



A DARK
MAFIA
ROMANCE

THE DEVIL'S PLAYTHING

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DANI RENÉ

THE DEVIL'S PLAYTHING

A Dark Mafia Romance

DANI RENÉ

Edited by
REBECCA BARNEY



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I can't believe I'm finally hitting publish on this story. It's been in my WIP folder for over a year, and as I slowly delved into Victor and Sofia's journey, I fell more and more in love with them. It's a first in this genre for me, and I enjoyed every moment! I hope you do too!

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Lastly, to the readers, thank YOU! It's because of you I'm able to put out book after book. Giving you what you ask for, and hopefully making you excited about the next book. Thank you for your reviews, keeping them SPOILER FREE ;) But most of all, thank you for buying our books. For your support, love, and encouragement.

Mad love, D x

As my first dip into the mafia romance genre, I hope I've done it justice. I loved writing Victor and Sofia's journey.

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Mad love, Dani xo

PLAYLIST

Devil, Devil - MILCK
Delincuente - Maluma
Solos - Maluma, El Micha
Remedy - Thirty Seconds to Mars
Love is Madness - Thirty Seconds to Mars, Halsey
Intentalo - Maluma
Bailando - Enrique Iglesias
Love to See You Cry - Enrique Iglesias
Give it up to Me - Shakira, Lil Wayne
Papi - Jennifer Lopez
Bad guy - Billie Eilish
Señorita - Shawn Mendes, Camila
Find the playlist [here](#)

BLURB

A brand new dark mafia romance from *USA Today* Bestselling Author, Dani René.

Victor Cordero is the devil.
Cruel. Sadistic. Heartless.

*Sofia Montero is an angel.
Beautiful. Sweet. Intoxicating.*

My father stole from him, but papá was stupid.
He got caught, and now I'm in trouble.

*She's my payment. My plaything.
Too innocent for my games, but it doesn't stop me.*

The man I've hated all my life has come for me.
His threats are meant to break me, but I'm stronger than I look.

*She spits her hate at me, but she revels in our game.
Her strength makes me want to see her break.*

I'm merely a plaything for the devil himself.
Owned by the most dangerous man in Colombia.

*I promised to release her once she's paid her dues.
But you should never make a deal with the devil.*

I will make him feel.
And when that day comes, he'll break for me.

Never back down. Never show weakness. And never allow anyone to break you.

Mad love, Dani xo

PROLOGUE

VICTOR

Colombia.
My home.
My kingdom.

I was born to a father who would ensure his organization—running drugs—was known for the utmost quality, and that any shipment promised, would arrive on time. He could take a baseball bat to the face of the men who worked for him if they were caught stealing, and nobody would recognize them again. Importing drugs was what he did best, and nobody got away with theft. He knew every kilo and every ounce that was brought into the country, and he knew when it left.

He didn't feel guilt, shame, or any of those human emotions that make us weak. My father wasn't weak, and neither am I. He showed me the way, leading by example.

This is my life.

Before, the pressure wasn't on me. I could fly under the radar in my father's organization. Now, I'm the man who rules it all, after having taken over from papá, Luis Cordero, who died a proud man, knowing that his life's work would live on through me. On his death bed, he told me he was ready to go because he knew I was ready. Now, everyone fears *me*. When I walk onto the street or into a building, hushed whispers follow me. I wouldn't have it any other way because when people are afraid of you, that fear will bring about some form of respect.

I learned that from my father. He gave me everything I own, and some things I took for myself. The one thing you need to know is I'm not apologetic in any way.

I don't ask, I don't beg, I take.

It doesn't matter what or who it is, if it catches my eye, I will own it.

The tug against my jacket—where I slipped my wallet into only twenty minutes ago when I was at the restaurant—and the mumbled words, "*rico maldito bastardo*," ring in my ears as if it's a foghorn blaring in the dark night. I feel for it, realizing my wallet is no longer in my pocket, but the man who's attempted to steal from me doesn't make it far. One of my men grabs him by the scruff of his neck, dragging him back to where I'm standing at the market stall.

Ignoring the woman who's serving me the crisp, green apples, I turn to find the thief. He's nothing more than a vagrant who's running around on the streets. If he had come to me and asked for a job, I may have considered it, but he's tried to steal from me, and he's mouthed off.

Granted, he may be right, I am a *rich fucking bastard*, but I'm the only one who can say that about myself. Anyone else spews venom, or even if someone takes from me, disrespects me in some way, I'll make sure they pay with a pound of flesh or a gallon of blood. Either way, they'll learn from their

mistake. And this is why I'm in the town center with my men flanking me.

"*Perdóneme?*" I smile as I watch two of my men force him to the ground. Silence falls around us, and I revel in the way I've captured the gazes of the people around the market square. I love to put on a show; most times, it's in the privacy of my home, but right now, I think they all need to see what I do to assholes like this.

Once he kneels, his mouth is forced open by, one of my youngest men, Alejandro. I lean in, my gaze locked on his dark one. Reaching for a handful of red sand, I grasp the granules and drop the whole lot in his mouth. The spluttering is enough for me to ensure everyone's heard him, but it's not enough.

If he'd kept to merely insulting me, I may have considered mercy, but stealing is another thing altogether. I straighten and gesture for my men to grab his wrists and force the left one to the ground, making it easier to access.

"Please, don't do this," the voice of the man kneeling at my feet whispers as he peeks up at me. The plea for mercy evident in his gaze. His voice is raspy from the sand I shoved into his mouth only moments ago. I watch him choke and cough, and I smile.

My black shoes are no longer shiny; instead, they're covered in the dust that he's disturbed. The toe of my shoe presses harder on the thin, fragile wrist of his left arm. Alejandro passes me the heavy leather wallet, which is thick with notes, and I slip it back into the pocket the thief swiped it from.

"What you need to understand, heathen," I bite out, leaning closer, so he can hear me. I feel the crowd that gathers, their eyes on me as I make a spectacle of an asshole who decided to disrespect me in the middle of the street. It wasn't my plan, but this piece of garbage forced my hand, and now, I'll take his. "I don't take kindly to having someone like you disrespect me. I work hard to give you what you need. And I certainly am a good boss to you. You, on the other hand," I smirk, shoving the metal harder into his flesh, breaking it and causing blood to seep from under my shoe, making the red sand turn a dark brown. "You don't deserve my mercy."

I reach for the blade that Javier hands me, and I slowly toy with the sharp tip of metal right at the inner wrist of the man who's still pleading with me. The deep crimson liquid seeps from the small cut. I twist the blade around and around, watching as the knife inches deeper into the wound.

It doesn't take long for the gash to widen, the metallic fluid to shoot from the veins that have severed. Thankfully, with the razor-sharp serrated edge, I can slice evenly into the bone, listening to it crack. Flesh spews from the open wound, his hand lies an inch from his arm and his face is contorted in pure anguish.

He writhes in agony, and his cries are music to my ears as I rise. Pulling the handkerchief from my pocket, I wipe the blade clean and throw the small scrap of material on the asshole clutching his handless arm.

Turning, I meet the eyes of the people who live in the city I rule and tip my head in greeting before I turn away. I don't need to tell them what or why I did that, all they need to feel is fear.

For me.

Because I'm the King.

And everyone knows my name.

I
VICTOR

My thirty-seven years have been filled with nothing but destruction and violence. Learning from a young age that weakness is death, I've ensured that everyone near me, each person who I come into contact with, knows that I'm far from a pushover.

"Sir?" The tentative voice of one of my men comes from the doorway of my office. The space is lit by the sun streaming through the windows. My father built this house, or rather, monstrosity of a castle, to ensure it steals all the natural light in the day. But under the cloak of darkness, it looks like a fucking medieval fortress.

When I was a child, I likened it to Dracula's castle; it looked evil, menacing, and that's what always made me smile. It's perched up on a hill, overlooking the ocean. There aren't any other houses around for miles, and I always enjoyed the feeling of being a king, which in the end, I found out my father was. Most children would be afraid of living in solitude, but I wasn't. As I got older, it was the calling card for the girls I brought back here.

They wanted to see inside the mansion that was whispered about throughout the city, and I played on those rumors. It was a drug—addictive and dangerous—and it offered a high like nothing else ever had. When I saw the wariness in their innocent gazes, my cock hardened, and I got them to suck me off, while telling them about the horrors I'd seen within these walls. Fucking needy bitches, all of them.

They wanted to survive me in order to tell their friends. But when they saw my dick, they fell to their knees without me asking. With every year that passed, I got worse, giving them something to talk about by spreading rumors, or by offering up stories about what I had witnessed happen in the dungeon beneath the house. I brought girls home, taking them into the darkest hallways and sending fear racing through them. The sex was always better like that.

I'd ensure they all believed me, and soon, the city knew we would never fall. Our strength was in the name, Cordero, and my father ruled with an iron fist. When he died, I took over and became as ruthless as he was, giving them even more to gossip about.

"What is it?" I glance at the young man.

"There's evidence of product being sold in your territory," he informs me. I beckon him into the office with a crook of my finger. When he nears the desk, he sets down the folder he's been clutching.

Opening it, I glance at its contents — photos. As I flip through them, I note the seller's face is hidden by a baseball cap. The peak of it covers his identity, but what he doesn't realize is that I have ways and means of finding him.

Nobody sells in my kingdom. I'm the king here, and soon, this scum will learn this truth the hard

way. He's taking from me, so I'll take from him. Before he has time to spend the money he's making, I'll fucking steal everything he holds dear.

I'm about to throw orders at the young man, but as soon as I open my mouth, we're joined by my right-hand man. He saunters into my office like he owns it. He's the only person I'll allow to enter without asking permission. My men all know that if they step foot inside my space without me requesting it, they'll be thrown into the cells in the bowels of the mansion.

Javier smirks when he settles in the chair that's positioned to the right of my desk. He picks up the folder, scanning the images much the same way I had. A sneer curls his lips when he flips the images over.

"This is a fucking cunt who needs to be put down," he utters in disgust. Dark eyes meet mine. Javier's had my back since we were in school; the asshole stole my lunch, I beat him to a pulp, and then he became my best friend.

"I want him found. Focus all manpower on this issue and use every connection I have. Get the team out there and do it now." Javier nods, waving his hand. He gestures to the young newbie, causing him to mumble a *yes, sir* before scurrying off.

"He'll do as I ask," Javier informs me.

"Oh?" Quirking a brow, I watch the slow smirk that crawls along his face. A glint of satisfaction makes him look almost manic, but I know Javier, and I know he's clearly done something to the younger man.

"He's trying to impress me," he tells me. "I'm handsome, a motherfucking god in my own right. Not my fault everyone wants to fuck me." He seems elated with this information.

"You let him suck your dick?" I question, waiting for a response.

"Not yet, but he's definitely doing as I say for now. It's the promise of forbidden fruit, and you dangle it like a carrot until they obey. It's a beautiful agreement between master and slave."

"I see." Settling back in my chair, I lift the cigar to my lips and take a long drag, filling my lungs with smoke. As I puff out white cloudy circles, the woman I fucked last night comes strolling into my office. Casting my glance at her, I question, "Did I offer you an invite to enter?"

She freezes mid-step. "I-I..." Her glance flits over to me, then to Javier. "*Lo siento*, Mr. Cordero," she utters in fake innocence. This bitch is so far from innocent. Last night, I fucked her ass so hard, leaving it gaping from the thickness of my dick. And she licked my cock after, like it was a fucking lollipop.

"Get out." Waving my hand in the air, I dismiss her. The shock on her face is clear, but I don't give a fuck about her feelings. She was a hole for the night.

"But—"

Pinning her with a glare, which advises her not to question me, I wait until the whore is out of my space and Javier is at the door, ordering men to escort her off the property. He normally admonishes me when I've had some whore in the house, mainly because he doesn't trust them. To be fair, I don't either, that's why I offer them enough coke to ensure they're too high to remember any shit that went down.

And if they talk, they'll lose their tongue, among other important bits. I'm ruthless. A cold-hearted asshole, and I like to keep it that way. My father spent years telling me that if I ever appeared weak, I would lose everything—the Cartel, my home, and my country. He trained me that way, and I need to make him proud because I loved him more than I knew was possible. He was my hero, someone I looked up to all my life. He was a good man, but he was never weak. Even on his deathbed, he showed strength in his sickness. So, I decided that I would never have a woman weaken me by falling

in love. And even though I did break that rule once, I vowed to never do it again.

“I want this fucker found.” My finger jabs the folder as I snub out my cigar in the ashtray, before meeting Javier’s inquisitive gaze. He’s expecting me to explain who the fuck the whore was, but that’s not happening.

“He will be, Victor,” he tells me in his thick accent that matches mine. “How about we head out of the city to the house on the coast? It would give us time to figure out what we’re going to about Rodrigo.” His suggestion has me quirking a brow. “It’s been too long since we’ve been on the beaches of Cancun.”

“It has, but this needs to be dealt with first.”

“He’s not stupid enough to work for us and steal, then try to resell.” He’s right. None of my workers would have the balls to do shit like that. Not because they’re idiots, but because they know what happens to those who take what belongs to me.

“We’ll see.”

The sun beats down on my shoulders, and the stifling heat steals my breath as I rush through the street to get home before my dad arrives back from work. The ocean air is fresh, with the soft scent of salt hanging overhead. The docks are noisy, offering me a reminder of who my father is and where he works.

All my life, living with papá, I've learned to stay out of trouble by going to school and spending time at work. The part-time job I have at the music store down the road from our house offers me some solace, giving me time away from the worrying thoughts of what would happen if my father fulfilled his promise.

He told me to stop working. To stay home and take care of myself, but I haven't given strength to my illness. Instead, I've focused on being healthy, even though slowly, I'm deteriorating without my medication on a consistent level.

My mother always told me as a child, *sé fuerte.* "Be strong." It was the mantra I grew up with, a constant reminder that I can do anything I want. Anything I need to be the woman I dreamed of being. But now that she's gone, it's another reminder that even life fucks you over at times.

Shaking my head of my wayward thoughts, I head inside the house and shut the door behind me. The one thing I love about our home is that it offers a cool relief in the searing heat. An air conditioner sits against the wall, taking the sweltering humidity and giving an icy breeze to make my sticky skin chill with goose bumps.

I glance at the large clock on the wall. It's almost time for dinner. Six pm is when papá walks through the door, and I'm met with his happy grin. It took him a while to smile again. After my mother died, he became cold and closed off, but then I got sick.

Perhaps that jolted him from the stupor he'd been living in for so long, or maybe it was his need to protect me, but something changed. And as much as I wanted my father back, he didn't return the same person. He became more protective, and the sicker I got, the more he would fuss.

"Papá," I call into the empty house, knowing he's not home, but it calms me to do it. My mother would step over the threshold and call for both my dad and me. Each evening, I would run into her arms. She would wrap me in warmth, and I'd watch on as she would be devoured by my father. He would kiss her like his life depended on it.

I never knew a love like that. Not even my friends at school spoke of their parents and the affection they'd witnessed. Growing up, visiting my friends' homes, I never saw an ounce of what lived and breathed in the home I grew up in.

There was just something more between them. When I was older, the idea of that type of passion

consumed me, making me crave it. The fire, the passion, even their fights were filled with love. Don't get me wrong, there was anger, far too much of it, but each night, it ended with them making up noisily.

I was embarrassed, but I was also elated that even though their fights were almost violent, my father had a way of making my mother coo. She would tell him he was the handsomest man in the world. That he owned her heart and soul.

That was the only thing I never understood. Yes, I'd read fairy tales; yes, I got love and having sex, but having someone *own* you. That never sat well with me. I guess perhaps it was my immaturity, but there was something dangerous in the way she had confessed it.

My father was a man who loved his family, but with my mother, he became more intense. She was his property. But the moment I stepped into the room, the air would change, and it wouldn't feel as all-consuming.

To me, ownership meant you would never be allowed to do anything of your own free will. You're bound, locked to that person for life, and they have complete control of everything you do. For me, that sounded like a death sentence, and I knew all about that.

Before my mother died, she learned about my disease. She knew that I wouldn't last without medication, treatment, or some normalcy. Even though she had meager savings, she had made sure I would get treatment for a few years after she died.

As much as papá tries, he'll never be able to keep up with the payments on my medical bills. And that's okay, I've come to terms with dying. I've prayed to a god I never believed in, and if I ever came face to face with the Devil I know exists in our world, I'd beg him, not for riches or power, just for a chance at life.

Making my way into the kitchen, I pull the meat from the freezer and pop it into the microwave to defrost. I asked my father to do it before he left for work, but clearly, he forgot about it.

The chicken slowly spins on the glass plate. I watch the meat turn around and around. The medication I've taken is slowly wearing off, and I feel sick, once more, watching the rotating item.

Holding my stomach, I race into the bathroom and spill my guts into the toilet bowl. The lunch I'd managed to finish earlier is now lying in the pool of water. Sadness washes over me when I realize I'll never be able to afford treatment, or the transplant that would possibly save my life. Even though papá works for one of the richest men in Colombia, I know he'll never be able to pay for me to get better.

On my knees, in the tiny bathroom, I heave once more, and then again. The emptiness of my body offering nothing more to expel. The thought of my father's boss makes me dry heave, one more time, before I stand on shaky legs.

The man they've named, The Devil, is every bit as evil as the title ensures. He lives in a castle, a monstrosity on the beautiful coast of my small city. Santa Marta is pristine, bar for one dark noose—the Cordero Castle.

It was built years ago by the man who ruled Colombia with an iron fist, and now, his son is as bad as he is. Papá has worked for the Cordero's all his life. Since he was sixteen, he's been pulled in by their dark promises of riches and wealth, only to be rewarded with a small house and meager earnings. But my father is loyal to a fault, he goes back each day with the promise that he'll be able to pay for my medication.

Even though I beg him not to go back, I know there's no running from Victor Cordero. The man is ruthless, he doesn't take kindly to anyone going against his rules, and the thought of ever coming face to face with him sends a chill racing down my spine.

If I had a choice between death and the man my father is so loyal to, I'd choose the former. It seems an easier way of leaving this world. I've heard the stories, I've heard it from the girls who ventured into his domain—stories of his sick needs, his violent tendencies, but I've also heard that he's never kept one woman in his life for longer than one night.

