The man was apologetic and even feared losing his job as he pleaded profusely.

"I'm so sorry... You!"

Nathan immediately knew who he was.

"You're Ema's Dad aren't you?"

"Yes." The man replied.

"Where is Ema?" Nathan inquired, pressing his hand softly at the spot the planks hit.

"She didn't come." Mr. Contreras replied, avoiding Nathan's gaze.

Nathan was a businessman and he knew when his workers were lying.

"Ok. You're fired."

"What! Why? I did nothing wrong." The man said, defending himself.

Nathan smiled, enjoying his misery.

"Yes. You need nothing wrong. You just tried to kill me."

"But...You're only doing this to get back at me..." The man trailed off.

Their talk was beginning to attract eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Contreras. It's the least I can do for trying to hide Ema....oh! I mean Adriana."

"How many times will we tell you until you get that she's not your wife, You can keep your job for all I care."

Mr. Contreras walked back to his truck, just what Nathan wanted.

He took a picture of the vehicle plate and followed Mr. Contreras.

He wasn't done yet.

"What do you want?" Mr. Contreras demanded when he discovered he was being followed.

"I just wanted to give you your pay. Am I wrong?"

The grunt the man gave was satisfying for Nathan.

"You must be thinking, if only She was here, maybe she could change my mind."

The man ignored Nathan and started the car before zooming off.

Ema searched for her father amongst the other workers.

He was nowhere to be found.

She walked up to where he left the truck but both he and his truck were gone.

What in the world would he leave her all alone?

A funky honk caught her attention and she turned to where the familiar honk came from.

She recognized the white truck and walked up to it.

"Why did you move Dad?" Ema quizzed.

She noticed he was too quiet and his smile was gone.

"Are you ok?"

"Yes. Let's just go."

"What about the planks? We haven't offloaded all of them."

"We don't need to. I've been fired."

The Revelation was more like a stun to Ema.

"What! Why?"

"Don't worry about it, let's just go home." Mr. Contreras insisted.

"No Dad. Not until you tell me what happened?" Ema retorted, having none of her father's prom and proper nature.

He didn't answer. He just stared at Ema.

"Ok, If you won't tell me, then I'll find out myself," Ema stated and walked out of her father, heading for Tower.

"Hello, I'd like to see your boss," Ema said politely, despite burning inside.

The secretary stared at her face downwards before saying,

"I'm sorry but do you have an appointment?"

"Just call your freaking boss outside!" Ema snapped.

Some workers stopped to steal looks at her with some muttering about how much she looked like someone's wife.

Holy sh*t! He owned this place.

Ema fixed the missing piece almost immediately. She has initially thought Rodriguez ran the company but with the whispers around her it was none other than... Nathan!

"Can I help you miss?" A masculine voice said behind her and she turned back to see him.

Devil's incarnate.

"Is anything the problem?" Nathan inquired, looking every inch an angel.

Ema could see for herself why most of them fell.

"You fired my father and for no reason."

"Calm down Miss."

"My name is Ema!" She retorted.

"I'm sorry I can't call you what you aren't Adriana. Miss would do just fine."

Ema shook her head in frustration.

Here he was acting all prim and proper making her look stupid and immature.

"If you want to talk, you can join me in my office."

"Then let's go."

"So why are you here?" Nathan inquired when they got to his office.

"You fired my father and I want to know why," Ema demanded, refusing to take her seat.

"For starters, he lied, he said you weren't around and he tried to kill me." Nathan defended.

"Unbelievable, can you just give him his job back?"

"Why? Are you willing to pay the price?"

"What price? I pretend to be your wife?" Ema quizzed.

"Caution your tongue, Adriana." "And I don't want you to pretend to be anyone, I just want us to have a date."

"What!..."

The telephone beeped interrupting Nathan and Ema's talk,

"Mr. Tocci, Mr. Contreras I here to see you."

"You see Adriana, he's trying to cut is apart again because he's hiding something," Nathan said.

"Keep him waiting," Nathan said to the telephone then turned to Ema,

"So what is it going to be? No...or yes?"

"If I go on this date, my Dad will get his job back and if it fails to do whatever you think it will do, You drop this madness."

"I give you my word Adriana."

"I accept."

Nathan smirked. If he was going to make Adriana remember anything, he would have to recreate the day they met.

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

"What will I tell father," Ema thought as she walked back to the reception.

She had been so rash that she accepted to go on a date with Nathan.

It was stupid but yes, she complied.

Seeing her father in such a foul mood at the reception made things a whole lot awful go her.

"Dad..." She made her presence known to him.

"Ema, why did you run off like that? Are you ok?" Mr. Contreras demanded, examining he like he was sure she had been molested in his office.

The punk's lips was a devilish temptation and the sparks she felt when their body met was alarming, apart from that, Ema knew she was untainted.

"I'm fine Dad."

"So what did he tell you?"

"You got your job back."

She expected her father to be shocked or doubtful but instead, he was angry.

"What! How!"

"I don't understand you Dad, Didn't you want the job back?"

"Ema, I want you to tell me the truth and now, What did he do? Did he say anything?"

"No... I just accepted to go on a date with him."

Before Ema could react, her father latched at her arm and dragged her outside.

"Dad, you're hurting me!" Ema shrieked but he didn't as much care.

He continued dragging her until they reached the truck.

"Get in!" Mr. Contreras commanded.

"No!" Ema retorted.

"Don't make me hit you!"

And just like that, her father had morphed into a monster. One of her family had mysteriously become since she set foot in the city since she heard the name, Adriana.

"I don't understand you anymore. What is it that I'm doing wrong? I tried to help but it seems all you and mother want is to keep me under a lock and key."

"This is not the time to joke around Ema." Mr. Contreras spat.

"I'm not going anywhere. I have a promise to keep." Ema voiced and turned away.

"Where do you think you're going?" Mr. Contreras demanded, holding Ema.

"Leave her." A Stern voice warned.

Mr. Contreras turned to see Nathan, hands in his rich pocket, and with his winning smile.

"Leave us! This is a family matter."

"But physical assault isn't." Nathan chipped in.

Mr. Contreras let Ema go and she ran behind Nathan.

Nathan walked up to the old man and whispered into his ear,

"You pushed her away and the game hasn't even begun yet."

"Come back here Ema."

"No father." Ema maintained, "I am not a puppet and I can make my life choices. I am going on this dumb date and if you stop me father, then there is something you're not telling me."

"There you have it old man. She's with me."

Mrs. Contreras was busy with the house chores when a neighbor came to inform her that her husband wished to speak to her through his phone.

"Is anything wrong Honey?" Mrs. Contreras asked, worried sick.

"It's Ema. That...man...he took Ema."

"What! Call the police!"

"You don't understand. Ema followed him...freely."

The camel's back broke.

Mrs. Contreras dropped the phone in her hands getting a glare from the neighbor whose phone went shattering on the mud floor.

Did she follow Nathan freely? How?

Mrs. Contreras took refuge in the old creaking dining table and buried her face to think.

"How could this happen?"

"Because you failed as a parent for the second time."

Mrs. Contreras looked up to see Ema.

She was dressed in a wedding gown and covered in her own blood.

"What...are...you...doing...here?" She stammered.

The apparition cackled.

"I thought you forgot me. You got yourself a new daughter, now watch how you lose her!"

"Stop it, Ema! I don't want to lose her too."

"I died a day to my wedding mother, she's already married. Tick... Tock!"

"You're wrong!" Mrs. Contreras yelled at the ghost and closed her eyes to stop the figure from haunting her.

"Who are you talking to?" The neighbor inquired.

He was still here.

"Give me your phone." Mrs. Contreras pleaded, ignoring the man's concern.

"Try not to damage it again." The man cautioned before handing it over.

"Hello Rodriguez, I need your help badly."

"What's it about now?"

"Ema...She's with Nathan."

He got the message because he instantly cut the call.

God, let him find them before it's too late, she hoped.

Little did she know what she had done.

"You look so pale. Are you afraid?" Nathan asked Ema as he pulled up his car in front of the mall he took her to when they first met.

"I'm not afraid and why are we here, you said we were going on a date."

"We are Adriana. But first, I have to dress you up."

Ema looked at her clothing, a blue top, and black jeans.

It wasn't that bad for a date where she didn't intend to impress anyone.

"What's wrong with what I'm wearing?" Ema inquired.

"Let's just say I want you to look good."

He exited the car and nudged Ema to follow.

What was the use of resisting? The more she remained to herself, she would wallow in self-pity. She needed a painkiller and humoring Nathan was perfect.

"Ok."

It was the mall she had visited the first day she visited the city with her father.

Just being there was unsettling. To think that her father was somewhere disappointed in her.

She needed to shake him off.

"Hello. You again." A dark-skinned woman acknowledged.

Ema remembered her. She was the woman that led her to Nathan, the one she had given the nickname bubbly to for her free-spirited nature.

"Yes, we'd like to buy a dress to crown the day we met which happens to be today by buying the clothes she bought on that day if you still remember them," Nathan stated.

"Of course I do." The lady assured, "It's not every day, I get rich customers."

"Ok. Just make sure it's just as perfect as that day."

"If you tip me." The lady winked and whisked Ema away.

"So you took this and I took this..." The manager handed to Ema a leopard skin jumpsuit and a blue gown before saying, "I don't remember the third clothing but try this."

The woman held up the blue mini gown that managed to look classy and seductive.

"That must be expensive," Ema noted.

"It is." The woman acknowledged, "Try it on."

Ema received the dress and went for the dressing room.

She slipped out of her tight jeans and top and tried the new one.

It fit like a glove and Ema gasped when she looked in the mirror.

"You look beautiful." A masculine voice said behind her and she turned to question Nathan but it wasn't Nathan.

"Who are you and what are you doing in the dressing room?" Ema demanded, scared of breathing.

"I know you're angry at father Adriana but he must have been busy." The teenager continued like he didn't hear what she had said earlier.

The teenager was tall for his looks and had trimmed hair, bleached, of course, he had chestnut eyeballs and a smile that seemed to be ingrained with him.

"What are you doing here?" Ema repeated.

"Why don't you want to remember Adriana? You know it's not your fault." The boy continued.

"I'll yell," Ema warned, finding it creepy that the boy wasn't answering her and that he continued to talk like she didn't even exist.

Was he even real?

Ema began to feel dizzy instantly and the figure in front of her began to distort.

Bright light by the window side that wasn't there before made her eyes burn. She watched a force push the boy into the light and heard the sound of glass shattering.

As the boy plummeted to the earth of her distorted reality, Ema yelled his name.

"Adrian!"

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

"Hello, Dr. Suarez."

Mrs. Romero wasn't expecting a call from Dr. Suarez this early

There could only be one reason why he was calling, For her, this was the moment of truth, she was ready for anything.

"It's about the DNA results."

Mrs. Romero remembered to take deep breaths in case it didn't come out as she had expected.

"I don't believe this but Ema shares your DNA."

Mrs. Romero choked on her saliva.

This was not what she had imagined.

"Dr. Suarez... Ema... is Adriana?"

"Yes." The man replied.

"Excuse me." Mrs. Romero said before putting the call on hold and running around the room like she was on fire.

"She's alive!"

Her newfound joy took the wrong turn when she remembered that Ema wasn't in the hospital anymore.