Shaking my head once more, I try to focus on dinner. But I can't, whenever I think about Victor, there's something that niggles deep in my gut, and I know that sleeping serpent will want to play. Each time she awakens, I tamp her down. But there are moments where I crave it, the darkness, the danger.

I wouldn't back down if he were to summon me. And perhaps, that's what I hunger for so deeply. The fire between two people. I want to experience the sting of pain and taste the drop of poison, just to feel alive and bask in the passion I crave. And I know not many men can offer me that. Not many men who I *want* can give me that.

But Victor is a bad man.

And bad men get killed.

Or they kill you first.

The moon hangs high in the dark sky tonight, surrounded by the tiny pinpricks of white. I've always loved the night, there are so many things you can do under the cloak of darkness. Lifting the tumbler to my lips, I take a long swallow of the dark rum that I favor.

Most of my men prefer beer, but I've always enjoyed the burn of liquor. The sweet, strong alcohol warms my blood as it burns through my veins. Javier informed me they have a lead on the asshole who's been selling coke in my territory, and I'm certain, by tomorrow, I'll have him bound and bleeding.

Anyone who crosses me pays. Either with their life or with their families' lives—no exception. A sweet scent of perfume comes from behind me, and I expect her hand to slide over my shoulder any moment. I don't turn around. I don't acknowledge the woman who's here for the night.

"*Señor,*" she utters in a sultry tone.

"Helena," I turn to face her. She's one of the prettier whores who frequents my estate. Most are older, but this young one just turned twenty-one. Her long dark hair hangs in waves down her back. Big hazel eyes shine with excitement to be called to my room. They know if they please me, they'll be able to frequent the compound, get any drugs they want, and even get paid.

"Thank you for the opportunity to be your comfort tonight. *Aprecio estar aqui.*" She smiles as she tells me how much she appreciates being under my roof. Of course, she does, the only reason her pert ass swayed in here is to get a stack of hundred-dollar bills, or she wants the high that comes with fucking the king. A whore will spread her thighs for any amount of money, but this one is particularly interested in the drug I deal in.

I take in the pretty girl while sipping my drink. Tipping my head to the side, I offer her a smirk before ordering, "I want you naked on the bed. Open your legs, show me your pretty cunt."

Her cheeks darken, making the olive skin even more beautiful than before. I watch her slip the dress she's wearing to the floor. She steps out of the pool of material, offering me a glimpse of her naked curves.

Her long legs climb onto the mattress, and she settles on her back, her big eyes finding mine. Desire swims in her hazel orbs, their color like liquid gold. My men would have a field day with her. But if I allowed them to, she'd never be able to walk straight again.

Entering my bedroom, I set the glass on the cabinet, slowly unbuttoning my shirt as I allow my gaze to trail over her body. Her tits are perfect handfuls of smooth caramel with dark nipples, which are hard peaks.

"Touch your flesh, stroke yourself with your finger," I tell her, standing at the foot of the bed. The

warm breeze that billows the curtains causes her to shiver, but then again, it might just be my harsh words.

Tentatively, she drops a hand between her thighs. Slender fingers find the already wet lips. She spreads herself for me, offering me a glimpse of the pink hole I'm about to sink my dick into.

“Are you a virgin?”

“No, *señor*,” she murmurs as she pleasures herself. I'm enamored with the way she moves. A seductress if ever I've seen one. If she was pure, that would make this so much more sensual. I love breaking virgins, feeling their tight walls grip my thick cock as I feel their slick crimson virtue. But she looks sweet and tight enough.

Shoving my slacks down past my knees, I step out of them and my briefs follow. Her gaze lands on the erection jutting from my hips and a soft gasp falls from her lips.

Gripping my dick, I fist it a couple of times before sheathing myself. Never fuck these whores without a condom. Come to think of it, I've never stuck my cock in anyone without a rubber.

I crawl onto the mattress, hovering over her, as she continues to toy with her clit. Big eyes gape at me when I settle between her thighs and nudge her entrance.

“This is going to hurt,” I warn, before sliding into her in one long thrust. Her scream is music to my ears as she grips me with her free hand, nails clawing my shoulder as my hips meet hers.

She mewls, pleading for me to slow, but I can't. I'm lost in pleasure as I fuck her brutally into the mattress. “You know I'm not a good man, but you wanted it anyway. Didn't you, little whore?” I smirk down at her as my hips slam her harder and faster. She's crying out for a god who will never save her, when I reach between us, my fingers strumming her clit the way I would a musical instrument. Before she has time to think, an orgasm is torn from her body, and she cries out.

As much as I enjoy fucking, there's no pleasure in this anymore. I fuck her until I find my release. Once I've emptied into the condom, I pull out of her, moving off the bed hastily. I reach for her dress, throwing it at her and glance over my shoulder. I utter “time for you to leave,” before heading into the adjoining bathroom.

“VICTOR.”

Glancing up, I find Javier entering my office. I'm ready to head out to a meeting, but he seems far too excited, so I allow him to stop me for a moment before I leave.

“You're never going to believe it,” he tells me, waving his hand in the air for effect. “The cunt who's been selling in our city is one of our men.”

“What?” This is news to me. No man who works for me is allowed to deal. They know it, even the fucking peasants who live on the street know it. Anger sizzles through me, trickling into my blood, heating it. I'm ready to torture the asshole who's decided his life is worth nothing. “Who the fuck is he?”

“Hector Montero.” The name is not new to me. I've known Hector since I was a little boy. He worked for my father for a long time, and when my old man died, Hector stayed on. I didn't know much about his personal life, but I knew my father trusted him.

“That doesn't make sense.” Shaking my head, I settle in the chair and pull out the drawer where I keep records of all the men who work for me. Flipping through the folders, I pull out the one on Hector, wanting to compare the photos we have on file of him when he joined to the ones from the

footage. "Give me that folder."

Javier places the informant's photos on the desk, and I slide them beside our worker images. Give or take a few years, that's him. There's no doubt. Even with the cap covering half his face.

"We found the buyer," Javier informs me, as he seats himself in the chair that's become his throne in this office. "He's confirmed Hector mentioned he's getting a kilo of coke, he's selling it for a couple thousand."

"I just don't understand what would drive a man to do this."

Javier shrugs, pulling out a cigarette, lighting it, then glancing my way. "We'll bring him in." He's confident. I have no doubt they will. "In other news, your pretty little whore from last night ran out of here crying. Did you fuck her ass without lube or something?"

"Fuck you."

He chuckles, blowing out a plume of white smoke, before arching a dark brow at me. He loves to hear about my escapades with them. I'm not sure if he actually gets off on it, or if he's simply comparing notes. It's no secret that once they've fucked me, they jump into the beds of my men.

"Why? You want a piece of her?"

"Perhaps. She was...*inocente*."

Shaking my head, I chuckle, before rising. "I have a meeting. Find Hector, take him to the warehouse and I'll meet you there. I want him captured before sundown."

"*Cualquier cosa por ti.*" *Anything for you.* He winks confidently, offering a grin, before I leave him in my office. The only man in my organization who's allowed in there while I'm away.

It's been a long afternoon and weariness has settled on my shoulders. My lashes flutter, threatening to shut, but I force myself to stay awake. The bell on the door chimes, causing me to meet ice blue eyes. The man seems familiar somehow, but for the life of me, I can't place him, and I wonder just who he is. Dressed in a charcoal suit, he looks like he's far too wealthy to be inside this shit hole.

Don't get me wrong, I love the small run-down store, but nobody comes in here anymore. The instruments sit gathering dust, and the old bookshelves with autobiographies have seen better days.

His mouth quirks when his golden gaze lands on me. There's a darkness that seems to follow him around like a foreboding entity as he saunters into the small space of the store. He nears the desk silently, then taps two fingers on the countertop, leaning in before he speaks.

"I'm looking for a Mr. Hernandez."

The thick baritone of his accent is nothing short of perfection. Silky smooth and filled with richness, reminding me of a black coffee with no sugar—strong and thick. He could melt panties with just one word, but it doesn't faze me, at least, that's what I tell myself.

"He's out. Meeting with someone."

His dark brow arches as he regards me. "And he knows how you speak with customers, *niñita*?" He calls me *little girl* like he's decided who and what I am before he's really spoken to me.

Rising from my seat, I round the desk, realizing my mistake as soon as I step in front of him. The man is easily over six foot four, his broad shoulders and towering frame dwarf me as if I'm insignificant.

"If you need something, I can help, but like I said, Mr. Hernandez is out. And I'm not sure when he'll be back." Crossing my arms in front of my chest, I watch him through narrowed eyes. I've never seen a man more devastatingly handsome before. Granted, I've never had a boyfriend, or even bothered to look for one, but *Mr. Dark and Handsome* over here has my interest piqued.

A dark chuckle rumbles in his chest, and it vibrates through me, making my heart catapult wildly in my chest at the sound. It reminds me of a bass strumming right at the heart of me.

"Feisty," he remarks, offering me a slight bow before he turns for the door, leaving me at the desk with nothing more than a sly glance. As soon as the bell chimes, telling me he's gone, I release the breath I'd been holding. The moment I take another inhale, I'm assaulted with the faint scent of cigars and spice.

Even though there was a danger to the man, I wonder who he is and if I'll ever see him again. Settling in the small stool at the piano, I close my eyes and allow my fingers to dance along the keys.

As the melody echoes around me, the golden eyes of the handsome stranger haunt me along with his sensual voice.

I fly through two songs before the door opens and my boss walks into the store. He's smiling from ear to ear when I glance up, his face lit by happiness.

"Sofia," he calls to me as he enters, setting his briefcase on the desk. "I've found a wonderful student. She'll be coming in to help when you go to school." I told him two weeks ago that I want to study in America. My father, even though he doesn't want me to go and will attempt to stop me, can't deny it will be good for my future career. I've wanted to study music and going to New York would be a life changing move.

At first, I wanted to stay home and look after papá, but when the scholarship was granted, I knew I had to make a move. I had to leave here before I ended up in a dead-end job. Even though papá has pleaded with me to stay local, I can't help the wanderlust that drives me each day.

I know he can tell when he looks at me that his little girl is growing up. I'm becoming a woman and he doesn't have a choice any longer. He's going to have to support me. I know my mother would've wanted it, she always told me to fly like a bird. My mother was a free spirit, someone who could easily pack her bags and head out onto the long empty road.

"That's great, Mr. Hernandez," I tell him with a smile. "Someone came by looking for you." My words give him pause. "A man in an expensive suit. He didn't say who he was, just walked out after I told him you were away."

"Ah, don't worry about it." He waves me off, seemingly not too bothered by the stranger's visit. "Tomorrow, we will have a client come for the piano." He rushes into the back office, then comes flying out and hands me a cloth and waves his hands about. "Clean, girl, we need it shining. The man is one of the most important in this country."

"What?" I sound like a dumbfounded imbecile when I realize he may be talking about the one man I hate. The only man who can instill cold fear inside my veins.

"Mr. Cordero, he is coming for the piano." He seems excited, happy even, that the Devil of Colombia is going to be in his store. I'm not working tomorrow, thankfully, but the thought of my father's boss walking into my safe space puts me on edge.

While I shine the instrument, I wonder what he's going to use it for. It's stupid, I mean, what else would someone use a piano for? To play music. But I can't see how a man like him would even enjoy music, or anything that resembles something normal.

Once I'm finished, I rise from where I'm kneeling on the floor, placing the cloth on the desk, and make my way to the back to let my boss know I'm leaving. As soon as I step out of the store moments later, I feel the sweat trickling down my spine, causing me to shiver. Even under the heat of the setting sun, I know it's not the only reason I feel uncomfortable.

VICTOR

There have been many times I wondered what it would be like to have a normal life. Perhaps to live in another country, to spend time with a woman who loves me, rather than one who fucks me as payment for her husband not returning the loan he'd begged me for. There are times I think about how it would feel to not be the most feared man in Colombia, but then I laugh because I know I'd never be able to live that life.

I am proud of who I am. And I never regret the things I do because that's the way I've been taught. My father made sure I learned that guilt and regret are two emotions I never fall prey to.

Today, I have a job. One that requires me to make sure the man in question learns his lesson for trying to steal from me. When someone encroaches on my territory, they pay dearly. They pay with limbs, and some are tortured for a long while before they pay with their lives.

My men lead me through the empty parking lot, flanking me in the event one of my enemies makes an attempt on my life. They watch me diligently. It's what I pay them for. Pulling out a cigar, I snip off the tip and place the fat stick between my lips. One of my bodyguards flicks a lighter, ensuring the cherry burns bright red before killing the flame.

Inhaling a thick drag of the intoxicating nicotine, I smile as they jerk open the heavy metal doors of the warehouse as I near it. The screech of wheels at the bottom of the door that haven't been oiled in years is the only sound besides the screaming from inside the building.

The gravel underfoot crunches with every step I take toward the warehouse. I was told the man I needed to see was here. My men have him bound to a chair, naked, with two large fans blowing cold air on his wet body, which will keep him shivering and weak. It might sound easy to sit through, especially in this fucking heat, but it's definitely not.

I don't fuck around when it comes to torture. I revel in it. And when I find out the men who work for me want to steal my product, I don't take kindly to it. That's why my name is whispered in fear amongst the various criminal organizations around the country, amongst dealers, and even my own men. It's how I earned the respect of each one of them. I ensured they knew what would happen if they decided to fuck me over.

But for now, I'll focus on the fucker who decided to shove a few bags of coke up his ass to resell. He figured he'd be able to make money off my product, what he didn't know is that I'm the only one in the city, in the country, who pushes the white powder, and it's easy to find out if anyone else attempts it.

"He's been mumbling about his daughter," Javier, my right-hand man, tells me.

"And what has he been saying about his daughter?"

He shrugs. “Her medication is late, or something, his jaw is fucked, we can’t really understand much.” There’s a glint in his eye, and I know that it’s probably his fist that broke Montero’s jaw. When Javier walked into my office the first time, I refused to allow him to work for me. I told him he was far too young. He told me to fuck off. We knew each other too long, and I finally relented.

He was full of fire and that’s what made me hire him to clean the weapons. Even though I was only twenty at the time, I knew what I was looking for. The need to become someone in this dark, criminal world shone in his wide eyes convinced me. I taught him everything I know, and he moved up in the ranks within two years. Now, he accompanies me everywhere.

“Well, I best go inside and hear it for myself,” I tell him, as I step into the large building. An immediate chill seeps through the material of my crisp white shirt and I can’t imagine how Hector Montero must feel sitting on a metal chair with no clothes on and two industrial fans blowing directly onto him.

My footsteps are silent on the concrete floor as I near him. His face is indeed *fucked*, blood drips from his nose, mouth, and one ear, which tells me that they’ve blown an eardrum. His hands are bound behind him, his legs tied to either side of the chair.

“Mr. Montero, *el hombre de la hora*” I say, keeping my voice level, causing him to jerk his head, then wince as pain must’ve shot through his neck. “My men have told me you’re co-operating very well.”

“V-Victor,” he mutters my name in his thick accent. “Mr. Cordero, *por favor, te lo ruego*,” he gurgles. “I beg, please.” His repetitive words are frustrating to say the least, but I nod once to let him speak. “If you kill me, my daughter will die.”

I drop the cigar to the floor, the toe of my shoe grinding it into the ground, ensuring the red cherry is snuffed out, just like I want to do to Hector. I glance at him once more. “And I’m supposed to care?”

“Please, I can’t, she’s innocent.” His words intrigue me. There’s so much affection in his bloodshot eyes for this daughter, which only makes me see my father was right. Love, and any sort of emotion like it, makes a man weak, and Hector certainly is the weaker one here.

“How old is your daughter?”

His one eye focuses on me, watching intently as he responds. “Eighteen. She’s the only thing I have left in this world.” Even though I can barely make out what he’s saying, it’s clear the man is more worried about his daughter than the fact that I’ve got him chained in my warehouse. “She... she’s too young to be alone in this world.”

I wonder what this sweet innocent young woman looks like. Perhaps I can bring her here as my payment. I can toy with her and watch her suffer for her father’s stupidity. I generally know everything about the men I work with, but Hector used to work for my father, then he continued on when I took over, so I never learned more about him, other than the fact that my father trusted him.

“And what is the name of your daughter?”

His mouth opens, then closes, and I’m certain he knows why I’m asking her name. I don’t do things just for the sake of doing them. When I ask a question, it’s because I have a plan.

“I don’t like repeating myself, Hector. *Con rapidez*.”

“Sofia. Her name is Sofia, but—” Finally, he offers what I need.

“That is all, Hector,” I bite out. The sweet little Sofia Montero will be brought to me, and I’ll keep her as payment for what her father took from me.

“Please, Mr—”

“*Bueno*. You’ve pleased me today. I will allow you to live, for now.” I stalk closer, lifting my

foot. I place one shiny black sole on the chair between his legs, causing him to cower in fear. "I'll pay a visit to your home, ensure your daughter is taken care of."

"Please, don't hurt her, Victor, Mr. Cordero," he pleads tearfully. His face is contorted in agony as I press the toe of my shoe against his crotch, which is shriveled from the cold.

"You stole from me, Hector, which means only one thing." I allow my sentence to hang in the air between us. I don't have to tell him what I plan to do because it's obvious.

"No, please, *por favor*." His voice cracks, and I know there's no wife to speak of, because if there was, he'd have mentioned her.

"Where is she?" He stares at me dumbstruck. Even if he refuses to tell me, I'll find her. "Hector, you know I have contacts, I'll find her."

"*Señor, por favor, por favor*." He repeats his plea, only making me angrier with each passing second. My shoe makes contact with his dick, pressing down harder, causing him to cry out in agony when I feel the flesh give way under the pressure.

"Put him in a holding cell down at the dock, I want to find the girl first." Turning, I leave my men to clean up the mess and the stench that's been burning through my nostrils for the past ten minutes. Pulling my phone from my pocket, I hit dial on the number of one of my contacts who I sent earlier to Hector's house.

"Sir."

"Have you found anything?"