She vividly remembered watching her go with the wrong people.

It shattered every good moment she had planned to share with the world - her workers.

She returned to the phone to get more information about Adriana's parents

"Doc, She was taken away from me and I watched her slip right away. I need the names of those posers."

"I don't believe this, why would they pretend to be Ema... Adriana's parents."

"I feel the same way Suarez, it makes me wonder what kind of situation she is now." Mrs. Romero expressed her fears.

"I have gotten their names and where they live. Esmeralda Contreras and Devi Contreras, and from what they told us, they live in Malinalco."

What would they be there?

Mrs. Romero remembered hitting Ema on the road outside Tijuana.

"Are you sure?" Mrs. Romero inquired, feeling a bit uncertain that they could be there.

"Yes, At least that's what they told us."

"Thank you, Dr. Suarez. I have to go now."

"Ok."

Mrs. Romero ended the call and immediately called for Walter.

Her driver came as quickly as he could.

"Walter, get the car ready."

"It's a Saturday." He chipped in.

"I know Walter but this is far more important than business. We are going to Malinalco."

MALINALCO

Malinalco was a beautiful small town that didn't deserve to be called a village. It was the perfect place to spend the holidays with family.

Mrs. Romero could only think of the good things the city had to its favor just to avoid what rampage her mind was causing her.

She didn't understand all this, Ema fell from a cliff and she suddenly made it here.

She could only get answers from the people who took her.

"We are here," Walter informed as he pulled close to a duplex.

Mrs. Romero highlighted the vehicle and walked towards the house that held the answers she needed.

She knocked and waited for a reply.

She heard people chattering inside then they stopped.

She knocked again and this time, she heard footsteps.

The door made a creaking sound and Mrs. Romero watched the door open.

A woman in her early fifties stared down at her August visitor before saying,

"Can I help you?"

"I'm looking for the Contreras." Mrs. Romero replied.

"The woman got out to facers Romero.

She looked every inch terrifying and one would think she was a descendant of Anak.

"I don't know what game you're trying to play but please Leave." The woman spat.

"I can't! You have to help me."

"I can't. They don't live here anymore."

"What do you mean? Since when?" Mrs. Romero demanded already losing it.

The woman stepped back a bit seeing how agitated Mrs. Romero was.

"After her daughter, Ema's death."

They had a daughter who died?

"How did she die?" Mrs. Romero quizzed, shaky.

"Her daughter wanted to get married but they refuse and while they tried to take her away from the man she loved, She took her own life."

" Now just leave me alone." The woman pleaded and shut the door.

Mrs. Romero was stunned. Those people were in their right senses when they took her daughter.

They must have seen her floating in the river so they took her, That's why the cops never found Adriana's body. They named her after their daughter knowing she was suffering from failed memories.

Psychos!

The Contreras faked their address knowing one day their lies would catch up to them, which also meant one thing, Adriana lived close to her.

The cliff incident and the car crash meant she was in the city or just close by.

Ema blinked her eyes and all she thought turned dark.

The image she saw was far too real to be her imagination.

She rubbed her eyes and walked out now clad in the Royal blue gown.

Her body felt weak, Ema could swear that her body would give up any second.

"Are you ok?" The mall lady inquired, seeing how drained Ema had become.

"Just tired." Ema brushed it off and walked back to Nathan.

"You look...stunning," Nathan commented when he saw her.

"Thank you."

"That wasn't convincing. You look pale, Are you ok?"

"I am," Ema answered.

"Ok. Let's go."

"Where to?" She inquired,

She thought shopping was all he had in mind.

"Lunch, You look hungry," Nathan replied.

"I'm fine. I just want to go home."

"After lunch." Nathan insisted.

"Where exactly are we going to?"

"The first place that held our good memories together."

"I'm not...Forget it!"

He was so bent in forcing the role of his wife on her.

"I see your strength is back." Nathan teased.

"Can we just do this and get over it?"

"Let's go then."

"Does this place bring any memories?" Nathan asked Ema when they arrived at his secret location.

It was an outdoor restaurant that looked more like a shack.

"No. I've never been here." Ema retorted.

She got off the car and took her seat on an available bench. Nathan parked his car and joined her soon after.

"What do you want to eat?"

"Anything."

"Ok then. How about posole?"

Ema was bewildered, she had been craving for that exact food for a week now.

Was he telepathic?

"How did you know I wanted that?"

"Adriana liked it and so do you."

Which reminded her, After placing an order, she asked Nathan something that had been on her chest since they went shopping.

"Did Adriana have siblings?" Ema quizzed.

"Yes. She did." Nathan replied, pondering on why Ema would ask him that.

"Are...they alive?"

"Adriana had a twin brother but he's dead."

Ema had a flash of the boy flying out of the window.

"How did he die?"

"I don't know much but he fell out of a window. What are you asking?"

"I was just curious."

Nathan knew white lies but he kept his trap shut. If he was getting Ema to remember her past life, then he best left her to find out.

Ema was beginning to doubt her very existence. Those memories did not belong to her but she seemed to be getting flashes about everything Adriana.

Was she living in lies? She needed to find out.

" I learned her father died but did she have a mother, any relative at all?"

Nathan raised an eyebrow.

"Something is wrong here. What are you hiding?"

"Nothing." Ema lied, she didn't want to give him the slightest hint she was beginning to think she might be Adriana.

"Well her mother is still alive."

Ema considered the odds. She needed these answers for herself. The family she thought she had before had changed drastically from sweet to controlling.

She only had one more question,

"Where does she live?"...

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

Fuck! Pick up the phone you bastard!

Rodriguez tried Nathan again only to be cut off again.

What could he do now? He thought.

The Contreras had disappointed him and now Nathan was spending time with that girl.

If Adriana managed to get just a fragment of who she was, she would question the Contreras and there was no way his name would not be given out.

Shit! Why was this happening to him?

His enemies had tripled. If only he has put an end to Adriana the time he met her.

Nathan would surely be trying to make her remember her past but the problem was where they would be.

Rodriguez had sixty percent certainty that he would take her back to their family.

Of course, Rodriguez snapped his fingers finally getting his shit together.

Now all that was left was to send Chale spying while he went to talk with the Contreras.

He pulled up a gun from his drawer, the cold metal made him smile.

"It's like killing two birds with a stone."

"What are you doing?" Rodriguez heard his wife question.

He trembled a bit, caught unaware.

What was she even doing here, he mumbled.

His wife approaches him seeing how jelly he became.

"Are you alright", She asked.

"I am." He replied, placing the gun back into the drawer.

He turned to face her, in hopes that she would stop her incessant questioning.

"What are you doing here?"

His wife sent him a puzzled look,

"What am I doing in our bedroom? Rod, Are you sure you're ok?"

"I am." He assured, keeping his hands secure on the drawer.

"Can you move? I want to drop this." She then flagged a pink towel they had purchased for their coming child.

Rodriguez froze.

He hasn't bothered to cover up the pistol and he knew his wife's twisted obsession to make everything she saw wrong right. She would find out.

"Give me that." Rodriguez snatched the towel from her hands and folded it,

"You know, you shouldn't be working, I don't want you to stress out my son."

His wife slanted in mock surrender,

"What makes you sure it's a boy? It doesn't kick that much so I'll say it's a girl."

At least that caught her attention, Rodriguez sighed.

He used the little time he had to cover up the pistol and dropped the towel right on top.

"Oh I know it's a boy honey."

"Whatever."

"Well, I have to shower now and I'll be late tonight."

"It always works with you."

"It will end soon, I promise."

"Ok." She replied smiling at him.

Rodriguez kissed her forehead and walked out of the room.

Immediately she saw him out, she inspected the drawer.

Nothing was there.

She could have sworn she saw Rodriguez drop a pistol there.

She hardly knew what was going on with her husband.

First, he has mood swings, and now he kept guns.

He wasn't working for the mafia such that he would need a weapon in case his enemies wanted to get back at him.

She closed the drawer after checking its nook and crannies.

He had taken it. She had a bad feeling he was going to do something stupid or drastic, she had to find out what it was.

The road back to Tijuana wreaked havoc on Duena Romero.

Adriana was in grave danger and she couldn't find her.

How could she be so stupid?

Walter had tried to cheer her mood but she insisted he faced his driving in order not to repeat another accident.

All she wanted right now was to go home and file a complaint to the police.

Please be safe Baby, she prayed.

Mrs. Romero had lost her family and now that God had given her a second chance, she wasn't going to let Adriana die a second time.

Her phone chimed and she swiped on it to find out who was calling.

It was the maid.

"Hello." She answered.

"Hello Madam, A couple is here to see you..."

She wasn't expecting any visitor but she allowed the maid to continue.

"...A Nathan Tocci and Ema Contreras."

"Con...treras?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Tell them to wait for me." She said almost yelling.

"Ok."

The maid ended the call and Mrs. Romero immediately burst into tears.

This was God-given. She must have deserved a second chance and this time, she wasn't going to misuse the opportunity.

"Drive faster, Walter!"

Duena set out of the car when the car arrived back at her house.

She slammed open the door and was surprised to see it was all true.

"Adriana!" She rushed to hug her.

Ema accepted the hug and they both cried.

"I can't believe you're here. I thought I lost you."

Ema broke off the hug feeling uncomfortable.

She had no memory of this woman and it was all apathy.

She hated to break it to the joyous lady but she deserved the truth.

"I don't remember you.", Ema said plainly.

"What do you mean? If you don't remember, why are you here?"

"I'm looking for answers. I don't remember half of my life and I've been getting these images about a boy named Adrian, Do you have a picture of him?"

Duena could not believe this, she couldn't go through this...This was far wicked than a heartbreak. Her daughter has no memory of her.

What kind of mother had she been?

Duena put on a show of bravery despite falling apart.

"Adrian is dead." She solemnly replied, coming in terms with her broken soul, "But I have his pictures."

She got up and went inside, appearing a few minutes later with Polaroids.

She handed them over to Ema with teary eyes.

Ema collected them and browsed through them, Duena noticed tear drops Cascade down her pretty round face.

"I'm Adriana, Aren't I?" Ema tried to mouth, despite the lump she felt in her throat.

She took a photo of Adrian and fluttered it around.

"And I killed him."

Ema dropped the photos and watched them sway unto the floor.

"What kind of monster am I?" She screamed and ran out.

Nathan went after her.

Duena remained inside sobbing.

"Adriana wait!" Nathan yelled as he sprinted after Ema.

Ema stopped and fell to her face.

Nathan joined her and held her close.

He could sense her fear, her anxiety.

"I wish I didn't remember." She cried.

Nathan held her tighter but didn't talk.

"Why did they lie to me?" Ema questioned Nathan.

"They were trying to keep you safe in their way. When you love someone a little too much, you do more harm than good."

"What about you, I tried to ruin your life...I was a monster!" Ema said as she continued to sob.

Nathan tilted Ema's head to meet his. He wiped her tears with his soft palms and gave her a smile.

"You changed me, Adriana. You are not a monster, you are my wife and you have a beautiful heart. You are only saying this because you don't remember everything about you and I don't care if you don't remember but I want you to remember something, I love you."

Ema stared at the good man for a second and had another flash.

She sniffled and obeyed her instincts,

Their lips locked.