"The house is empty, doesn't look like anyone has lived here for a few days. And there's no sign of a girl." Shaking my head, I hang up without responding to him. I pull out a packet of cigarettes, tapping one out, before lighting it with the silver Zippo with the crest of my organization emblazoned on the side.

As we make our way to the black SUV, I turn to my right. "Javier, I want the best man for this job. The girl is my payment from Hector, and I would like to ensure my payment arrives safely," I tell the only man I trust with my life.

"I'll call Diago," he tells me, with an efficient nod, while pulling out his cell phone.

Diago is an expert in making a kill. I've heard whispers about him, and I'm certain he's heard about me. Today, I will ask for his help in collecting the girl, and his payment will be substantial. What he's best known for is slicing men from head to toe, but today, he'll work for the king of Colombia.

The moment I step into the house, I wonder why my father isn't home. It's almost eight, and he never stays out this late. Setting my purse on the table, I pull out my cell phone and hit dial on his number. It rings a few times before going to voicemail. I try once more finding it going directly to the messages this time which sets unease coiling in my stomach.

"Papá, where are you? Call me."

I hang up, resigned to making ramen noodles for dinner. Even though my father works late at times, he never, and I mean never allows his phone to go to voicemail. An eerie feeling overtakes me and a cold shiver trickles down my spine.

If my father doesn't come home soon, I'll have to call his work. I've never needed to call the number that's pinned to the fridge, but if I have to, I will.

Sighing, I grab the pot from the sink and give it a quick wash before filling it and setting it on the cooker. My phone vibrates, and I'm sure it's papá, but when I glance at the screen, I notice it's the reminder to take my medication. The same medicine that's running out. I should lower my dosage to make sure I have some left until we can afford more, but my head is spinning from the heat and not having eaten, so I open my purse and find the tablets.

Swallowing two tablets, I gulp them down with a swig of water from the bottle I keep in the fridge. I should've eaten first. They make me drowsy, and the water is only just boiling now. In five minutes, I'll be almost passed out on the sofa if I'm not careful.

There's nothing I can do to stop this sickness that's eating away at me. The doctors did tests, but we ran out of money before they could offer me any advice as to what they can do. I've read up on it, and I know there's a surgery to halt it in its tracks, but with the cost of my mother's funeral, and the expenses of my father's car, the house, and school, there's no money left for my medication.

I drop the brick of noodles in the bubbling water, watching as it softens in the heat, and I wonder if Victor has ever done something like that to a person. I've heard stories about the man who lives in the castle on the hill, but I've never come across him.

It reminds me of the movies I've watched on TV of bad men who end up dying for the things they've done. But for some reason, Mr. Cordero has survived years of torturing innocent people.

Anger bubbles through me like the water in the pot that's cooking my dinner. As soon as they're completely soft, I turn off the heat, and my head spins wildly for a moment. Swiftly, I hold onto the countertop to keep from keeling over, until the dizzy spell passes.

"Where are you, papá?" I whisper to the empty house. My phone buzzes, startling me. With one hand still gripping the counter, I reach for it with my free hand. Hitting the green button, I press the

device to my ear. “Papá?”

“Sofía?” The deep rumble of my father’s good friend Guillermo comes from the other end of the line. “Are you at home?” he questions in a voice that has me turning cold.

“Where is he?”

“Sofía, listen to me. Are you at home?”

“Yes,” I hiss, slumping to the floor, no longer strong enough to hold myself up. Something bad has happened, I feel it in the pit of my stomach. Tears sting my eyes, making everything blur before me, and I attempt to blink the emotion away.

“I need you to be strong now. *Escúchame bien?*” He growls for me to listen to him.

I nod, mumbling my response in a raspy tone, “*Si, tío.*”

“In your father’s bedroom, there’s a chest of drawers, put your hand in the back of the bottom drawer to find a set of keys. I’ll text you an address. Take some clothes in a backpack, enough for you to run. If you want to take any personal belongings make sure you can carry it for long distances. Sofía —”

“What’s happening?” I cry, losing my shit because I can’t do this. I can’t lose my papá when my mother is gone as well. I’ll be alone. I’ll have nobody. “Please, tell me.”

“He’s been captured by Cordero,” he spits into the speaker, causing my body to freeze.

“What?”

“I’ll explain everything, I just need you to get out of that house, they’ll come for you. Get out, Sofía! *¡Hazlo ahora!*” That’s all he says before hanging up, leaving me crying on the kitchen floor of my childhood home.

SHUTTING THE DOOR BEHIND ME, I lean against the thick wood, praying it will keep me safe. Deep down, I know it won’t. Nothing can hide me from the man who my father warned me about all my life.

I wonder if I should’ve called Rodrigo. If he would be able to help me, but when I recall our last interaction, I shudder. I *dated* him for a few months, thinking he would be able to pay for my medication, but he wanted more than I was willing to give.

My chest aches when I think about running low on my medicine. The heart I was born with isn’t as strong as it should be, I know I can’t go too long without seeing a doctor. My phone rings as soon as I’m inside, and I wonder if he’s watching me. I hit answer and hold the phone to my ear. “*Tío?*”

“Are you safe, *querido?*”

“I’m at the apartment.” Seating my ass on the sofa, I hang my head, wondering what the fuck is going on. “Tell me.”

“Your father was caught stealing and selling Victor’s drugs.”

“Oh, god.” My groan is the only answer I can offer. *Why the hell would he do this?* For me?

“I have to go. They’re searching everywhere for you. Sofía, you need to get out of the city. Stay at the apartment till early morning, leave in the dark. Just run. Please.”

“*Si, gracias, tío.*”

He hangs up before responding, and my heart sinks even further. Victor is evil, he’ll kill papá, there’s no question about it. All because of me and this stupid fucking disease in my body.

At eighteen, I’ve heard about things that would give any other child nightmares about my father’s boss. Being the only daughter, and having my father be a single parent, hasn’t been easy. His job with

the Cordero Organization changed him from a calm, loving dad to a stressed-out man who only worked.

I hardly saw him, and when I did, his eyes had dark circles under them, and I knew he feared that if he lost his job, he'd lose me too. Not by choice, but because nature decided his daughter needed a life-threatening illness and the medication was far too expensive for him to afford on his salary. He couldn't afford the surgery, so the pills had to keep the evil at bay.

Even though Victor's father had given mine enough money for the family, Dad had his own demons before my mother passed away. His gambling made for a dangerous addiction, and when I learned that papá had lost most of our money in blackjack, I knew I had to grow up sooner rather than later.

Papá spent his life working for one of the most notorious men in Colombia. And when my father's friend, who worked alongside him all these years, called an hour ago, I knew I had to run. Since mama died ten years ago, I've grown up in the roughest of neighborhoods, but nothing would prepare me for the wrath of the one man we all fear, if he finds me.

Victor Cordero.

Papá got caught trying to steal drugs from his boss, and it's all my fault. He did it for me, but he was stupid. I told him I'd be fine, that if I could go to America, I would be able to ask for help with my medication. But he still made the mistake of crossing the one man who can end his life with a flick of his wrist.

My heart aches when I think about what they're probably doing to him or have done to him. Victor is a man with no conscience. He's violent, unpredictable, and heartless. Killing someone would be fun for him; he wouldn't think twice about slitting my father's throat and basking in the glory of the kill.

Moving away from the door, I settle on the small single bed that overlooks the dusty city below. This place is my home, and I refuse to leave my father here. He left strict instructions for me to take the money he'd hidden beneath the floorboards and run, but I need to know he's safe, or even alive, before I think about leaving.

There is nothing here for me if my father is dead, but I have a feeling Victor will toy with me. He'll lure me out, using my father as bait. That's what he does, he hurts people. The hate I've felt for him over the years has only intensified the older I got. I've never seen him, papá has always kept me away from his job, hidden from the man who maims without giving it a second thought.

When he took over the organization, things got more intense, more rigid. He had rules which he never wavered from. My papá worked every day, almost twelve hours, just to make enough to buy my medication. When I overheard his plan to steal cocaine and resell it to get my new prescription, I ran into the kitchen where he spoke to Lorenzo, his friend and confidante, and pleaded with him not to do it. I told him it's far too dangerous, but he was adamant. He was the parent, and it was his job to care for me. Not the other way around.

The small burner phone rings in my purse, startling me in the silence of the apartment that I'm hiding in. But as soon as I grab it and hit the answer button, I realize it's a mistake.

"Ah, there she is." The thick accented voice of who I can only assume is Victor Cordero comes across the line. I've heard him before; while papá spoke to him on the phone, I used to spy on his phone calls when he'd phone our landline. *Papá* never had a cellphone, so Victor would contact him on the old phone, which sat on our kitchen table. Only, papá never used to hear me pick the handset up in his room and eavesdrop on what was being said. "I do like a good game of cat and mouse, Sofía."

"This isn't a game," I retort hotly, but sound squeakier and more afraid than feisty and confident. He has my father, and I need to make sure he doesn't hurt him any more than I'm sure he already has.

“That’s where you’re wrong, *juguete*.” He calls me ‘*plaything*’ like it’s my name, which angers me, boiling my blood with rage. I need to breathe through the frustration and the fear that grip me. He’s taunting me, making me play his game, but I need to be strong. I need to be strong for my papá.

“Where is my father?”

“He is... indisposed at the moment,” he tells me. “Sofia, he did a very bad thing, and when people do bad things, I make sure they pay. Especially when they steal from me because that means I have to steal from them.”

“He didn’t—”

“Don’t fuck with me, little girl,” Victor sneers down the line. “Remember, I own this city. You can run, but you can never hide, because when I find you, I’ll make sure your *precioso papá* watches me own you.” His words send ice coursing through my veins, and I have a feeling he doesn’t mean as one of his servants. The thought revolts me, even his voice, dripping with malice, makes me convulse and causes acid to burn its way up my throat, threatening to expel from my mouth.

“And if I surrender, you’ll let him go?”

He laughs—dark and gravelly—and the sound rumbles through the speaker. It’s stupid of me to even ask. But I had to try.

“You have guts, Sofia,” he tells me. “But I don’t make deals with little girls.”

At that, he hangs up, and I know I’m no longer safe here. If he can contact me on a goddamn burner phone, then he can certainly find the building where my father bought an apartment under another name. Victor knows everything, which means I’m a sitting duck. I need to get out of here before he captures me, but then I think of papá and what’s he’s going through. *Can I leave him in the hands of a monster?*

Fear trickles down my spine like poison, slow and meticulous, just like the man hunting me, but I shake it off. Mr. Cordero will never find me. I may be young, but I’m clever. My father made sure to give me all I needed, he educated me on how to disappear. And that’s what I’ll do. I’m strong, I can endure anything he throws my way.

Sofia's feistiness makes me hard. As soon as I hang up, I smile because I have a feeling this girl is going to be so much fun to break apart. Once I have her here under my roof, I'll make sure she obeys me. The thought of her working for me, paying off her father's debt is an idea that easily pops into my mind. Yes, she can bring my meals, clean my room, and when my body craves a woman, she can ride my dick. I wonder if she'll refuse. Fight me when I command her to take my cock deep in her tight cunt.

Just one taste. I promise myself as I focus on the work before me. Two men are bringing in a shipment of coke that I'm certain will bring in triple what I'm paying them. A profit is always welcome, so when I hit reply on the email to my client, I tell him to meet me tomorrow night, so we can make the exchange.

That's one thing I never do, work from home. All my transactions take place at the warehouses I have around the city. My home is my sanctuary, and I don't bring *business* into it. If a deal goes badly, it doesn't reach the safety of my compound.

A knock at the door catches my attention, and Javier saunters inside. He settles opposite my desk, unbuttoning his suit jacket. His one ankle rests on the opposite knee as he regards me with a smirk.

"And?" I question.

"He's on it. Told me to give him forty-eight hours and she'll be in hand." His grin makes him look far younger than his thirty-one years.

"Good work. And you told him she's not to be harmed?"

"Yes, Boss, he understands," Javier nods. "Have you managed to get hold of her on that burner phone Lorenzo blurted about?"

"I did. She's feisty, I want to break her and make her kneel for me." I lean back, picking up my cigar, I light it and take a long puff, inhaling the thick smoke. "She'll be a challenge."

"I've never known you to back down from a challenge, Boss." I nod at his assumption. "I wonder what she looks like," he ponders.

"She's far too young for your ass," I tell him, chuckling.

"You do realize you're older than me, Boss?" He grins, the asshole fucking grins. If he was anyone else, I'd grab him by the hair, shove him down on his knees then slit his throat until he's bleeding all over my carpet.

But Javier is my only friend. That may sound sad to most people, but to me, it's what I live for. I always strive for perfection, and he's the only person in my life who I trust to give me that.

And that is the reason why I don't have a woman beside me. Most of the whores who walk into

my compound are here for drugs, money, or protection. Granted, I would give those things to them, but most are far too easy. They offer their filthy cunts to me with little effort on my part. I enjoy the fight, the back and forth. I love fire. The only time I want a woman to beg is when she's pleading for my thick cock.

"Respect your elders, Javier," I tell him on a chuckle. I suck in another lungful of air before dropping my head back to enjoy the smoke filling my chest. The calming flavor of the cigar is what I love about smoking. Just knowing that the sweetness on my tongue can take away the ever-present stench of blood when I'm working is the reason I carry one whenever I'm out. But when I'm in my office, it allows me to relax. With a job like mine, there have to be things that offer solace.

"Did you want to go see Hector tomorrow, Victor?" Javier questions, pulling out his own pack of cigarettes and lighting one.

I watch him for a moment before responding. "Perhaps that's a good idea, I'll let him know that his sweet girl is on her way here," I tell him.

Sofia Montero is a mystery to me. I should look online for photos, her social media should be inundated with images, all young people have those at the moment, but I don't want to spoil the moment she's brought into my office for the first time.

I have a feeling Sofia will be something else. I have a feeling she'll surprise me and offer me her life for her father's. I wonder if she's the type to martyr herself for those she loves. And since her papá is the only one who's alive, I'm sure little Sofia will be promising all sorts of things to have me free her father.

THE MOMENT I walk into the warehouse, the stench hits my nostrils. Hector is cleaned up, somewhat, and he looks halfway human. Besides the broken jaw and the swollen eye.

"Victor," he rumbles.

"Sofia sends her love," I inform him, when I stop just in front of where he's chained to the chair. He stares at me through one eye, and I wonder if I should draw this out or kill him now. Sadly, the sweet tone of Sofia's voice reminds me that if I have leverage, I can toy with her.

"Have... have you...?"

"She's not here yet, but my men will find her. You've raised quite a firecracker, Hector." I chuckle, leaning in close to his face. "I'll make sure her fire is snuffed out like a flame. And you know why?" He doesn't move, so I continue. "You stole from me. I'm giving you an out here, Hector. Your daughter can spend sixty days with me, and you'll be clear of your debt."

There's surprise on his face, I'd recognize that expression anywhere. Men have looked at me with it when I've allowed them to walk out of here; the only difference is, as soon as their feet hit the red sand outside, they're shot in the back of the head.

I never offer anyone mercy. It's not in my blood.

"Anything," he wheezes, and I wonder just how much this asshole would do to clear his name from my shit list.

"Anything?" Tipping my head to the side in question, I wait for him to disagree, but he doesn't. "That to me means you, Hector Montero, are allowing me to take your sweet Sofia and keep her as my plaything until I decide otherwise. If that's your agreement, you'll be cleared of any wrongdoing and your debt to me will be paid."

His head moves slowly. “I agree. But...”

“Ah, there’s a but...” A smirk tilts my lips as I watch him blubber.

“There’s something you should know,” he lowers his voice, as if he’s about to tell me a secret. And when he finally speaks again, a secret he does tell me, and it only confirms that Sofia will be mine. I’ll make sure of it.

Darkness has settled on the city, and I'm slipping out of the apartment with my backpack. There's not much in it, but I've taken a few photos of me, my mother and father, and two of her necklaces—one that hangs around my neck, the other hidden in between the clothes that I've packed. Also, I have the money papá had hidden under the floorboards of our home, my passport, and two changes of clothes, which will need to be washed soon.

I don't know how long I'll be on the run or where I'll end up, but I know getting out of the city is the first thing I need to do. There's no rhyme or reason to my plan, only the need to see anything other than this godforsaken shit hole.

My heart is heavy as I reach the street. A few people mill around, but because of the hour, I know it's going to be quiet enough for me to run without being noticed. Most of the stragglers are drunk and don't even give me a second glance, which I'm thankful for.

Rushing past the music store, I offer it one last long stare before racing away. The piano I cleaned for Victor sits in the window proudly. I always found it strange that nobody ever attempted to break into the shop. Perhaps he was under the protection of the Cordero Cartel.

I never knew much about that sort of thing or how it worked. All I've overheard was people paid Victor for protection. To be kept safe from thugs. If you were hurt, robbed, or maimed by anyone, Victor would send his men, and they would leave you hanging on to your life by a fine string.

My feet move quickly up the road as I head away from the city. Away from my home. The place I grew up in slowly disappears behind me, and I can't think about anything else but leaving. Even though my eyes tear up, I don't look back.

I know there's nothing left for me in the city, there's no family left because, even if papá is still alive, I wonder how much longer he will be. Unless Victor wants to torture me, to toy with my emotions. I don't know him well enough, but perhaps he's someone who enjoys the mental torment, as well as the physical.

Once I reach the outskirts of the city, I breathe a small sigh of relief, but it doesn't last long when I hear a brawl not far from where I'm hidden in an alleyway. The bars are closing, the men are drunk, and I know I need to get out of here before I become the center of attention.

The darkness holds me in its embrace as I race further up the road and head into the space behind a building. There are a few dirty trash cans and the stench of them turns my stomach.

Swallowing past the lump in my throat, I close my eyes and pray. It's been a long time since I've prayed. Since I've asked someone other than my father for help.

My phone vibrates wildly in the pocket of my jeans, and I pull it out before moving further toward

the main road that will take me out of the city completely.

“*Ola, tito?*”

“Have you left?” His voice is low, a rumble that reminds me of just how much trouble I will be in if I’m caught.

He sighs in relief when I tell him, “I am. Almost out of the city.”

“Good. I’ll call you at nine, please be safe.” He hangs up once more, leaving me in the darkness with my vivid imagination and my racing heart. Shoving my phone back into my pocket, I make my way onto the road and head north.

It’s quieter here. With the silence, I have time to think about my life, my future. I’m not sure where I’ll end up, but in a way, I suppose I’ll be safe. All this time I’ve wanted to leave Colombia, and now that I can, I’ve never wanted to stay more, but that’s the sadness holding me in its feral grip, reminding me of all I’ve lost and what I still stand to lose.

THE SUN IS ALREADY high by the time I reach the empty road. The small backpack feels heavier than it is. Perhaps it’s the anxiety that’s coiling in my gut or the fear that’s riddling itself through my veins.

Sadness has clouded my mind like a drug tracing its way through me with every mile I get away from where my father is. Deep down, I know he’s still alive. What state he’s in is a mystery, but I doubt Victor would kill him if he wants me to play along with his cat and mouse game.

The loud bass of a sound system vibrates through me when a black SUV pulls up beside me. I don’t stop, I continue my steps through the dust, but the car follows alongside me. The window slides down, and the man inside looks at me, his dark shades covering his eyes, but I can feel the heat of his stare.

“*Hola pequeña niña,*” he utters in a thick accent that is almost husky with the way his voice sounds when he calls me *little girl*.

“Yeah?” I respond in English, attempting not to show my origin, even though my lifelong accent is unmistakable.

“*¿A dónde vas?*” he asks where I’m going, but fear settles in the pit of my stomach at his question. He lifts his sunglasses, peering at me with curiosity, and I’m not sure what to say.

Where am I going?

My gaze flits to the road ahead; there’s nothing in front of me, only deserted shacks. I can’t run, I have no way of getting away from this man in his SUV.

“I’m fine. I don’t need a lift.” I tell him, but I know that’s not what he asked or even said. I stalk my way forward, but he follows. My god, the car is right beside me, and I know I’m caught. This is not some random stranger. This man is going to take me to my fate. I cast a glance along the road, even though there are cars coming toward me, I know that they won’t help if I screamed or pleaded with them for assistance.

Nobody would attempt to anger Victor. And the stranger who’s peering at me with those dark, brooding eyes is here to deliver me to the Devil on a silver platter, and there’s nothing I can do about it.

“I’ll give you a lift,” he tells me, and I hear the click of the locks. “You can’t run, *mami.*” He smirks, as if reading my mind. “I find everything I’m hired to. I deliver what my clients want.” I know he does.

“*Quién eres tú?*” I finally turn to face him fully, still not getting in the car, but asking who he is. Surely if he’s here to take me to Victor, he can offer me his name.

The corner of his mouth lifts into a dark grin. “Curiosity killed the cat, *mami*,” he says, and the dangerous aura surrounding him is stifling.

I want to run, and he knows it. I’m sweating, my skin is sticky, and I’m feeling dizzy from the intense heat. My energy levels are running low, and I know if I attempt to get away from him, he’ll not only catch me, but he could hurt me as well. Working for Victor, he must be a killer.

“He asked you to collect me.” It’s not a question, but he nods. My worst fear has come true. My phone chimes in my pocket, and I realize it can only be one of two people. Pulling out the device, I find the unknown number glaring at me. *It’s him.*

“What?” I answer, pressing the phone to my ear.

“Ah, Sofia.” Victor’s deep voice comes from the other end of the line. “I trust my man has made contact with you?”

“He has.”

“He’s tasked to bring you back to me. If you give him any problems, he’s ordered to force your hand. I trust you don’t want that. Do you, *juguete?*”

“I’m no fucking toy. If you want me, I’ll come willingly, pay off my father’s debt to you so you can release him.”

He chuckles darkly over the speaker. The sound is utterly devastating, and I know I’m making a deal with the Devil. “I don’t make deals with little girls, but you, my sweet, will be a rather tempting plaything to toy with. Come. We will talk in person.” He hangs up, and I meet the eyes of my kidnapper. The man who’s going to take me to Victor, who will either torture me until my father begs for my release, or he’ll want something else from me, the one thing I haven’t given to anyone else. I tried, papá, but I just couldn’t make it. I was too slow, and the fading of my energy makes sure I get into the air-conditioned SUV without a fight.

If I can save my father, I’ll do it.

“Take me to your boss,” I instruct the driver.

The office is quiet when I stalk inside. The call that came moments ago informed me that Díago has found my payment. The young girl, who will soon be my prisoner, is in his grasp. God, I can't wait to lay eyes on her.

Her feistiness has an effect on me, and I can't wait until I have her within my compound, inside my home, so I can do as I wish with her. She's going to pay for her father's sins, but also, I want her to bow to me. She's offered herself up as the prey, a payment for her father's sins. And what she doesn't know is how much I love the hunt.

I should've gone out and hunted her down myself, but the anticipation of seeing her enter with Díago has me calm and at the ready. There's nothing more I enjoy than chasing a beautiful woman, pinning her to the floor, and making her scream my name. A knock at my door sounds as I settle into my chair, dragging me from the thoughts of my newest toy.

"Come."

When it slides open, I'm met with Javier's brother, Alejandro. He's the youngest of the two at only nineteen. He looks just like his older brother when he smiles, but there's a long scar that runs from beneath his left eye down to his upper lip.

"What is it, Alejandro?"

"There's a car that's pulled up. A man, Díago, said you're expecting something." He offers a small bow as he tells me this—a sign of respect for me being the leader of the organization. Being his boss, I have authority over him and his life.

Power is something I've come to crave, the need of having people answer to me as always races through my veins. It's in my blood. As a child, I'd always lorded over the other kids I grew up with, but now, as an adult, the need has only intensified. Waving my hand, I gesture for him to open the door fully. Now I'll be able to use that same power over my newest acquisition, the payment that I'm afforded because Hector chose to steal from me.

"Tell him to bring her in through the basement. Put her in one of the cells, I'll be there in a few moments." My order earns me a respectful nod before he leaves me alone to mull over how I'm going to introduce myself to the fiery woman who's come into my home, into my possession.

I never knew her mother, Hector's wife, but something tells me she's a beauty. Her father hid her away from the compound all the years he's worked here. Most men bring their kids to work, but Hector never did. And that's one of the reasons I know she will be worth the wait.

Rising from my seat, I button my suit jacket and head out to the hallway that is decked in dark reds and auburns. The deep brown of the walls makes the place feel ancient, and it is.

The Merlot-colored carpet takes me all the way through the house, until I reach the sweeping staircase that leads me down to the foyer. Once there, I turn left and make my way toward the kitchen, where the hidden door to the basement is waiting for me.

The house is silent. Nobody is inside because of the hot summer weather. I'm not completely evil, my staff gets time off, especially since I have a new toy to play with. The anticipation burns through my veins, reminding me that it's been a while since I've had a woman in my home who hasn't been paid to be here. And I'd love to feel this sweet virgin tightening around my shaft as I make her come.

Once the heavy door slides closed behind me, I meet two of my men standing on either side of the wide steps. They only offer a nod as I pass by. Each step lowers me into the dimly lit space, and there are soft whimpers that trickle up toward me, which make my cock harder.

I may be a fucked-up asshole, but the thought of hearing her cry is the only thing that makes me smile. I should really make sure my expression is serious, but I can't find it in me to do that, because as soon as I turn the corner and find Díago and Alejandro standing outside one of the cells, my gaze falls on her, and a smirk curls my lips.

"What the fuck is this?" she spits angrily. Her face is contorted in anguish, and her caramel skin is flushed and glistening. She must've been out in the sun because she's sweaty; I can tell by the dark circles of her tank top under her arms.

"And this is the beautiful Sofía?" I question, nearing her. Her tiny hands grip the bars, her knuckles turning white as she holds onto the metal. Her eyes—the color of the greenest grass I've ever seen—are wide with shock and anger.

"You promised that if I turned myself in—"

"I assured you that you'd be safe, and you are." I wave my hand over her from head to toe. "You're alive. Aren't you?" I keep my voice schooled, but I note the huskiness that's taken over my words.

"Where's my father?" she asks, her voice cracking on the last word. Her pain is palpable, only serving to make me even harder than I was before I laid my eyes on her. She's fucking beautiful. Exquisite. Her long dark hair is tied into a cocoa-colored ponytail at the back of her head with fine tendrils that frame her heart shaped face. Her large green eyes are still wide, and they shine with unshed tears as she regards me. A small button nose sits above two pouty pink lips.

Her body is encased in filthy clothes, and I wonder if that's from making a run for it, or if she just didn't have time to change before she left the music store. When I walked into the shop earlier, wanting the piano, I didn't realize it was her working there. I'd already been enamored by her beauty, and now I have her at my beck and call.

"I know you," she says, as I step closer, and the light hits my face. "You're... you were in the store." Her recognition turns her cheeks a soft rosy pink. I know she was attracted to me because I noticed her breathing turning shallow when I spoke with her.

"You do. You're quite the salesperson," I tell her.

"Where's my father?" she asks again, her body shaking violently as I trail my finger over her white knuckled grip on the steel bars. She tugs away as if I've burnt her with a live flame. Perhaps I have. But it's the fire that dances in her eyes which makes me wonder if the beauty would ever crave the beast.

I tip my head to the side to regard her before answering, "He's alive."

She shakes her head at my response. "I want to see him."

Her demand makes me chuckle because I don't answer to anyone. I'm in charge, and her sassy little mouth is going to get her into trouble. "Do you think I answer to you? I'm the fucking king, and

you're merely a pawn in a game that you could never comprehend, *novia*."

"Please," she pleads, which makes a groan rumble low in my throat, and I have to cough the sound away to mask it. I would love to hear her begging for something else. Something far more illicit, just to see her thief of a father.

"Tomorrow."

"No!" Her voice carries, bouncing off the dark concrete walls of the basement, which would be best used to hold wine rather than be turned into cells to hold prisoners. Her feistiness and confidence are shining when I turn to regard her and I realize she's not weak, even though she may be scared. The fire in her eyes makes me want to see her break even more.

I don't adhere to commands; I'm the one in control, not her. She has to learn that in my house, under my roof, I make the rules, and she has to obey, or there will be consequences.

"Today. Mr. Cordero," she utters my name with the sweetest of voices, which makes me wonder how she'd sound screaming my name. "Please." Another plea, one that's turning my blood hot and my cock throbbing for her, and I'm tempted to paint her pretty face with my release.

I turn to face her fully. "Let me make something clear, *juguete*," I start, holding my hands behind me as I stalk closer to the cell, and as soon as I do, the scent of her perfume, even in this shit hole, smells like jasmine blossoms. *Fuck*. "I don't take demands from little girls, and if they try to force *my* hand, I will make them bleed all over my cock. You will see your father when I say so, not when you demand it."

She balks at my words, and I know she's afraid her father is dead. I may be the Devil, but I'm not a monster. The corner of my mouth lifts slightly as I offer her a smile, which she doesn't return.

"But since you've pleased me by coming of your own free will—"

"My own free will?" she retorts, causing me to lift a brow at her in question. "I mean... I just... I don't want to be here, but for my father, I'll do anything."

Tipping my head to the side, I watch her before asking, "Anything?"

She waits a beat before nodding. "Anything."

"That's a rather bold statement for a little girl who doesn't know who she's getting into bed with... so to speak." I tack on the last three words because I notice her mouth fall open in shock at my choice of words.

"I just want my father safe. I can handle anything you throw at me." She puts on a brave appearance, for a girl her age – one who's walked straight into the wolf's den, giving herself over as a sacrificial lamb for slaughter. "I've heard stories about you and I'm not afraid." Even though she says she isn't, I know she is. She's trembling, her fingers are slipping on the metal while her chin wobbles. Her lower lip juts out, and I can't stop the image of her swallowing my dick from racing through my mind.

"I'm sure you're not afraid, but that would be stupid, *juguete*," I smirk. Knowing she doesn't like the name by her reaction, I offer her a smile. A grin.

"Perhaps I'm stupid then, *diablo*," she retorts hotly, making me chuckle out loud. There's a strength in this girl, and I can't wait to see her soften. Because make no mistake, I will break her.

Nodding, I lean in closer, meeting her wide green eyes. "Then it's time for you to meet the real me, Sofia." I turn and walk away. "Oh, and by the way," I cast a glance over my shoulder, "when you learn to respect me, you can sleep in a real bed." Turning my stare to Díago and Alejandro, I order, "Come." And they obey without question.

Stalking up the stairs, I listen to her screams, the curses being spewed my way, and it only makes me laugh even more.

SOFÍA

It's cold. So, so cold. I no longer have the warmth of the bed I slept in last night, and I no longer have my phone, so I'm stuck in this cell alone with nothing but the sliver of the moon shining through the small rectangular hole in the wall.

Seeing Victor Cordero in the flesh wasn't what I was expecting. In my mind, I'd made him out to be a wretched man with fangs for teeth and horns popping out of his head. Like a Satan himself, but he wasn't. The person who stood almost six foot five with broad shoulders towered over the other two men who'd accompanied him.

His dark hair, tousled and messy, matched the stubble that lined his angular jaw. His olive skin looked warm, and I found myself wanting to touch it. His sharp features looked sculpted from the most beautiful marble. His eyes, though, that's what caught my breath, as the color of shimmering gold met my glare.

He's handsome.

He's violent.

He's evil.

And I realize in that moment, I've become the Devil's Plaything. The moment he looked into my eyes I knew I was fucked. I'm not sure how such evil can be so beautiful, but he's the walking conjuncture of the two. As a child, I learned that bad things weren't nice, they weren't pretty, but he certainly breaks the mold.

He had venom on his tongue as he spoke, and I know what he has in store for me. He wants me in his bed, but that's not something I am willing to give him, but I'm certain that he'll take it anyway. He isn't a man who asks, he commands, and he's going to attempt to steal my soul before he robs me of my life.

I think back to the store, when Victor walked in to ask for my boss. I didn't know who he was in that moment, and I found myself attracted to him. Now, I know his name, and I hate him all the more.

Can a name change so much of a person?

Can his reputation be as dark as people say?

Yes. Yes, to both questions.

Shaking my head, I settle on the small blanket that sits in the corner of the cell. Pulling my knees up to my chin, I wrap my arms around my legs and close my eyes. But each time I do, it's only him I see.

It was my choice to come back, to allow the man in the SUV to bring me to Victor so I could bargain with him. To save my father, I've given myself over to the most dangerous man in Colombia,

and there's nothing I can do to change it now. He owns me. I'm his toy, and I know he'll do anything to make sure I obey.

I can't believe papá did it. He stole from one of the most ruthless men in our country, and he knew what he was doing. He did it for me, but it doesn't make it right. I never wanted him to become a thief to save me.

In an attempt to calm my sadness and frustration, I rock side to side gently, singing something that I recall from the store. The lyrics that leave my lips are merely a whisper, but I close my eyes and get lost in them for a moment, because it's the only solace I have right now because being a prisoner is gently chipping away at me.

Strangely, in this darkness, I feel safe, even if it's just for this moment. There's no guarantee he will listen to my pleas, and any promises made by Satan himself cannot be trusted. But deep down, I pray that Victor will allow me to plead my father's case and give him the leniency that I think he deserves.

Punishment comes after a crime, it's how the world works, but I need to save my father, and if I'm the payment that Victor wants, then I'll gladly sacrifice myself. Perhaps I can make him see that I could be an asset to him, rather than him killing me and making a spectacle of it.

He could've walked down here and slit my throat for what papá did. But he didn't, he told me I'd be his toy. Whatever that involves, I'll bear it, as long as he keeps his promise and lets my father leave, without hurting him even more.

And, once my payment is up, I get to leave as well.

I lean to the side, curling into a ball; I breathe in and out, attempting to calm my heart rate while I attempt to think my way out of the situation that I now find myself in. All my life, I've been taught to keep my family close, but this time, I'm going to need to keep my enemy even closer.

My father taught me to be intelligent, to watch people's actions and listen to their words. When you're observant, you can pick out their weaknesses and use them to your advantage. And I know that's what I have to do with Victor; I need to find out what makes him weak.

A SCREECH TEARS from my throat when I open my eyes to see a man hovering over me. He doesn't move, merely stares down at me as if I were on display, and he was a paying client. Those gold eyes are glimmering with amusement at my fear, and I recognize the smirk that tilts his full lips.

"You're rather skittish, Sofia," he tells me, before taking a step back to observe me from farther away. Even though he's no longer leaning over me, his presence is like a force of nature. It's almost as if he's holding me down on the small bed.

"Where is my father?" The words tumble free before I can ask about when he's letting me out of this fucking box that I've been holed up in.

"Feisty little toy," he utters. "Your father is currently being held in one of my warehouses." He turns his back to me, and I can't help my gaze from trailing over his large frame. He's easily double my weight and more than a foot taller.

The thought of fighting him doesn't seem like a possibility. My heart sinks when I think about my father being in a cold, empty warehouse with Victor's thugs hurting him.

"Is he even alive?" I bite out angrily, causing him to chuckle darkly. The sound is low, a vibration of happiness at my sadness. He's a fucking monster.

“Of course, he is, *juguete*,” he confirms, turning to face me. “I keep my promises. And you’ve been so kind as to offer yourself as payment. Tonight, will be your first event.”

“Event?”

“*Si, Sofia*.” He holds out his hand to me, offering me a way out of the cell, and as much as I hate him and he scares me, I know I’ll have to submit to him. He won’t give up until he’s seen me bow down to him and that thought has my chest tightening. I focus on my breathing, trying to calm my thoughts along with my heartbeat.

I slip my hand in his, and he tugs me up without effort. His strength is unmistakable. The man could kill me with one hand wrapped around my slender throat. The thought causes me to shiver. Victor’s eyes hold mine hostage for a moment, as if he is trying to read my mind, then he turns and leads me up the stairs he appeared from last night.

“Where are we going?”

He doesn’t respond. When we reach the top of the steps, he tugs me through the doorway, and I’m met with bright light, which hurts my eyes, causing me to wince in agony. Victor waits, his eyes on me at all times, while I allow my vision to get used to the sunshine streaming through the kitchen window.