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

She followed him closely, mad on his trail despite hiring a cab.

"Drive faster!" She nudged the old man.

The man nodded and stepped on it.

The rough road made her hold on to her swollen stomach feeling each bump the car suffered affect her aching back and the baby inside.

Soon, they arrived at a village.

She couldn't understand what her husband planned to do here but she had a gut feeling, evil looked close by.

She instructed the driver to stop when she saw her suspect turn around in their direction, his eyes were bloodshot, they had no mercy.

He flimsily checked around even peering in her direction but as the good Lord would have it, he did not approach the vehicle that had been following him for minutes.

She saw her husband pay a bulge in his back pocket and proceed to where he was headed.

That was the gun, She could swear.

Maybe she was right, Rod was in some kind of trouble. She had to know what he would hide so badly from her and why he would need a gun to handle the situation.

She reached into her bag and picked some loose change before thrusting it into the driver's greedy hands.

It was more than enough but it was collateral for him to wait for her while she continued following Rodriguez.

"Wait for me." She ordered and got out of the vehicle.

The driver gave her a wise toothed smile assuring her of his cooperation.

He probably imagined she was a wife that didn't trust her husband and he might be partially right.

Rodriguez was a quick walker and it took her every bit of her and her child's energy to tag along.

He suddenly stopped at a house in the middle of the small town.

He knocked and waited.

She saw the door open and a woman smiled at Rodriguez.

"Even if Rod was cheating, I don't think it would be with her. This was something different."

Her husband peered around again to make sure no one was watching before entering, She saw him pull out the glistening pistol before the door jammed shut.

Was he intending to kill her? Or was someone else within those brick walls...

She got out of her hiding spot and approached the house.

The sky panels were a bit high for anyone to notice her so it was easy for her to go unnoticed.

She saw some villagers and young teenagers pass but none seemed to be suspicious of her.

When she got close, she began to pick on their discussion.

"You're not meant to be here Rodriguez, please I want you to find Ema and bring her home." The feminine voice she could make out said.

"I've tried reaching Nathan but he hasn't picked my calls. From my perspective, he might have gotten Adriana to remember something."

She gasped, the sudden realization of what was happening was absolutely terrifying.

She knew about Adriana's lookalike but the fact that Rodriguez knew she was Adriana yet he kept his mouth shut was bewildering.

She strained her ear to pick out more of what they were saying.

"Don't you dare Rodriguez! It was you who insisted that I tried to keep her away from Nathan but instead they kept on bonding, Fix this or else..."

"Or else what!"

She suddenly heard a creak. Even the blind would know what just transpired.

He intended to kill her!

One side of her wanted to burst in and stop him before he did something unspeakable but she had no idea what harm her presence could cause so she continued listening in on them.

"What are you doing with a gun?"

"Hush...Have you told anybody about us?"

"I don't know what you mean?"

"Good because she'll come looking for answers and there is no way you're going to implicate me."

"Wait, Rodriguez...Don't do something you'll regret..." She pleaded.

"I'll make regret the day you saved her." Rodriguez snarled and a loud bang followed.

A scream here and there but the pregnant woman could not move. She might have taken a leak herself.

She heard something thud on the floor and footsteps quickly approaching where she was.

Before her numb body could give her cover away, she ran.

"Rodriguez killed someone...Her husband was a murderer!"

Nathan could barely contain himself.

Now that Adriana was back to him, her vengeful side seemed to have returned.

She wanted to have a word with the Contreras.

"I just want to know why they hid all these from me when they knew the truth!" She sprung around shrugging and swearing.

"They lost their daughter Adriana, she was scared. As a mother, I understand how far you can go with love." Mrs. Romero chipped in.

Adriana sat down and scratched her scalp.

It reminded her of her father.

She had been told he shot her. She couldn't just believe it, neither could she believe that her mother took it all in.

That her husband, the man she known all her life would point a gun at his own daughter and shoot her point-blank, it was incomprehensible.

If only she could freaking remember!

The front door made a banging sound and it caught everyone in the room's attention.

Nathan went for it and Adriana noticed he turned pale.

It only took a second for her to guess who it was.

"What are you doing here!" She demanded.

Mr. Contreras had his shoulders shrugged down in defeat or was it something more...

Adriana noticed he was crying but it didn't move her.

"I hope you shed your crocodile tears well, I'm gone for good...and tell 'mother' that!" She sent with sarcasm laced in between.

Mr. Contreras suddenly burst into tears.

"I'm sorry Ema but she's dead....she..."

"What happened to her!" Ema demanded feeling the rage she felt before evaporate.

Even if she was still angry at them, they saved her life, and most importantly, they showed her love.

"She was shot!" Mr. Contreras muttered before falling to the floor, crying.

Adriana was left traumatized, who would do this?

"I need to see her." She mouthed to no one in particular.

Tapes with police warning filled the house coupled with the blaring sirens.

Adriana walked for the last time in Ema's shoes, remembering all the good times she had with the deceased before she was snatched away from her.

She got closer to the crime scene and could see the force doing their work already.

"Get out of here! This a Crime scene." One yelled at her.

She was too bugged to even understand what he just spat.

Her gaze remained on the dead body that was now in a black plastic bag.

She examined the surrounding for anything out of the ordinary but there was nothing, just her mother's dried up blood spelling the words "RO"

Wait!

Adriana fixed her gaze back to the letters written in blood.

She must have written it during her last moments alive.

Adriana rushed in to take her closer look but was restrained by two male officers.

She shrieked but it was of no use, the men were stronger than her so they managed to keep her in check.

All she could think of now was,

What clue had she inked down in her blood?

It could lead her to the murderer.

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

She followed him closely, mad on his trail despite hiring a cab.

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CHAPTER FORTY

Rodriguez noticed his wife staring at him and decided to scold her for not helping.

"You know honey, you always insist on doing everything but today, you don't seem to want to help. Are you alright?"

She was stunned.

"I'm alright. I just don't see the need to go with them. We can go on our own."

"Nonsense. You hardly relate with anyone, I'm doing this for you."

"Are you sure or is it something else?" She spilled before she could think straight.

"Ok. What's wrong?" Rodriguez demanded, getting closer to her.

She could barely breathe seeing him so close to her. Her self defense instinct went haywire.

She almost compulsively took out the knife she has hidden on her to protect herself.

She hadn't slept last night, not with the fear that he would kill someone and when she did, the terrible nightmares interfered.

"Maybe you shouldn't go." Rodriguez put in.

"I'm going!" She almost yelled.

She had to keep a watch on him. He was a maniac and was dangerous to everyone.

"Call the police!", A part of her murmured.

Maybe it was right.

Rodriguez left her and she used the opportunity to search what was in the basket Rodriguez had fixed up.

Nothing much, just the checker blanket and some sandwiches.

She heaved and fixed the basket back before Rodriguez returned.

Grrrinnnggg! His phone rang.

She picked it up and checked the caller's ID.

"Chale."

She picked it up and listened.

"Boss, I have been watching the girl. They're getting ready for the picnic. She doesn't suspect anything."

A lump made her instantly stop breathing.

Rod was spying on Adriana, This was bad!

"Hey." A voice said behind her and she instantly felt her spine get the chills.

"Who's calling?" Her husband quizzed as he approached her, more like speedwalking.

She instantly cut the phone and turned to face him.

"It was Nathan." She lied.

"What did he want?" Rodriguez queried, collecting his handset from her.

She was glad she had already deleted his call history.

"He just wanted to know if we'll meet him at his house?"

"Of course we will," Rodriguez replied and resumed parking.

"Which Park are we going exactly?" She asked, wanting to know how much information her husband knew.

"Friendship park." He answered.

Fuck, he knew!

Seeing him concentrated on what he was doing, she contemplated hitting his head with a vase.

It could render him unconscious but it could also kill him.

"Tell the police before it's too late." Her conscience advised.

Her belly ached just then. It felt like a message from her child.

She couldn't just bring herself to do it plus she had her secret fears.

What if she was taken for acting as an accomplice?

She did know of the murder and said nothing.

A million thoughts bothered her but she didn't know what path was safe.

She left for the bedroom and took her phone.

It was either she informed the police or Nathan.

Her mind went back to the drawer. She approached it and opened it.

The metallic device laid there most probably thrown carelessly by Rodriguez.

She took it out and examined it.

It would take her nothing to use it against Rodriguez.

She immediately pushed away the dark thought.

How could she even go that far?

She made up her mind to call Nathan but backed down at the last minute.

"Hello?" She heard Adriana say.

She couldn't say it. She just couldn't do it. She was too weak to betray her husband. The golden band on her ring finger burned, forcing her to remember the vows she made to Rodriguez on their wedding,

To stand with him.

She cut the call and sat on the bed feeling empty and wondering what to do now.

She felt helpless and desperate at the same time.

Adriana would be in constant danger near her husband and here she was, being selfish.

But, at the right moment, she remembered Miranda.

She grabbed her phone and furiously searched her contacts.

She found it and instantly called.

"Hello."

"Hello Miranda, can I talk to Adriana?"

"Oh, she's gone with Nathan already."

"Good. Does she have a cell phone so I can call her?"

"Yes. Nathan got her one yesterday."

Thank God, She said aside before speaking.

"Can I get her number?"

"It sounds urgent, is everything ok with you and Rodriguez?"

"Oh yes."

'Just that he's now a maniac.'

"Ok. I'll send it to you if that is ok," Miranda said.

"It is. Thanks, Miranda."

She cut the phone and tried to think of what was going to happen next.

She planned on telling Adriana that she might be in danger and since Adriana didn't know who was calling, she would be worried but at high alerts.

"Honey! Its time to go!" She heard Rodriguez yell from the sitting room.

"I'm coming." She sent.

Her phone chimed, checking it she saw it was a text from Miranda.

She silently prayed she could so what she had in mind before heading downstairs.

10:00 AM

Friendship Park Tijuana

'Friendship park' was nothing like those in the smaller towns. Theirs were miniature formal gardens for the elderly that had retired there for a quiet life.

They had benches, ornamental trees, flowers year-round, and water fountains in clear lakes that were stocked with Koi carp. But not here, here was a park with acres of concrete interspersed with neat grass verges, rollerblading tracks, tennis courts, water parks, and skateboarder basins.

Adriana noticed the vendors were smaller. The music playing clashed from various sources, none of them were her favorite and it made her wonder if she would be able to take her mind off the world here.

The park had lost its purpose and was beginning to feel like a miniature party house.

The sun made it worse. Adriana regretted not bringing any sunscreen and relying on a stupid hat.

She didn't make her irritation known to Nathan. He had dressed for the occasion.

He wore a glowing Whit T-shirt that wrapped his body well, slightly revealing the pleasures within, baggy brown chinos that reached knee length and a green Nike knitted trainers. He was the epitome of perfection.

Adriana had noticed a few girls staring and made sure she made them know it was her territory.

The feeling of watching them leave disappointed or with a squeezed face was highly satisfying. Maybe even the first thing she had enjoyed so far.

"Where should we stay?" Nathan inquired, eyeing the spot close to the girls.

"Near those girls I suppose," Adriana replied, not taking his bait.

"They look hot, Don't they?"

"Good so you can talk with them all day and I can have this day all to myself."