“This is *the* castle.” I speak without thinking, knowing it’s stupid to be in awe of it, but it’s one of the homes I’ve always wondered about. Knowing my father would come here daily, I always begged him to bring me to work, but he always refused.

“It is indeed the Cordero Compound,” my captor tells me, with a proud grin on his handsome face. “Come, little one, you need to get clean,” he tells me, as if I’m a burden on him because I’m sweaty and smelly.

He leads me through the home toward a staircase that’s beautifully carpeted with deep reds and auburns. The railing looks as if it’s gilded, and as we make our way to the second floor, I can’t help admiring how exquisite the house is.

The paintings that hang on the walls are opulent, in frames made of the finest gilded wood, and the tapestries look like they’ve been hand woven by a million angels. Everything in this house screams of the wealth that Victor has because of the crimes he commits.

I’m led into a bedroom that has a large four-poster bed, with dark bedding the color of red wine. The curtains are open, offering a view of the gardens. There’s a small armchair positioned toward the window, a small vanity with a mirror and stool, and a door off to the right opposite the bed.

“The bathroom is over there,” Victor points to the door I’ve been staring at. “Everything you need will be there. If there’s anything missing, tell me and I’ll have the maid head out and buy it for you.”

“I want to see my father.”

“Once you’ve showered and changed into clean clothes, you’ll be able to see him.” He seems serious, rigid almost, and I wonder what’s running through his mind as he watches me. *Is this something he does all the time?* Kidnaps girls and locks them in a bedroom for later use. The thought makes me shiver once more, a cold, fearful chill trickling through me and I have to shake it off if I’m going to survive this. I need to stay strong, show him I’m not easily broken.

“Don’t go back on your word.” I don’t look at him when I say this; instead, I keep my gaze on the gardens of the compound. Even though my back is to him, I’m not fearful of him hurting me in here. I’m not sure why. I can’t explain it, but I stay standing, hoping he’ll walk out soon.

“Sofia,” he calls my name slowly, sensually, as if he’s tasting it on his tongue. Allowing him my eyes, I cast a glance over my shoulder, with my arms folded across my chest, my attempt at closing myself off to his lies. “I’m not the monster in your fairy tale.”

“This is no fairy tale, Mr. Cordero. My life has been nothing but a sad saga of a girl who believed

too hard and lost everything.”

He tips his head to the side at my words, curiosity dancing in his golden eyes, and I wonder just how they look in direct sunlight. *Will they twinkle? What the hell, Sofía? He’s a criminal, evil. He’s stolen you as payment and you’re wondering about how pretty his eyes would be.*

“Call me Victor.” He turns and pulls the door closed behind him, leaving me with those three words. I hear the click of the lock, and I know there’s no escape now. I’m in the hunter’s lair, and the only way out is if I kill him myself.

VICTOR

All I want is to hear her say my name. After hearing her take on her *story*, I'm intrigued. When I chose to take her three days ago, I thought she'd arrive, I'd fuck her, then torture her until she's close to death, then slowly kill both her and her precious papá, but now... Everything's different.

All I want is to delve into her mind, to learn how a girl so young can be so jaded. Yes, living in this city hasn't been kind to many people, but in her short life, she's far too negative about her future.

I hope she finds the medication in the drawer. I wanted to tell her I know, but that would be far too personal and too soon. I've left her pills in the vanity to ensure she takes the medication. When her father explained her situation, I knew I had to do something.

There's no explanation as to why I feel the need to do this, but now that I've finally laid my eyes on her, I can't have her dying until I get paid in full.

It's not in my nature to want to keep someone alive. I don't *care* for people. I'm the asshole who steals your life, not the guy who gives it back to you. But for some apparent reason, I feel the need to keep her around, to continue this *game* we're playing. I can't explain it, but perhaps if she's here for a little while longer, I can figure out what the hell she's doing to me.

"Victor," Javi's voice comes from behind me, startling me. I've been lost in my own thoughts, and when I turn to him, I notice the serious expression on his face. "They're looking for her, just like her father said. Hector was right."

"Fuck."

"We'll need to figure out how to get this shit dealt with, Victor. These men are coming down to Colombia in two weeks. That means—"

"I know what it fucking means." Stalking past Javier, I head to my office, shoving the door open and making my way to the desk. I pull open my drawer and find the folder I had one of my men compile on Hector and his *associates*. I can't believe the asshole would endanger his own daughter for a fucking stack of cash.

"Do you think Hector is playing both sides?" Javier's question causes my gaze to snap to his. I burn him with my glare, until the laugh fades away, and I'm met with his worried stare.

"No, something tells me that he thought he could and now realizes that these assholes are worse than I am," I bite out in frustration, chucking the folder at Javier who picks it up and flips through it.

I watch him nod, his gaze scanning the information. "Her father's stupidity could've shortened her life even more than it is." He doesn't see my body vibrate with rage at his words. I'm not angry at him; my irritation is for her father and his actions.

“Let’s get the men on this, keep track of those mercenaries.” I settle in my chair. Pulling out a cigar, I run it under my nose, inhaling the scent before continuing my orders. “I want to know where they go and who they meet with; we also need to find out who’s leading them.”

“We’ll find out everything.”

“I have no doubt. If we need to pull Díago into this again, do it. He’s good, and I don’t mind spending the extra cash.” Javier arches his brow at me, but I offer nothing more. I don’t explain my decisions to my second-in-command because he doesn’t need to know the girl is locked upstairs in one of the guest rooms already. I should’ve made her wait to sleep in a soft, warm bed, but I need her for the meeting with my contact.

I know I should’ve hired a whore for the event, but I wouldn’t want to lower my standards when meeting with these assholes. Javier’s my right-hand man, and he knows that tonight will make sure everything about the new coke deal is solidified. I’ll have Rodrigo and his territory under my rule soon enough. And if he doesn’t take the bait, I’ll kill him.

“I want you two on the ground, don’t let his men out of your sight. Once you’ve spoken to Martinez, bring the information back here, and we can intercept Rodrigo’s shipment,” I tell him, and Javi nods. His respect for me goes down to the root of who he is. It’s been like that all our lives and that’s why he’s the only man who can take over while I’m busy.

When Javi was fifteen, I recall his parents, who were loyal to my father, bringing him into our house, and pleading with my father to keep him safe. They’d gotten into trouble with the wrong people, and even though I knew my father didn’t give a shit about them, he knew my friendship with Javier meant a lot to me. And he agreed. Since then, we were more like brothers than friends.

My father taught me since I was a child, keep one man by your side while you rule. Every king needs a confidante who would take a bullet for him. And Javier is mine.

“I’ll talk to Díago,” he tells me, turning to leave my office. Once I’m alone, I settle back and light the cigar, inhaling a deep lungful of smoke. Reaching for the remote, I turn on the cameras in the bedroom where my prisoner is hidden away.

As soon as she appears on the small black and white screen, I’m ensnared. She’s showered, dressed in a pair of cotton shorts, and a tank top. On screen, they both look white, and I wonder what color she’s decided on. The lighter shades make her caramel skin a beautifully decadent hue, and I’m tempted to get a taste and see if she is as sweet as she looks.

She moves through the room, checking out every inch of her new cell, and then settles on the chair overlooking the garden. She’s chosen a book from the shelves, holding it in her hands while I take her in. She’s curled on the seat with her long dark hair pinned up on top of her head in a wet, messy bun.

Nothing has prepared me for her. Even just her presence in this house has changed the energy that fills the hallways and rooms. And I wonder then how long I’ll keep her here. I also wonder if she’s taken her medication. She’ll need her strength for tonight because once our dinner meeting is over, I’ll finally get the part of my payment I’ve been craving.

Tonight, I get to play with my new toy and slowly watch her fall into my darkness. Once I have her body, I’ll take her soul. I want to possess her completely. My chest tightens at the thought. I’d like to see her look at me without the hate and rage she does right now. *I want more.* I shake my head at the craziness clouding my mind. I can’t... I don’t...

Fuck. She’s doing something to me, getting under my skin. Even though I’ve built my walls high to keep women out, I have a feeling little Sofia is different, and perhaps I want to see what she can make of me.

I know that’s the one thing she doesn’t want me to steal, but my sweet *juguete* doesn’t know that I

always get what I want.

I SHOULD GO UP THERE, but I've been watching her on screen most of the day. Even though I've been working, my gaze has cast toward her several times over the past few hours. It's almost midday, and her lunch will soon arrive with Valentina, and I wonder if she'll attempt an escape.

I turn my attention from the document to the security screen. When her bedroom door opens, I watch my maid stroll inside with a tray. I wasn't sure what she'd enjoy, so there's a choice of three small meals. Along with coffee, juice, and even water.

Valentina sets the tray on the small desk, which sits against one wall, then turns to the girl and offers her a smile. I can't hear what's being said, but Sofia speaks, and then she grins at the older woman. Her face lights up like nothing I've ever seen, and, once again, I'm enraptured by her. She's the personification of beauty.

Once she's alone, she drops her feet that have been curled under her to the carpet and goes to investigate what's on the plates. She opts for the sandwich. Slowly, she bites into it. Picking up the plate and a mug, she settles back on her chair and eats her lunch as she gazes outside, and I wonder if she wants to go into the gardens.

Perhaps I'll take her later on. What the fuck was that? Shaking my head, I focus on the laptop once more, and I type out an email to my distributor in Miami, informing him that if I don't get the new shipment of weapons, I'll be flying to America to slice him limb from limb.

My focus is on the email being sent, when I see a new one come in. The subject line makes me stop. It's addressed to me, directly, none of the men call me by my first name and seeing it in my inbox makes me wary.

Clicking on the video file, I watch as the screen fills with Hector's face. He's talking to someone I can't see. He hands the stranger a package, which I know is my fucking drugs, and anger ripples through me like never before.

I know what he did. I have him in a warehouse ready to be tortured for stealing from me and watching it go down like this doesn't curb my rage. My little toy will soon see her precious father, and she'll watch as I make a spectacle of him.

Picking up my phone, I hit dial on Javi's number, and when his voice comes through the line, I speak, "I'm sending you a file, find out where this email came from and get me a name. Something isn't right."

"Of course," he responds, as I hit send on the email. I hang up before he has time to receive the message. Turning back to the screen, I look at Sofia and watch as she sips her hot drink.

She's in so much danger. All because her father was stupid enough to believe the lies of bad men. I shake my head at the stupidity. If he had come to me, I would've probably given him the money, but he didn't. If only he'd been honest in the first place, I may have spared his and his daughter's life.

Sofia catches my attention when she slips from the seat and goes for the water next, sipping it tentatively, then, once she settles her pert little ass down, she wraps her delicate fingers around the glass. The book she's been reading is perched open on the page her eyes are trained on, while she enjoys the food that I've allowed her to have.

There's one thing she'll learn while being here—I hold her life in my hands. Rising from the chair, I decide I've done enough spying for the day, and shrug on my jacket. Buttoning it up, I make my

way down the hall until I find myself outside her door.

SOFÍA

My stomach feels heavy after just the sandwich. Since I haven't eaten in a couple of days, I'd been feeling the effects, and I know it's not a good thing since I need to take medication to regulate my heart.

After seeing my medication in the drawer while searching for a weapon of some sort, I was taken aback. If he's bought me pills, he may not mean to kill me. *Yet.* The thought comes unbidden to me, and I shake it off.

I need to keep myself healthy, alive. I'm sure he's biding his time, waiting for the perfect moment to slit my throat. *Would he do that? Would he shoot me and make it quick?* I know my father deserves the punishment. The Cartel rule, and the King is a villain in an expensive, tailored suit; my father signed his death warrant when he stole from Victor.

Respect goes a long way. Mr. Cordero, Victor's father, trusted mine for so long, I was shocked when I heard that papá did what he did. I so badly want to see my father. To know he's still alive. I wonder what the cost would be to ask Victor to let him go free.

Would I forever be a prisoner in this place?

Would he keep me hidden away like a princess locked in a tower?

At least I'm comfortable. He could've easily kept me hidden in the dungeon, but the bed is beautiful—soft and inviting. The bathroom was indeed stocked with toiletries that any girl would fawn over. And the food, the coffee, everything make it feel as if I'm not a prisoner, but a guest.

How can someone live in luxury like this while the people of his beloved country are drenched in poverty?

The streets are laden with poor, homeless, and even sick people, and here, Victor sits on his throne surrounded by money. Anger swells inside me, turning my stomach at the thought. I'd always feared him, but the more time I spend here wallowing in my thoughts, the more my anger morphs into something much more volatile and vengeful.

It turns to rage, to hate.

The door swings open behind me, stealing my attention to the man who's consumed my every thought. He's dressed in one of his black suits, the dark shirt under the jacket a stark contrast to his silver tie, which has been tugged loose, as if it had been choking him.

His mouth curves into a dangerous smirk. It's a frightfully sensual movement, and I can't stop my body from responding to him. He's handsome—dark and brooding—with an air of malevolence following him around like a cologne.

"I trust you're feeling better." He enters the room confidently. With each long stride, he invades

my space further. “You’ve eaten.” His observation is filled with amusement, and when he smiles, I find myself staring at him.

How is it a man who kills for fun can be so devastatingly gorgeous?

He sighs when I don’t respond. Pulling up the small stool, he unbuttons his suit jacket and perches on the small cushion. He doesn’t say anything for a while, sitting in silence, he watches me as if I’m about to do something interesting, but I don’t. My body remains rigid, not because I’m afraid of him, but because the moment I move, I’m certain he’ll pounce.

“Sofia, you came here of your own free will.”

“I came here to free my father,” I bite back, my gaze meeting his gold one. “It’s not of my own free will. Being coerced to walk into your home, offering myself as a sacrifice—”

“That’s a rather arousing thought.”

“Fuck you.” My retort causes him to shoot up from the chair, his hand instantly finding my throat. He wraps his long fingers around the column and squeezes, causing me to splutter. He pulls me to my feet by the hold he has on me and shoves me against the wall so hard, I see stars behind my eyelids.

The glass I was holding falls from my hand onto the plush carpet, staining the expensive rug with a dark patch of water. I claw at his wrist. Even though the material of the shirt is in the way, I do it anyway. My attempts are futile.

He’s a monster, there’s no way I can even hurt him. My feet flail when he picks me up off the floor and his fingers dig into either side of my neck, causing my vision to blur as I try to focus. My lungs scream at me, but I can’t say a word. Victor’s grin is enough evidence to tell me he’s enjoying this, he loves to hurt me, and in my muddled brain, I wonder if he’s hard.

He leans in, closing the distance between our mouths. “You’re under my roof, you will respect me.” His voice is cold, barren of any emotion. This is the same man who bought me the medication I need. This is also the man who would no doubt torture my father while I watched in horror.

When he eases up his hold, I cough out, “respect is earned.”

“And your life is as fragile as you are, *juguete*,” he bites out, brushing his lips over mine, causing sparks of electricity to shoot through every nerve in my body. The jolt is nothing I’ve ever experienced. I try to shake off the feeling that tightens my belly, but it’s useless, I feel the unwarranted burn of desire all the way from my head to my toes.

“Let me go.”

He sets me to my feet but doesn’t release my neck. “You are here to serve as payment, once you’ve completed your time, you can leave.” He steps back, allowing me to breathe in deeply, filling my lungs with much needed air. I watch as his back turns toward me, how his jacket molds to his broad shoulders.

“I want a contract.” I speak to his back.

He turns to me, the mischief in his features making him look far younger than the thirty-seven years I know him to be. “What?”

“An agreement. I leave after I’ve paid for what my father did.” My words are breathy, and I inwardly chastise myself for it. My legs are wobbly, I can’t stand for too long, so I settle in the chair before I inhale and exhale slowly and steadily. My arms wrap around my middle, in an attempt to hold onto myself. I need to ground the feelings that are warring within me.

The pain from his hand around my throat still burns, and the ache caused from his lips on mine rage through me, alarming me in every way.

“For a girl so young, you’re rather resilient,” he surmises with a grin, which doesn’t help the hankering inside me. It doesn’t quell the need to have his lips on mine, just once more.

“I’ve learned to grow up fast in this city,” I tell him. “It’s the only way to survive. Please, Mr. Cordero, my father may have done something stupid, but he did it for good reason.”

He doesn’t respond, just turns and heads for the door. With his hand on the knob, he twists it, steps out, and glances my way, before offering a tip of his head and shutting me inside my ornate prison.

Once I’m alone with my thoughts, I try to overlook the ones that remind me how my body responded to him, and I attempt to focus on the fact that he’s a bad person. He’s done things that would make anyone shudder in revulsion.

It’s only when I glance outside again that I realize he didn’t tell me if I can see my father. Our conversation was steered in the opposite direction, and I’m left with the empty feeling that’s been gnawing at me for days—perhaps my father is already dead.

An hour later, the door opens again, and Valentina smiles when I glance over at her. I’d been lost in the book, trying to focus on anything other than my situation, when she sets down another tray.

“Master Victor asks that you get ready to see your papá.” Her words have me on my feet, the book forgotten on the windowsill.

“What? Right now?”

She shakes her head, points to her empty wrist. “In one hour.” Leaving me to my excitement, she shuts the door behind her, and I race into the closet to find a pair of jeans, and a T-shirt, which I quickly change into.

The thought of seeing my father has my heart racing wildly, anticipation prickling my skin. I hope he’s okay. *Who am I kidding?* He’s probably hurt, close to death. *What if it’s the last time I see him?* I don’t think Victor would do something so heinous to let me watch my father’s death. *Would he?*

I rush into the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth. I’m not sure why I’m doing it, I put it down to nerves. I hear the click of the bedroom door, as I’m combing a brush through my long dark hair. *His* cologne fills my nostrils, taking over my senses, and I know he’s in the bedroom. I can feel his presence like a storm cloud, heavy and foreboding, looming over me, and there’s no protection from his downpour.

When I enter the room, I find him perched on the foot of the bed. He seems so out of place in this feminine room that seeing him is jarring. As if he feels me behind him, he rises and turns to face me.

“Your father wanted to see you,” he informs me curtly. The earlier incident vanished, the anger, or whatever it was, is gone and his expression is smooth, calm almost. And I wonder if this is what he looks like before he kills someone.

“I thought he may be dead by now,” I offer an honest answer, instead of hiding what I really think. A dark brow arches at my retort, but he doesn’t respond, which frustrates me. I want him to react, I don’t know why, but there’s something about him that makes me want to see him lose control. Each time he’s entered the room, he’s been calm and cool; the only time I saw the real Victor Cordero, the one I’ve grown up learning about, was when he grabbed me by the throat earlier. His harsh hold on my neck left a ghost of his touch on my skin.

“Let’s go.” He turns to the door, expecting me to follow behind him like a damn puppy. As much as I want to refuse, to pout like a goddamned teenager, I can’t because he knows what I want. So, I bite my tongue and fall into step behind his large frame.

The house is so quiet, it’s as if there’s no one else here, but there must be. Surely, he has men surrounding the house, watching him, or watching for trouble on the grounds of his compound.

With every step we take, I allow my gaze to take in the doors, the walls, even the windows when we reach the center of the staircase. The place is a fortress. It’s alarming at how scary it looks from the outside, but inside, it’s decadent and beautiful. An elegant, alluring home that keeps the Devil in

his cage.

A woman strolls into the foyer as we descend the stairs. She's dressed in a long black dress, her hair is tied in a bun behind her head, and a thick necklace of large gleaming diamonds sits around her neck.

I don't know why, but a pang of jealousy swirls in my gut, causing my breakfast to curdle in my stomach, threatening to make itself known, but I swallow the feeling down. Forcing it away, I watch her watch me.

"Is this her?" Her voice is cool, rigid, but her eyes never leave me as she speaks to Victor. I want to slap her for some reason. She sparks rage within my gut, but instead of acting out, I offer her a curt smile, keeping my head up.

VICTOR

Camila is staring Sofia down as if it's her job to protect me. Her piercing eyes are locked on the beautiful girl beside me, and I wonder how she'd react if I told her I wanted Sofia to stay here. *Perhaps forever.*

"Is there something you needed, Cami?" She can tell by the sigh that leaves my lips that I'm not in the mood for this bullshit. I want to get to the warehouse and back before sundown. Camila shakes her head, offering me a smile, before she turns on her heel and heads down the hall toward the office.

"You really should keep your guard dogs at bay," Sofia bites out behind me, causing me to chuckle. Glancing over my shoulder, my gaze meets hers, finding those grass green orbs penetrating me right to my black fucking soul.

"Are you jealous, *juguete*?"

Her body visibly vibrates with anger at my question, which only makes the challenge more entertaining. Watching her rage, seeing how she fights this thing between us, is adorable. When I whispered my lips across hers earlier, I felt it, I know she did too. And I know as much as I'm attracted to her, this will merely be a short-lived interaction.

"You're an asshole, I will never be jealous of anyone wanting you."

Nodding, I lead her out of the house and toward the waiting car. I reach for the door and pull it open. She follows, just like I expect her to. Javi glances my way as I allow Sofia to settle on the backseat.

Before I can climb into the car, he informs me, "we need to do something before we take her to see Hector." His eyes hold excitement, which shine playfully, and I know what he means.

"Is he ready for me?"

"Yes, perhaps we can show the girl what happens to thieves," Javier suggests, and I glance at her for a moment before I make my decision. Nodding to my right-hand man, I settle in the seat beside her.

"Seems we have one stop before you can see your precious papá," I tell her.

"Where are we going?"

I smile, but don't meet her questioning gaze. "To see a man who stole something from me. You should learn what kind of man I am."

"I know who you are, what you are." Her voice is low, a mere whisper, as if she's afraid of speaking the truth.

The car moves through the streets with my convoy, both leading and following. I never travel light, and now that I know Rodrigo is trying to make a play for my territory, I've ramped up my security.

It doesn't take us long to come up to the house, where we find more of my men standing guard. Once I exit the vehicle, I have Javier bring Sofia along behind me, and the moment I step into the putrid smelling home, I know the asshole has already pissed himself a few times. The stench of his excrement will only intensify once I'm done with him.

I find the asshole who's double crossed me by spewing my upcoming shipment locations to Rodrigo. I find out everything that happens under my nose, and he should've known that. He's bound to an armchair that has seen better days. The leather is torn and shredded, and the rest of the room looks as if a hurricane swept through it.

"Mr. Cordero," he mumbles. "P-please."

Sofia gasps behind me when she sees the man. He may be a stranger to her, but she'll soon learn that he has something in common with her precious papá.

"Sofia, this here is Juan," I tell her, while waving my hand in his direction. "He needed money for his gambling debts and decided that working for me would get him that." I speak to her, but refrain from meeting her eyes. "Only, he wasn't happy with his earnings and decided to steal from me." I unbutton my suit jacket before moving my hand to my belt. The sheathed blade I keep wrapped safely is in my grasp and the beauty behind me gasps once more when she sees it in my hand.

"No, *señor*," he mumbles. "No, I mean, *lo siento. Lo siento*," he repeats, over and over again. It's always the same thing—they get caught, they plead apologies as if it will save them. I step forward, turning to face my little toy, before I have one of my men hold his wrists against the arms of the chair.

The creak of leather is the only sound besides Juan's weak pleas for mercy. I lock my gaze on Sofia's before I grip two of Juan's fingers and smile at the beauty. "This is what happens to men who steal from me." I bring the blade down on the two fingers. Luckily, I had Javi sharpen it this morning, because it slices through the flesh easily; it's when I get to the bone that I need to work at it a few times before the fragile bones give way and two digits fall to the filthy floor.

"Oh god," Sofia chokes out, the color fading from her gorgeous face, and I know she gets the gist of what her father faces. The screams from the man beside me are a dark symphony of pure agony, something I've become accustomed to hearing. I may be the king, but I do enjoy getting my hands dirty.

I cut another two digits from his left hand, ensuring I leave only the thumb. I lock my dark gaze on his watery one. "Are you ready to tell me what you did with my money?" It's only fifty grand, but it's mine, and nobody takes from me and lives to see another day.

"I-I-I can't, *señor*, they collected an hour ago," he tells me in a wobbly voice, and I'm sure he's about to cry like a four-year-old who had his lunch stolen. Picking up one of the bloody digits, I twirl it between my fingers, before I gesture to one of my men who knows exactly what I'm about to do.

He tugs on Juan's head, opening his jaw in the process, and I slip the thick fleshy finger down his throat and listen as he slowly chokes and coughs. A smile dances on my lips. I turn my attention to Sofia who is shuddering, a retching sound echoes around me, and I glance at Juan who's attempting to spit out the digit.

"Shut his mouth, he needs to learn the consequences of fucking with the King of Colombia," I tell my men. "We will allow you to breathe long enough to tell us who the men are you gave the money to, once you do, we will feed you the rest of your filthy, thieving fingers." I straighten, glancing at Alejandro. "You got your job to do. Can you handle it?"

"*Sí, señor*," he nods confidently.

"Once you find the assholes, get my money and then kill them all. I don't have time for bullshit games today, I have places to be." I step into the filthy kitchen and twist the cold metal tap until clear

water gushes from the faucet. Rinsing the blood from my hands, I pull out my white handkerchief and wipe my hands before I head outside.

Once we're back in the car, Javier takes the wheel, and we silently drive from the house through the back streets, until we hit the docks where my warehouse is situated. With the two SUVs following behind and one in front of us, I know our evening can only get better from here.

"Are you going to do that to my dad?" she finally whispers after a while. I can smell the desperation emanating from her. It's beautiful and alluring. I am the evil monster she's painted me as just from how hard I get when she's scared.

"I haven't decided yet," I tell her honestly.

"Please, Victor, Mr. Cordero, please don't do this. He didn't take from you for a bad reason like gambling. He was trying to save my life," she pleads, and even though I know she's right, I can't allow him to walk free.

Turning my attention to her, I speak softly, "He stole from me, thousands of US dollars' worth of product. Do you understand that consequences come no matter what?"

The pain that flashes across her face is clear. She knows I'm right. Hector was one of the longest serving members of my team. He worked for my father; he can't get away with what he did.

"Yes, Mr. Cordero," she mumbles, and her fat lower lip wobbles, but she keeps herself strong, not allowing any tears to escape, even though they fill her wide green eyes.

The looming structure where Sofia's father is being held is hidden behind other high buildings, and when we drive between them, I find eight of my men guarding the entrance.

The fearful energy surrounding the beauty beside me is like a goddamn perfume. She's trembling with nerves, and I wonder just how much longer I can delay this without her fire burning me alive. I want it though. It's those dark flames dancing in her eyes that remind me, she's nothing like the women I've become accustomed to.

She's different.

Special.

Mine.

Shaking my head at the unwarranted word that comes to me, I exit the vehicle, allowing Javier to open her door and help her from the car. Offering a nod to him, I wait for her to look at me before I lean in close. The moment I do, her fragrance invades every one of my senses, and I'm lost in her sweetness.

"I trust you to behave." My words skitter over her skin with warning, and I can't help staring as her plump pink lips fall open. The only thought in my mind in that second is watching them stretch around my cock as I feed it to her.

"I trust you to keep your word and let me speak to him." Her challenge is clear, and she doesn't have to worry about my word because it's the one thing people can count on. I always ensure my promises are kept. But I can't guarantee I won't hurt Hector for what he's done.

"Always, Sofia," I whisper, allowing my fingertips to find the base of her spine as I lead her toward the warehouse where my men have cleaned up Hector and ensured he's comfortable. The only reason I did it is to keep the girl from having a complete breakdown.

If I had my way, I'd kill the fucker for what he put her through, but instead, I'm here playing the happy ruler of my kingdom, allowing a man who stole, not only from me, but from his family, to live... for now.

Upon entering, I hear her gasp when she sees Hector for the first time in days. He's seated in the corner of the warehouse, still bound to a chair, but he's cleaned up. His one eye still swollen, but the

bruises and cuts look better without blood oozing from them.

I want nothing more than to slice him limb from limb, and with my blade in hand, I follow the path toward his chair. He begged me to keep him here for now, to keep him safe, but he doesn't realize that he's already given me what I wanted.

Last night, I made the call to bring her here. My plan to record his demise and have her watch it wasn't going to work. Not because I want him to live, but because I knew the girl, who's now on her knees on the cold concrete, would never have survived had she seen her dead father in my warehouse. And she is the one who's a pawn in this game.

Perhaps I should fuck her right here, in front of him, ensuring Hector feels the agony and pain I would love to inflict, while getting this need for her out of my system.

"You like the fire in her," Javier observes beside me. "I can see it when you look at her." He knows better than to question me, or even say shit like that, but he's right, and I can't admonish him for his observation. There is certainly something about her that's caught my eye.

She holds onto her father as if he's the king of her world. There's a pang deep in my chest once more. *Jealousy*. It's a new and foreign emotion. Something I'd rather not give rise to because the last time I felt anything close to this was a time I'd rather forget.

Shaking my head of the errant thoughts, I stalk forward, my gaze trained on Hector's as he offers me a silent *thanks*, which is uncalled for. He doesn't realize that even if he didn't tell me the truth, I would've still taken his sweet baby girl.

"Sofia," he calls to her, dropping his gaze to hers. "Stand up. Go to Victor."

"What?" Her shock is evident. She wasn't expecting him to say something like that, and neither was I, if I'm being honest. Granted, he knows I'm the only one who can keep her safe, but it was the last thing I ever thought I'd hear him say.

"I want you to go to Victor, Mr. Cordero will keep you safe." He sounds broken when he finally admits that he couldn't keep his own daughter safe.

"I don't understand, papá." Her voice is small, childlike. And the fear lacing her words is the only clue to what she's truly feeling. Even though she came with me today without a fight, there's still a fear inside her, and I know she believes I'll hurt her. Maybe, I'll show her just how fucking violent I can be. But not in the way she thinks. I won't mutilate or torture her, I'll fuck her into submission.

I decide then and there, I want Sofia Montero in my bed.

"Sofia, if ever you listen to me, *hazlo ahora*," he commands her. It's the first time I hear him speak with any fire in his tone. Giving his daughter away is a price he didn't ever think he'd have to pay, but now, as he pushes her away, I see the agony and guilt etched on his features.

Sofia surprises us both when she rises and spins on her heel, racing toward me, her tiny fists slamming into my chest, over and over again. Hector is calling her to stand down, but I just watch in awe as she spits her venomous words at me.

"*Vete a la mierda, Vete a la mierda!*" *Fuck you, fuck you!* Her voice is drenched in fury as she curses me. Hector, in the background, is trying to abate her. But it's only when I reach for her wrists, does she realize the error of her ways. I can take certain things, I can even find her feistiness sexy, but nobody, and I mean nobody, curses me.

My hand tugs at her, and I drop my blade before my other hand fists her long, chestnut waves, pulling her head backward. She winces in pain, the agonizing whimper from her plump lips enough to turn my cock to steel.

"*Pequeño juguete*," I bite out, keeping my voice rigid and drenching every fucking word with the rage that's brewing inside me. "Never strike me. Do you understand?"

“Fuck you, Victor! You made him say that, you made him—” I grip her hair so tightly, she cries out, breaking the tirade of venomous words she’s spewing. She’s only making matters worse.

“Javier, take her to the cells, I think little Sofia needs to calm the fuck down.” I grit out, and he pulls out the sedative. Within seconds, the medication is swimming through her veins, and she falls limp in my arms. Her long dark lashes flutter like tiny butterflies on the apples of her rosy cheeks.

Fuck, she’s beautiful.

Shaking my head, I find myself once more pondering what this girl is doing to me. She’s softening me in ways no other woman has, not even Gaia. And it’s time to break that bond because I can’t be feeling emotions, I have no right feeling.

Javier lifts her and walks her out to the car. The engine starts, and I turn to Hector. By the time Javi returns, I’ll be done with this asshole. Not because his daughter attacked me, but because I’m sick of being nice.

“We need to talk.”

VICTOR

“Mr. Cordero, Victor, she’s a child. She doesn’t under—”

“I don’t give a shit anymore, Hector. Your fucking mistakes are what’s making her life a living hell,” I inform him coolly, as I pick up the knife that I dropped earlier. When I close the distance between us, I gesture to one of my men to hold his hand open. “It’s time you paid with a pound of flesh.”

“I’ve given you—”

“You’ve sold your daughter for the coke you stole,” I interrupt him once more. “This is for her.” My beautiful, hand-carved steel blade cuts into his skin, causing blood to spurt on my shiny Oxfords, but I don’t care.

Hector’s cries are music to my ears, a symphony of echoes that ring around the warehouse and bounce off the metal walls. Two fingers down, only four more to go. I consider what I’ll do with him after this, while I watch the red liquid drenching the floor.

The thick gold band that was on his ring finger falls to the ground with a clank of metal hitting concrete, and I pick it up. The yellow is stained with blood, just like my hands are right now, and I know they always will be.

I realize as I look at my fingers, tinted with the life force of Hector Montero, that Sofia was right. I’m not a good man, nor did I ever claim to be. But it’s her words that seem to ring in my ears in this moment, as I regard the jewelry that her mother gave her father. It was a promise of forever. And now, I’ll keep this as remembrance that I’m not a good man. I haven’t been for a long time. And when I go back home, I’ll make sure that Sofia knows it.

She wanted a monster. She’ll get a fucking monster.

“Are you sure you want to keep the last bit of information from me, Hector?” I turn my attention on him again. I know there’s more to the fucking story he spewed. Sofia is sick, she’s in need of an operation, and if he doesn’t tell me what the fuck it is, I’m going to cut his heart out.

He stares at me for so long, I think he’s going to deny me what I want. But what he mutters next is not what I’m expecting. “My baby needs a heart transplant. Please, Victor, your father was a man of integrity. He would’ve done the right thing.”

My blood simmers in my veins, the thought of knowing this girl, Hector’s daughter, could possibly drop dead if she’s not cared for, does something strange to me. I wasn’t expecting this situation to affect me as much, but it has.

“Don’t speak of my father,” I bite out, as I regard Hector. “He would’ve done worse to you if you stole from him. He trusted you, considered you a friend.” My words have their intended effect.

He nods. “*Sé que sé. Lo jodí.*” *I know, I know. I fucked up.*

“Consider this a parting gift,” I tell him, as I grab his other hand and slice off all the fingers in one violent chop. A deathly screech falls from his mouth, and I watch as the thick metallic evidence stains the floor of my warehouse. “I will take Sofia as mine, she will serve me as a slave,” I speak, keeping my voice low.

Hector shakes his head violently, as he listens to my words. “Please, *por favor no,*” he mumbles, as tears stream down his cheeks. “*Mátame, pero por favor, sálvala,*” he pleads once more for her life and asks me to kill him.

“You would die, rather than have her serve me?” I challenge him. He knows what that means. He’s seen the women my father kept; he’s also met the women who’ve been around my compound. What he doesn’t realize is that those were whores, paid for their service. I don’t pay anymore. I have Sofia, and she will be mine to use as I see fit.

“Then marry her,” he suddenly blurts, causing me to chuckle. *Marriage?*

“You’ve lost your mind, old man.” Shaking my head, I take a step back and pull out my handkerchief, cleaning the blade with the crisp white cotton, before I sheath my weapon.

“Please, Victor, if you marry her, they can’t hurt her. She’ll be the queen, and she can rule with you.” His eyes are filled with the ravings of an old man. I can never get married. The last time I ever considered something as fragile as marriage, I had to kill the bitch.

“I don’t believe marriage should be based on emotion, and I certainly don’t love your daughter,” I inform him, but the moment the words leave my mouth, Javier returns. I can feel his questioning glare burning into me.

He’ll pay for that later.

“I didn’t ask you to love her,” Hector speaks, his words garbled as the pain takes over his body, and soon, he’ll either beg for death again, or he’ll do something stupid to himself. “I just need to know she’s safe before I take my final breath. *Es el deseo de un hombre moribundo.*” *It’s a dying man’s wish.*

I consider his words. They slowly permeate through me, and I turn to Javier. “Clean this mess up. I have places to be. And Sofia has a choice to make.” I move toward the door, leaving my second-in-command and two of my men to deal with Hector.

“What do you want to do with him, boss?” Javier questions, before I reach the door, stopping my exit for a moment, and I turn and glance at him over my shoulder.