Adriana flaunted her above-average butt at the girls and spread her blanket taking a seat.

"He's so hot. I wonder if he's single?" She heard one of the girls comment.

Adriana boiled but pretended not to mind.

Nathan joined her and then the girls got chatty.

"Hello Handsome what brings you here?"

Of all the wrong reasons to start a discussion, Adriana thought.

She noticed Nathan steal a look at her then back to the girls, he was trying to get her attention but there was nothing in the world that would make her fall for his antics.

"You know, the relaxing atmosphere and to meet great girls."

Adriana immediately turned red. She faced the girls and saw them giggle exaggeratedly.

Not on her watch!

She lingered close to Nathan and kept him in a warm embrace, warning the girls to steer off.

One of the girls got the message but the other one did not relent.

"I'm..." She tried to say but Adriana cut her off.

"Take a hint whore!"

The girl's jaw dropped right open and she stared at Adriana wide-eyed.

"What did you just call me?" She demanded when she got over Adriana's crude comment.

"You heard me." Adriana maintained ready to fight for what belonged to her but luckily Nathan came to the rescue.

"Pipe it down, girls."

"Tell her to take it back! Apologize!" The girl insisted.

"I will do no such thing." Adriana stood her ground, liking where this was going.

"I'll apologize." Nathan cut in, "I started this so if you'll please beauty, Forgive us."

The girl smiled, implying that she accepted Nathan's apology on his wife's behalf.

"Gee thanks but caution your wife, it's not nice to be so crude." The girl said.

"Neither is it to be an impulsive flirt." Adriana retorted.

The girl ignored her and returned to her book.

Nathan fell on the soft cool blanket and turned to Adriana.

She looked so beautiful when she was angry.

"You look stunning." He muttered, running his fingers on her sweaty neckline.

"I guess she's not the compulsive flirt after all."

Adriana knocked away his hand away,

"You are."

"Oh come on, you know I was just doing that to get your attention," Nathan claimed.

"Well, you got their attention. Just let me be Nathan. I'm here to take my mind off it all remember?"

"But not off me, I'm written in her heart and you, in mine."

"Oh, where have you used that like before?" Adriana teased.

Her new phone buzzed and she impulsively grabbed it.

Someone sent a text. It read,

"Someone is watching."

It sounded stupid at first but Adriana suddenly felt her skin turn blue.

She had the feeling she was being watched before but she had shrugged it off as a minor case of anxiety.

Another text came in,

"Someone wants you dead!"

Adriana shuddered, if this was a joke, then the person had better stop.

Nathan noticed her sudden mood change and questioned her,

"Are you okay?"

Another message popped up,

"Tell no one if you want to live."

"Nothing!" Adriana retorted sharply, "I just need to...."

"Nathan!" Someone yelled from afar and Adriana twisted in the direction the voice came from.

Rodriguez and his wife.

He was dressed in a Hawaiian shirt that showed his bubbly nature and grey shorts that exposed a little more than his tanned thighs. His wife, on the other hand, was dressed in a long summer gown that had printed hibiscus all round and fitted well with her fashion sense and comfort.

Adriana's anxiety grew worse as the couple approached them.

Almost instantly, the serene environment became hell for her. She found it difficult to breathe and suspected anyone that glanced in her direction.

"I need to go." Adriana excused herself before Rodriguez and his wife could arrive.

"Okay. Don't take too long."

Adriana nodded and left for the public restroom.

"Where's she's going to?" Rodriguez queried when he got to Nathan.

"To use the toilet. Have a seat." Nathan nudged, "She'll be joining us soon."

It was like three corpses using makeup to hide their maggoty state. It was bound to ease up the process.

Adriana locked the bathroom door to secure herself and try to feel safe.

Her heart beat loudly as she read the messages sent to her by God knows whom.

Why did she even believe it? It could be a prank, someone could just be messing with her head or the murderer was having mere fun with her before he decided to kill his game.

Adriana looked up to the mirror and nearly died when she saw something like someone holding a gun at her. She squeezed her eyes tight and opened them and for a split second, it was just a hallucination.

She got closer to the sink and turned on the tap. The sound of rushing water relaxed her and she proceeded to wash her face.

"You have to be strong Adriana!" She told herself, "No one can get to you."

Her phone beeped again and she checked on it even when she suspected she shouldn't have.

"Have you thought about who the culprit might be? The one who separated you from your loved one and who would do it again."

Adriana remembered the last written words of Mrs. Contreras.

"Ro..."

The phone beeped again,

"Don't you want to know who the chameleon is?"

"Tell me!", Adriana sent back, summoning courage from beyond.

"Rodriguez.", The message read.

Adriana felt numb instantly.

Ro fitted perfectly with Rodriguez.

No! What was she even thinking? That the man who tried to help them would be the enemy but still she couldn't help but think about it...

Bang! Something exploded startling Adriana so much that she cut herself with the mirror right in front of her.

She watched her blood trickle to the floor while she held the cut finger in pain.

She headed immediately for the door scared for her life.

The door was locked! No surprise there.

She had been hinted that someone was out for her life but the giggling she heard just outside the bathroom hinted this was something different.

It was the girls from before.

"Open this door right this instant! I know it's you." Adriana yelled and banged at the door violently.

"Yes." The girl's replied.

"Die of a heart attack bitch!" She heard them mutter.

More bangs followed and the room slowly began to get filled with a stomach-wrenching odor.

It smelt like sulfur.

They used firecrackers. Adriana tried at the door again, feeling weaker with each valiant attempt to force the door open.

Using the last energy on her, she dialed Nathan.

Adriana collapsed to the floor and began to feel the life being sucked out of her.

The wet tiled flooring turned to a blanket of grass. She looked up and caught a blurry figure staring down at her.