“*Haz realidad su deseo.*” *Make his wish come true.*

WHEN I GET HOME, I find Camila sitting in my office chair. Frustration grips my chest at her being in my personal space. She knows not to come in here when I’m not here, but she never fucking obeys me.

“What do you want?” I ask, as I saunter by her. She’s dressed in a deep red pants suit, looking ever the mafia queen. But she’s not mine. She never will be, even though I know she wants it more than anything.

“I was wondering when you’re going to get rid of the trash,” she tells me, crossing her leg over the other. She’s poised and elegant, everything that my father had wanted for me in a bride. Someone to sit beside me, but I never wanted her, because she never held my interest.

She comes and goes as she pleases because her father sold her to mine. Now, I’m stuck with a

woman I don't want or need. *I have one.* The thought comes to me suddenly, and my gaze flickers to the cameras that are currently turned off. Thankfully, I had the sense to flick the switch before I left, or Camila would've seen where I'm holding Sofia.

"She's not leaving. But you're welcome to," I tell her, waving my hand toward the door, wishing she'd take the hint and leave. But she doesn't. She never does.

"I want land," she says suddenly. "I don't want to live with you and your whore, or whatever the hell she is. I can't see it."

"You want me to give you land?" My tone is filled with incredulity, and I know she's going to get annoyed with me, but I'm amused that she can walk in here, demand something, and expect it to be so.

"Why not?"

"I don't want you here, I never have. The only reason I haven't killed you is because your father was a good friend, a confidante of mine."

"Then allow me to take the apartment in the city. You don't use it, and... I have things I'd like to do without your prying eyes."

"Things? Or men?" I challenge. She flicks her gaze away, and I know I've hit the nail on the head. I didn't think that she would feel as stuck here as I do, but it seems she needs an outlet. And I'll gladly give her that.

Nodding, I lean back in my chair and regard her for a long time. She's beautiful, but she's just not someone I can see myself with long term. Come to think of it, there isn't a woman on this earth that I would want in my life longer than I need them to get my dick sucked.

"Fine. Take the apartment, but," I pause my words, causing her to meet my gaze. "If you ever try to walk into my home again and piss all over me like I'm your territory, I won't think twice about sending you back to your father."

"You have a high regard for yourself, Victor Cordero." She smiles as she pushes up from the chair, straightening her jacket, before she turns on her Jimmy Choos and heads for the door. "Consider me gone from your life," she tells me, before exiting my office and leaving me to spy on my prisoner in her small cell.

SOFÍA

When I open my eyes, I find myself alone in the cell that I slept in my first night here. Anger still sizzles in my veins. I can't believe the asshole locked me up after my outburst. Granted, I did lose it back there, but to drug me and lock in me in a cage is uncalled for.

I'm on my feet, but a dizzy spell hits me the moment I attempt to stand. *Shit*. I haven't taken my medication today, and I know I'm going to need it if I'm planning on living to my nineteenth birthday.

I stalk to the front of the small cell, and my fingers curl around the bars, the metal cold in my grip. "Hey! Get me out of here!" My voice is hoarse, my throat burns from the screaming, but I don't care. I need to see my father and ask him what the hell is going on. There's no way I'm going to let papá tell me I need to stay with Victor Cordero. He will not rule my life.

Perhaps Victor brainwashed papá to say shit like that. I'm almost certain he has, because I know my father, and he would never allow Victor to take me. The thought sends both heat and fury through my body. I'm still dizzy, knowing I haven't taken my medication has my heart thudding wildly against my ribs. I breathe deeply, praying that I have time to see my father again.

"Hey!!" A violent cough attacks me from the word being wrenched from my throat, and I'm bowled over onto my knees from the fit. My lungs are threatening to give up, and my heart leaps into my throat, threatening to choke me before giving out. Tears spill onto my cheeks and trickle down my chin as I realize that perhaps my father was right. Victor may just be the lesser of two evils.

"That's exactly where I like you, *juguete*." The deep amused rumble of Victor's voice startles me. "On your knees."

"Fuck you!"

He doesn't respond. He merely stares at me, as if I'm the most interesting thing he's ever seen. He sets a glass down, along with the tablets I know will save my life. Those eyes—gold pools of amusement—only make me angrier than I was moments ago. He tilts his head to the side, watching me as if I'm a wild animal. Maybe I am, because if he opened that door right now, I'd probably claw his beautiful eyes from his skull.

"You know, little Sofia," he says, slowly stalking back and forth in front of the cell, "there's a time and place for such language." He's deadly serious as he tells me this. I claw at the medicine, swallowing the medication with a gulp of water, then I watch him once more. "The moment I slide my dick inside you, that's when you should curse me. You know why?" he questions, meeting my livid glare. "Because that's the moment I split your pretty little cunt open and own you."

"You'd like to think you'll own me, but you never will." Crossing my arms in front of my chest, I

pin him with a glare so harsh, I hope daggers fly from my eyes, slicing him into pieces, but I know it's wishful thinking.

"Can you be so sure?" This time, he stills his slow pacing, his gaze cast over his shoulder toward me. His words still me for a moment. He's far too confident. There's conviction in his tone, as if he knows I'll succumb to his advances, that I'll submit to him, but he's wrong because I'll never do it.

"I can. There's no way I would ever fall for your snake tongue. Evil drips from you, and I can never desire a criminal." My words are fierce, but deep-down, fear niggles at me. I'm not as strong as I may portray myself to be. And I have a feeling that Victor can see my doubt, my innocence. I think he basks in it, revels in seeing me falter.

"Emotions control actions, Sofia," he tells me, with a hint of guilt in his tone, and I wonder just what he's been through. Shaking my head, I attempt to clear my mind of the thoughts that seem to take over. Each time Victor offers me an ounce of his human side, he breaks down my walls. And that's my mistake. I shouldn't let him.

"*La lengua de una serpiente gotea veneno,*" I tell him—the tongue of a snake drips poison—but my words only make him smile.

"Such a pretty girl with such a dark outlook on life and the people who surround her," Victor observes, stopping at the cell to watch me for a moment, before he shakes his head. "When you realize I'm only here to help you, I'll allow you back in your bedroom," he tells me. "Until then, you'll sleep in here."

"You can't leave me in here, it's cold, the bed is hard as nails, and I need my medication."

He chuckles. "And as the Devil, I really don't care." His golden eyes flash with fire and challenge, stinging the words in my throat. He doesn't wait for me to respond, he takes the steps slowly, knowing I won't fight him, because he's fucked me over, and I'm stuck here until I apologize. He hasn't said it, but I know that's what he wants.

Silently, I settle on the hard mattress, my back against the cold concrete wall, as I stare at the opposite staircase. The cool night air is slowly wafting through the rectangular holes in the wall far from my reach.

I can't believe I'm once more his prisoner. Lifting my legs up, I wrap my arms around them and rest my cheek on my knees. I don't want to sleep, but I know, soon, fatigue will steal me from this world, and I'll be captured by golden eyes once more.

JAVIER'S VOICE startles me from sleep. "Get up," he grunts angrily. When my eyes snap open, I find the dark-haired man glaring at me. His blue eyes are a stark contrast, and I wonder just how he got them. I haven't seen many men like him: tanned skin, black hair, with those deep dimples when he smiles, and the dark dusting of stubble on his angular jaw. A sharp and prominent nose sits in the center of his face.

"What do you want?" I bite out.

"*No me jodas, niña pequeña,*" he growls—*don't fuck with me, little girl.* The words sounding like an animal. "I'm not Victor, I don't take your bullshit teenage hormonal outbursts." His words are meant as venomous snide remarks, but they're rather amusing coming from a man who's nearly six-foot five and broad like a warrior.

Sitting up, I cross my arms in front of my chest, my lips pouting at his attack on me. "I wasn't

passing you, just being observant. And, you're not a very nice person."

"No, I'm not. And you would do well to remember that." The corner of his mouth tilts up, and I can't help staring at him smirking happily at my observation. "I'm going to open the gate, you try anything, I'll put you down like a fucking dog. I don't care if Victor cares for you." His eyes flame with rage when he unlocks the cell door and pulls it open.

"Where am I going?" I question, but as the afterthought hits me, I wonder what he means—*Victor cares for me*. That must've been a mistake, because Mr. Cordero doesn't *care* for anyone.

"Mr. Cordero wants to see you," he informs me, gripping my arm and tugging me up the stairs behind him. My feet aren't even awake yet, and I stumble my way behind the large oaf of a man who's slowly annoying me more than scaring me.

When we finally reach the landing, he tugs me harder, as we make our way down the hall and into a large office that looks like it belongs in old school England. The dark wood with the walls of bookshelves are more like a haven than a horror show. I want to spend all my time running my fingers along the spines of the books, but Javier shoves me into an armchair with a glare pinned on his boss.

"Call me when you're done." He leaves without another word, and I watch as Victor stares at the door long after Javier is gone. It's clear they're close because Javier wouldn't be as angry with me if they weren't.

He let it slip that Victor cares for me and something tells me that he doesn't like *that* fact at all. Perhaps I can use it to my advantage. Those shimmering eyes fall to me before he rises and stalks toward me.

I don't cower, which only makes the color of his gaze turn molten, like gold melting over rocks turning them to gilded gems. He pulls a gun from a holster in his jacket and points it at me. The barrel nudged under my chin, his free hand fisting my long brown hair, and he tugs my head back until my eyes are locked on his.

My collar is exposed, and I know he can see my pulse beating wildly against the column of my neck. He watches me for a moment before he leans in close, pushing the metal against my flesh, causing me to shiver.

"I don't like fucking games," he hisses in my face. I don't expect it, but he suddenly pulls the trigger, and I yelp in fear, feeling the heat of my urine wetting the pants I'm wearing, which only turns my skin bright red in embarrassment.

"I-I-I—"

"Yes, you play me, *juguete*, and I'll fucking kill you." His words are filled with pure rage. There isn't an ounce of the man who came to me last night in the cell, and I have no idea what he's talking about. Even though I try shaking my head, I can't, because his grip in my hair is too strong.

"Y-y-you're wrong." Even though I manage to choke out the words, he doesn't believe me, because it's written all over his face. Indifference.

It's all I get out before he glances down to see I've wet myself in fear of him killing me. He drops to his knees for a second, his hands hovering over me, as if he wants to lift me up, to touch me and ask if I'm okay.

But the second vanishes quickly when he pushes to his feet and steps back. His mask being pulled back on. His full lips curve slightly, and I wonder if he's amused that I've messed myself. He releases my hair and stalks around his desk. He picks up the phone and taps a few numbers into the base.

"Valentina, my office, now." He hangs up and watches me for a moment, before gesturing to the chair with his chin. "I'm not a nice man. And I will *never* pretend to be. You're here for your protection. If you make my job harder, I won't think twice about pulling the trigger on a loaded gun."

“Is that what gets you off?”

He chuckles, lifting his 9mm, and closes the distance between us. “Open your mouth.” I don’t obey immediately, and the thumb and index finger of his free hand grips my cheeks, squeezing until I have no choice but to open for him. He shoves the barrel into my mouth and down my throat, causing me to gag on the metal nudging the back of my throat. “See,” he chuckles. “Soon, this will be my cock. Don’t fuck with me, Sofia. You’re here because I have chosen to help you.”

The door opens; he releases me and allows Valentina to enter. Her eyes are wide when she sees I’ve wet myself.

“Take her to the bedroom and get her cleaned up.” He waves his hand, ignoring us, as he settles himself in the chair behind his large desk. That’s the last time I see him for the day, but my body is still thrumming, and my mind is whirling with what the fuck just happened.

VICTOR

I fucked up. I shouldn't have done that, but the rage that's slowly simmering in my veins for this girl boiled over, and now I'm stuck here unsure of what my feelings for her mean. I want to protect her, but I also want to fuck her into next year.

I want her to cry.

I want to watch her crawl away from me, plead with me to stop when I won't.

I would never fucking stop.

And that's where my problem lies.

The door to my office flies open, and I'm met with Javi's angry blue glare. His eyes are the color of the tropical oceans in Havana. Flawless and see-through. Even so, he would never let anyone in. He's as closed off as I am. And perhaps that's why we get along so well.

Until now.

"What happened?" His expression is wary, knowing my emotions are taking hold of me, and I'm losing it. No woman who has ever stepped foot on this property has ever made me lose my mind, but for some reason, this sweet, innocent woman who doesn't have a forever has shoved her fist into my chest and gripped my heart in a feral hold.

"She overstepped her comments."

"And that's the reason for making her piss herself?" he questions, but I don't respond. I can't. His blue eyes shine with flames of dangerous fire, and I know he's about to give me a piece of his mind.

All the years I've spent around Javier, he's always been calm. Almost as if he didn't notice the shit I would do, but now... Well, this is very different. His body shakes with the rage that's so clear in his eyes. I want to get lost in a bottle of Patron, but for now, I have to take the advice from Javier.

"*Ella jodidamente se enojó,*" he bites out angrily, his face contorted in a way I'd never witnessed before. He stalks back and forth, pacing a hole in my carpet, before he suddenly stops and glares at me. "You're in love with her."

Love?

It takes me a moment to process the words. That one word. And I chuckle. I laugh, from deep in my gut, and the sound rumbles through the office like thunder rolling in from the desert.

"I don't love, Javi, you're being ridiculous." In my attempt at shoving his confident conclusion away, I glance out the window, trying to look calmer than I feel, because every fucking nerve ending in my body is alight with want and need.

"Look me in the eye and tell me she means nothing to you." His command causes me to glance his way. "Did you fuck her?"

“You’re out of line, *amigo*,” I bite out, shoving away from the desk, causing my chair to slam into the wall behind me with a resounding thud. Stalking around the desk, I maneuver my way in front of Javier, pinning him with a glare so fierce, I’m certain he’d drop dead if I could kill him with a glance.

“I’m not stupid, Victor,” he tells me. “I’ve known you all my life. When you lie…” His words taper off, and I’m burning to know what exactly he thinks he knows about me. “I can see it. There’s no way of hiding it.”

“Are you growing a pussy, Javi?” I taunt, attempting to push the focus on him, but I know he wouldn’t fall for that trick. I’ve done it before, and he’s picked up on it immediately.

“Victor.” There’s a hint of frustration, but mostly fear, in his voice. “This isn’t a teenage crush we can laugh off in a few years.”

“I never said she was. This has nothing to do with feelings. It’s a fucking job, just like any other that we’ve had.” Casting my gaze to his, I meet the shrewd glare he’s pinned me with. There’s no reason for him to believe me, but I know he will anyway. Because I’ll ensure he does. Fuck. If I’m being brutally honest, I need to ensure I do, too. I can’t have feelings for her; she’s a means to an end.

“She has nobody else in her corner and you’re coming down with some fucked up *knight in shining armor* complex,” he bites out.

“Is there something you’d like to tell me, Javi?” Tipping my head to the side, I face him fully, waiting for the confirmation that’s slowly settling in my veins. There’s something more here, something I didn’t expect.

“¿*De qué estás hablando?*” His dark brows furrow together in mock confusion as he questions, *what are you talking about*, and I see it clear as day in his expression. It’s dancing in his eyes like a fucking beacon in the night.

Leaning my elbows on the desk, I tent my fingers, resting my chin on them, while I stare at him for a moment before questioning, “Are you jealous?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he scoffs, chuckling as if it means nothing, but I’ve known Javier most of my life, the same as he’s known me, and this is, indeed, his green-eyed monster rearing its head.

“Tell me, Javier,” I taunt him once more, rising from my seat, rounding my desk to stalk toward him. Stopping in front of Javi, I stare him down, knowing he won’t back down at all. That’s one thing about Javier, he’s as stubborn as I am ruthless.

“We have a meeting tonight, I’ll see you in a few hours.” He spins on his heel and leaves the office with me staring after his retreating form. Of all the years I’ve known him, he’s never been jealous, we’ve always had our own likes and dislikes. Meaning, any pussy that I plunged my dick into was mine. We never had the same taste in women.

Shaking my head, I settle back in the chair and respond to the emails that came in this morning. But, even as I attempt to focus on the delivery of coke heading for the States, I can’t stop thinking about my best friend and my little captive.

Just then an email pops into my inbox with a subject line that stills my breathing. Clicking on it, I open the video attachment to find a faceless man. The voice has been distorted, but I can hear his words clearly.

“Bring her to the address in the email. We will give you a week to decide. If you refuse, you’ll be sorry you stole what belongs to the *Trituradoras de cráneo*.” The video ends in a black screen of nothing. Nobody threatens me, they know better. And this asshole may think he can fuck with me, but he doesn’t know I’m El Diablo, and I’ll burn him alive and bask in the sizzle of his skin.

Pushing up from the desk, I head to the exit. There’s only one place I can find answers. Time to talk to my captive.

SOFÍA

The bed is soft and warm, but I'm still shivering wildly under the heavy comforter. My body aches, and my eyes are puffy from crying. Valentina left me to sleep, but my mind has been working overtime since she walked out of the bedroom.

There wasn't anything else for me to do but recall the way Victor scared me. It's been a long time since I felt fear like that. The last time was when my mother died. Knowing I would be without her for the rest of my life was something I could never prepare for.

Victor, on the other hand, wasn't something I had been prepared for. When he lost his shit, I was no longer the strong girl I'd promised myself I would be. My heart and mind escaped me, and I was left a trembling mess.

As much as I hate him, I can't help wondering what he would've done if I'd retorted in that moment. *Would he kill me?* Yes. Of course, he would. There's no doubt in my mind he's capable of pulling a trigger without flinching.

Rolling over onto my back, I stare up at the ceiling, which is ornate with designs and patterns. The swirls make me dizzy, and I realize I haven't eaten today. As if reading my mind, the door opens, but the person who enters isn't who I was expecting.

Instead of Valentina's friendly face, I'm met with the cold golden glare of Victor Cordero. Shuffling up against the headboard, I pull my knees to my chest, hugging myself, not dropping my gaze from the predator who's just entered my bedroom.

"Sofia," he utters, shutting the door behind him. I watch him turn the lock, which makes my body tremble with anxiety. "We need to talk, little one." His voice is controlled, too even and cold, which makes me wonder what I'm about to experience. *Will he torture me?* I have no idea what I've done, but clearly, he's not happy about something.