"Where did the sun come from?" She asked herself.

She continued to slip away from reality but she got a good look at the person's face.

The whole scenario looked like the nightmares she kept having but this time the man's face was not blurry, this time it was as clear as day.

"You survived." She heard him say.

She was too numb to move or comprehend what was happening but she could see.

"Take her Chale!" He ordered and a man Immediately arrived to do his bidding. She saw herself being dragged against her will, she felt the pain of the small stones stabbing her and tearing away her skin, it made her cry.

"What are you doing?" She heard herself say even if her lips didn't move.

"Goodbye, Adriana."

The next thing she knew was she was falling from a height, all she could picture was Rodriguez's evil smirk as she plummeted feet below.

Then darkness called her home.

"She called me, I wonder what's going on?", Nathan reflected.

Adriana had been gone for minutes now and it was disturbing he missed her call.

"Excuse me, I'll go check on Adriana."

"We'll go with you." Rodriguez asserted.

"No, we won't. Go, Nathan, We'll be waiting for you." Rodriguez' wife cut in.

"Ok."

Nathan raced for where the bathroom was situated and was surprised to see smoke.

It got him more worried.

"Adriana!" He yelled when he reached the door.

It was locked. He banged it hard before realizing it had been sealed from outside.

"Why?"

He didn't dwell on his lingering question before unlocking it and rushing in.

His eyes Immediately stung due to the smoke and his nose went runny taking a sniff of sulfur.

"Adriana!" He yelled, relying on his other senses to find her since it was difficult to see.

He heard her cough and instantly pinpointed where she was.

She was cold when he felt her. He placed her securely in his arms and dashed out.

By this time, the ruckus had gained the attention of most people in the park and they rushed to the couple.

Adriana was unconscious and he could sense the tension in her breathing.

She needed air.

A good Samaritan got water and doused some on her face and it worked. She blinked and woke up.

"Are you alright?" Nathan quizzed.

"Rodriguez... He..."

"He what?" Nathan asked.

Adriana kept on receiving the terrible pictures of the fate they once encountered.

"Adriana calm down. You're not in the position to talk." Nathan cooed.

"No! She insisted, "He's the murderer. He tried to kill us. I remember Nathan, I remember everything. It wasn't my father, it was him."

"Well...well...well..." Someone clapped from amongst the crowd.

The crowded path away and allowed the speaker to walk through.

Nathan looked up to see Rodriguez pointing a gun at him.

"What are you doing Rodriguez?" Nathan demanded, stiff.

"She's said it all Nathan, Are you so dumb not to believe the truth?" Rodriguez stated.

"You....tried to kill us?" Nathan could not believe his ears.

"I did but I failed obviously and now that the truth is out, I guess I should finish what I started."

"What are you doing Rodriguez?" His wife inquired, in tears.

"I did this for us, Honey!" Rodriguez defended.

"I didn't ask you to this Rodriguez" She muttered, holding her swollen belly, "If you do this, you'll destroy us, You'll destroy our child's future. Think about it, Rod."

"Why would you do this to us? To me... I thought we were friends?" Nathan inquired, still unable to believe all this was true.

"Friends? Hardly! You see Nathan, I used to work in a classy place before I met you. Guess what, I was fired and you know why because women were in the picture. We got fired and our lives got ruined because of his mistake. When I met you, you made the same mistake but I wasn't ready to suffer for your sins."

"You did all these to keep your job?" Nathan and Adriana asked in unison.

"Not just my job but to everyone in your company whose life you could have ruined. I was their savior."

"You're mad Rodriguez!" His wife made known. She fell to the floor and began to sob heavily.

The congregation gathered around we're dazed by what was going on. Someone had called the cops.

"I know you hate me now but I had to do this for all of us, Now I'll have to finish the job, I don't care what happens to me," Rodriguez said, cocking the gun and pointing it at Nathan.

"Rodriguez stop... Please! You're not beyond saving." His wife pleaded.

"I'm sorry honey but I've gone a little far. I am beyond saving."

Rodriguez put his finger on the trigger and aimed for Nathan's head. Nathan closed his eyes and expected the pain to come quickly and easily.

There was no use fighting it. It was over.

He felt Adriana hold on to his hands and it made him open his eyes. Nathan felt his face moisten as tears began to pour, likewise Adriana.

There were no words but they could feel their hearts sing.

Always and forever! It said.

The gunshot was heard and a body dropped to the ground.

Rodriguez's wife held on to the gun in her hands shakingly and tried to comprehend what she had done.

"No...." She rushed to her husband trying every means possible to resuscitate him but all means proved abortive.

"I killed him, I killed him!" She kept on repeating and put the gun to her head.

Bang! Her body dropped right on top of his.

Three lives wasted for petty revenge.

The siren noises got louder and soon the park became a hood.

Nathan and Adriana held hands, ignoring all and just sitting like they were the only two in the world.

"I guess you're not the only one who ruined someone's life." Nathan began.

"Which means we were made for each other," Adriana commented.

"I know it's the most stupid thing to stay right now considering all we have been through but I love you, Adriana."

Adriana smiled, wiping away a tear from her face.

"It's not what should be happening right now but what the heck... You know Nathan, remembering everything, I got to know something I never really got to do."

"What's that? Kill me?" He joked.

"No. Remember our first kiss at that restaurant?"

"Yes?"

"I so badly wanted to kiss you back."

"What's holding you back now?"

The ambulance sirens got louder and despite the feeling of despair in the air.

Two lovebirds held hands, staring at the destruction fate had made them cause to bring their reckless souls to meet.

They kissed passionately under the open sky, lost in time and place, not even noticing the heavy eyes on them.

THE END