He doesn't come near me. Instead, Victor stands at the window, his tall frame almost covering the light that's slowly fading on the horizon. His hands are twined behind his back, and I take in the beauty of the Devil as he stands looking out over his kingdom. The golden glow makes him seem ethereal, but I know there's nothing angelic about this man. Perhaps a dark angel, yes.

"Get off the bed," he says in a chilly tone.

I move quickly, not wanting to anger him further. When I'm standing a few inches from him, he finally turns to regard me. He reaches for me, his fingers tangling in my long dark hair, and tugs my head back harshly, causing me to whimper in agony.

He doesn't seem fazed by my pain. He pulls me closer, until I'm practically standing on his shoes. I can feel the cool leather beneath my bare feet. His hand tightens, causing the strands to sting my

scalp, drawing another yelp from my lips.

His mouth tilts at the sound. “So pretty when you cry. Do you know how hard my cock gets when you whimper and moan like that?”

“You’re hurting me.”

“I know, *juguete*,” he grins. And damn him because it only makes him more handsome. “You see, I don’t like liars.” He doesn’t relent on his hold as he tells me this. If anything, he only grips me harder, drawing more pained moans from me. “They make me angry, and when I’m angry, I do things that you wouldn’t like.”

“I don’t know—”

“Don’t fucking lie to me, Sofia,” his harsh grunt sends vibrations through me from head to toe and back again. I can’t breathe, he’s far too close to me, invading my space. He’s all I see. Victor’s looming frame dwarfs mine, and I know there’s no way I can fight this man off.

A memory slams into me of my father teaching me to fight off an attacker. And in that moment, I grin, before lifting my knee and finding his crotch, feeling the contact the moment he doubles over.

I make a run for it. I don’t know where I’m going, but I have to try. My heart thuds painfully against my ribs, threatening to fight its way through my chest. When I reach the door, my mind is thundering with how to get out of this house. Twisting the lock, my hand is on the doorknob when I feel two large hands grip my arms.

Pushing me against the wood, he presses me against the surface with his heavy body. The heat of him almost comforts me until I remember who’s behind me. Shoving my hands against the door, I attempt to push away, but Victor is too strong.

His hand finds my throat, and his fingers wrap around the column of my neck while his free hand grips my hip, his fingers digging into the flesh, causing me to cry out in pain. When he rolls his hips, I feel the hard-on pressing against my ass.

Gasping, I attempt another shove, but I’m only tiring myself out. I can’t do this. Tears sting my eyes as I give up the fight and allow him to take control.

“You know, I would’ve believed you if you’d told me you didn’t know anything, but then you went and fought me.” His voice whispers along my cheek, the heat of his breath causing my skin to dot in goose bumps. “But what you don’t know, *juguete*, is that I like when you fight. It makes me want to pin you down and fuck some sense into you.”

“Fuck you, Victor Cordero,” I spit out, not sure where I’m getting the confidence from, but if he wants to kill me, I wish he’d just get it over with.

He spins me around to face him. His gold eyes blaze like the afternoon sun outside the window. Warm, yet cold and dangerous at the same time. My mouth falls open when he pins me to the door with his hand. I don’t fight, I don’t flail, and I recognize the frustration in his gaze.

“What? You don’t like a limp rag doll?” I challenge him easily, knowing I’ve caught onto what he really wants from me. He may not have said it, but it’s written all over his handsome face. *What the fuck, Sofia?*

“Tonight, you’ll give me everything I want.”

“And what do you want?”

His thumb runs along the smooth flesh of my neck, his gaze following the path up and down. He revels in the erratic pulse that’s thrumming wildly along the slender column. It’s my most dangerous part—my heart. It’s broken, it’s unstable, and it could kill me at any moment. Yet, he wants it.

“I thought it was clear, Sofia. I want you.”

VICTOR

She stares at me for a while before she shakes her head. Her body is still trembling, and I can't help but find it sensual. The fire that rages in her eyes, the fear that trickles through her, everything about Sofia has turned me inside out. And I'm about to unravel her just the same.

My phone buzzes in my jacket pocket, and I pull it out before she can speak. My eyes scan the message, and my blood turns hot like a volcano about to erupt, and I'm not sure little Sofia will survive.

"Do you think I could ever want you?" Her question steals my attention and stills me for a moment. Each time we've been close to each other, there's been electricity in the air. Even though she's not supposed to be mine, I know I'll take her.

"You mistake my statement as an option to you, Sofia," I murmur, while leaning in and allowing my lips to trail along her chin, up toward her ear. A soft gasp falls from her lips the moment I suck the lobe into my mouth, my teeth grazing along the sensitive flesh. "Tell me, Sofia," I murmur in her ear, and another shudder races through her.

"This... I... stop." Her weak response is only further evidence that she does want me. As much as I do her.

"It's been long enough, and you can't deny each time I walk into the room you don't feel it." My voice is husky, filled with need. "*Quiero oírte decirlo,*" I taunt her—I want to hear you say it—needing her to say no. To tell me she doesn't want this.

"Please let me go, Victor." This time, she sounds more convinced, but I'm certainly not. I can't be, because if I believed her words, then I'd be a stupid man. And that's undoubtedly not who I am.

"Look into my eyes, Sofia." My demand sends a cool shiver through her. Goose bumps rise on every inch of her skin, and I want to trail my tongue over them, tasting the caramel of her flesh. I wonder what her cunt looks like, if it's smooth and succulent, or if she's trimmed, tight and warm. Thoughts race through my mind and I'm lost in them when I feel her hand on my face. It's not a harsh touch, it's gentle, yet demanding at the same time.

A contradiction.

"Victor." The way she breathes my name sends desire coursing through me. Need that I haven't felt in a long time. Her gaze shines, and I'm lost in those beautiful windows to her soul and the want shining in them. She's fighting it. She's strong, using all her restraint to *not* want me. "Please release me from your hold. I want to lie down."

The gentleness of her request has me relenting. For the first time in years, in forever, I step back and allow a woman to control me. For far too long, I've been the monster, but for some reason, this

woman brings out a kinder side to me, she tames the beast that rears within me, and I don't know what to do with that.

"We still need to talk."

Sofia pads to the bed, perching her ass on the edge of the mattress, and I watch as she settles with her legs crossed. The small shorts she's wearing offer me a glimpse of white cotton panties beneath, and my cock is at attention, more so now than moments ago.

"Who is Rodrigo?" My question jars her. I see it the second his name leaves my lips. Her mouth falls open, but she shuts it tight, her lips pursed in concentration, and I watch in awe as her mind swirls with explanations that I know are all lies.

She's attempting to come up with some made up story. Only, she doesn't know who she's dealing with. I've been trained to read liars and torture men for less. I was about to walk her into that asshole's house tonight, but his threat was clear. The confirmation I got moments ago has violence thrumming in my veins. I'm ready to kill.

I run my index finger over my lips, while my thumb holds onto my chin. My other hand is shoved deep into the pocket of my slacks to keep from flinging something across the room. I can tell a liar when I see one. There are many tells on a person when they're trying to come up with a story. Even the short delay in response informs me that she doesn't want me to know about her past. About her secret. I wonder then if her father knows.

"Does Hector know about him?"

"No!" She snaps, her gaze pinned on me. Her delicate hands that are always so steady, tremble with anxiety. She's afraid of him. That angers me. I want her afraid of me; I'm the fucking asshole who can snuff her out within seconds.

I hold the strings to her life, and if she fears anyone, it should be me.

"And you thought not telling your father about your fucking drug dealer boyfriend would be a good idea?" My voice is calm; yet, she can tell from the underlying rage coursing through me that I'm not happy about learning this tidbit of information from Javier only seconds before I stood in her room. "I came in here to talk, to give you a chance to release your father, but if you continue lying to me, *juguete...*"

My words taper off, but that only opens the door for her to fist her tiny hands. The action is adorable, and I almost want to laugh, almost. Her big eyes pierce me with challenge, with anger, with everything she's feeling, and I'm tempted to pin her to the bed and fuck her senseless.

However, I don't expect the words to fall from her lips the moment I take a step toward her. "What? What are you going to do with your plaything, Victor? Are you going to kill me? Then do it! I'm dying anyway."

We both still at her outburst. Me, because I don't want to acknowledge the fact that she's ill. And she is frozen because she's finally admitted it. I knew she's never actually voiced the words. It's not something a sane person would want to tell themselves.

I'm dying anyway.

Those three words, so powerful in admission, yet so difficult to utter. I've seen men die before me, I've taken their lives, basked in the control I had over how many breaths they take, but this... This is something else. The thought of Sofia closing her eyes and never waking again causes my chest to ache in a way I've never felt.

I've only ever loved one woman. A long time ago. She was everything. I wanted to marry her, to make her a Cordero, mark her, claim her, put a fucking ring on her finger, and then I walked in while she was bouncing on one of my men's dicks.

THE HOUSE IS silent as I saunter through the living room. I thought Gaia would be home, but there aren't any lights on, and there's no music playing. When she's home alone, I know she enjoys singing along to whatever playlist she has on the stereo.

I make my way through the kitchen, finding nothing but a plate that's been swiped clean. Picking it up, I place it in the sink and turn for the stairs. That's when I hear the sound. It's slight, but I have the hearing of a fucking predator.

Pulling my gun from the holster that's secured on my shoulder, I cock it, ensuring it's loaded. Silently, I head upstairs, taking one step at a time. The closer I get to the top, the louder the sounds are. It's not music, perhaps Gaia is watching television. Some fucking soap opera. But it's only when I reach the door to the guest bedroom that I hear the moaning. That's certainly more pornographic sounding than the shows she usually watches on tv.

I reach for the handle, twisting it slowly, ensuring that the movement is silent. The wooden surface inches inward, and I find the source of the moans and grunts. The long flowing dark hair of the woman I was about to propose to hangs down her back in chocolate waves.

Her bare torso moves up and down, and with every whimper and mewl, she moves faster, riding the dick beneath her. I know her moves, I've seen them firsthand, but now it's as if I'm having an out of body experience.

I step into the space, and the asshole's shocked gaze latches on me. He shoves the woman I love to the mattress, swiftly attempting to move off the bed. But he's too slow. I'm a fucking hunter, and when I'm out for the kill, I ensure my prey doesn't escape.

Lifting the gun, I aim the barrel toward the naked figure. Gaia is screaming, begging me to stop, but all I see is red. Blood. My finger tugs on the trigger, again and again. With every bullet hole I puncture through the asshole's back, the less enraged I feel.

When he's on the floor, lying in a pool of blood, I turn to her. "Get the fuck out before I do the same to you." My voice isn't mine. It's dark, low, and dangerous. I sound like Satan himself. And I smile, when she glares at me in fury.

"What the fuck is your problem? You fuck—"

That's when I pull the trigger. Her body crumples to the floor as she screeches, holding her cunt as the blood pours from it. "Next time you get a dick inside that hole, you'll remember me."

That's when I turn and leave her on the floor.

THAT WAS the last time I ever allowed a woman to control me.

When I glance at Sofia, she's staring at me with curiosity painting her pretty face. I turn away, not wanting her to see me like that, even though it's in my mind, I have a feeling her piercing gaze can puncture the armor I've perfected since I threw Gaia out of my house.

I wanted to believe her love for me, but that's not the type of man I am. Instead, I didn't even stay to watch her bleed out, she didn't deserve my attention. And I never felt an ounce of guilt for slicing her open.

"Where did you go?" Her sweet voice cuts through the dark, and I'm bombarded by her light. She emanates it like a beacon. A lighthouse on the edge of the ocean, warning me to steer clear, but I've never been one for safety. I've lived my life on the choppy waters, and this time, it's no different.

“To a place I wish you never to see.”

“I’ve probably seen worse,” she tells me sadly.

I don’t meet her gaze when I question, “Why doesn’t Hector know about Rodrigo?”

SOFÍA

He watches me. The predator glaring at me, waiting for me to make my move. To tell him about my stupid deal with a man who is probably as dangerous as Victor Cordero himself. But then again, don't they say *it's the devil you know*.

"It was when I turned sixteen," I start, averting my gaze. "I was sick for months, and my father's salary wasn't covering my medication." A humorless laugh tumbles free when I recall papá's love for gambling. How each night he'd come home with less and less in his wallet.

I knew what he was doing, though. Trying to win money to pay for my surgery; he promised it would be okay, but it wasn't. He fell deeper and deeper into a fucking hole, and I was being dragged down with him.

Don't get me wrong, I love him more than life, but if he would have listened to me, this would never have come to pass. I told him I could work, I could do more, but he didn't want me to.

"Rodrigo promised to help me, help my family," I tell my captor. "He gave me money to buy medication, but it was only when I turned seventeen did he want more for his money. He..." My words falter, and I finally lift my gaze to Victor who's positively vibrating with rage. Over the past week, I've seen him angry, but this... it's something else. Something dark passes over his features, and if I wasn't the one telling him this story, I'd run.

Although, I tried, and it didn't work. So, I quietly sit here, wringing my fingers in the sheet that doesn't offer comfort against the wrath emanating from the man before me.

"Did he...?" He doesn't voice the words, but I know what he's asking. I know the moment he closes the distance between us and lifts me by my arms as if I'm a weightless doll. Our faces are inches apart, his lips are a breath from mine, and his eyes, those golden orbs of emotion, swirl wildly with confusion.

"No. He didn't do anything to me. Although, he almost did, got my clothes torn before someone interrupted, and he sent me racing home," I finally utter.

I'm about to tell him more, when his mouth crashes to mine. It's sudden, unexpected, but in that moment, it's everything I want. He releases my arms, and I fall to the mattress. His large frame hovers over me.

"Tell me, Sofía," he pleads in a low graveled tone. "Tell me you hate me." His gaze bores through me, it niggles away at my pain, the high walls I'd built to keep everyone out, and slowly, brick by brick, he's unraveling me, and I've never been more afraid.

Death has nothing on Victor Cordero.

Dying is welcome.

The emotion from the man who's about to consume me, that's something I'll never be ready for. So, instead of fighting him again, I arch my back, needing him close. I want to feel his warmth.

Meeting those honey colored eyes, I whisper the words he wants to hear, "I do, Victor, I hate you." It's then that he steals my breath with a kiss that not only eliminates my fear, it also consumes my soul. All the good, all the light I had hidden inside, is now only engulfed by the black and red of Victor and his family crest.

My fingers tangle in his dark hair. It's soft, silky, and I tug him closer. My legs wrap around his waist, the heels of my feet dig into his ass, feeling the fibers of the suit pants he's wearing.

I want more. So much fucking more that I whimper when he pulls away from me. "This," he tells me, planting a kiss on my lips, "is going to make you mine. Are you ready for it?"

"No." The word is honest. It's the most honesty I've given anyone in a long time. "I hate you. I'm so scared of you, I feel like I have a hole inside me," I tell him.

"Good." My brows furrow in confusion at his response. Only to have him reach for my face, pressing my cheeks together, he leans in further and allows me to swallow his reply, "because I'm the fucking monster you'll fear. I know you like when I hurt you, *juguete*," he murmurs.

"Please."

His fingers latch onto my neck, squeezing until I see black spots. "I bet your pretty little cunt is wet right now. You'll feel so good when I finally fuck you."

"Then do it."

He moves swiftly, shoving my panties and shorts down my legs. A second later, his face is between my thighs, his hands holding them wide. His heated gaze lands on my pussy, finding my core drenched with arousal for him. Just for him.

He doesn't speak, and I wonder what he's thinking. I want to close my legs, but the force he's holding me with doesn't allow it. Pushing up onto my elbows, I meet those beautiful endless pools of liquid gold before his mouth lands on my pussy.

His lips are warm, his tongue snakes into me, licking and laving at me like I'm a delicacy. As if I'm the last meal he's about to eat, and he's not letting anything go to waste. His fingers dig into my thighs, and I know they'll leave marks in their wake.

Bruised by the beast.

Toyed with by the monster.

Devoured by the devil.

My fingers curl in his hair, holding him against me as my hips rise up. I've never experienced anything like this; yet, I know I'm about to come. My toes curl when Victor finally releases one thigh, and his fingers dip into my drenched core.

"You're far too fucking tight, Sofia," he whispers against my sensitive flesh, then sucks my clit into his mouth while two fingers plunge into me. Both digits dip as deep as they can before he finds my resistance. I knew he would, but what I didn't expect was for him to continue deeper, to push through the barrier, causing pain and pleasure to mingle.

A turbulent force wrenches me from the bed, and I'm arching, crying out, and tearing at his hair as I feel some strange release of pleased pain ripping through me. He rises, his body shaking, as he shoves down his slacks, along with his boxers.

There's a thick, angry erection jutting in my direction, and I watch in awe as he fists his thickness with the hand that's now stained with my virginity. He jerks himself, slow and steady, as he looks between my thighs.

"Please, fuck me," I plead, stupidly, like a teen with a crush on the hottest boy at school, it's how

Victor makes me feel.

A sinful smirk toys with his lips, teasing me as he coats his cock with the evidence of *me* on the smooth, velvety skin. He presses the tip against me, and I buck up to add pressure to the one place I need it most.

He continues to rub my entrance, up and down, with his now seeping tip. It doesn't take long before I feel a wave of pleasure about to crash through me. The moment Victor's warmth hits my mound, I cry out his name, once, twice, and a third time, as my eyes roll back in my head.

I'm not sure how much time passes before I finally open my eyes, but when I do, I notice I'm under the covers. I'm hidden from his haunting gaze, but my limbs bear the weight of what I'd just experienced.

“You didn't tell me you're a virgin.”

It's then I realize he had his mouth down there. Hiding behind my hands, I peek at him through my fingers, hoping the ground would swallow me, and utter, “Oh God, I'm so sorry.”

He chuckles at my gasp. “I've had worse things happen to me, *juguete*. To be honest, you're rather sweet,” he tells me, with a smile that makes my heart kick against my chest.

I shouldn't be falling for the man who stole me, but I can no longer deny it—I'm falling for Victor Cordero.

VICTOR

“Get dressed, *juguete*,” I tell her, as I right myself. I wanted to fuck her, to take her body and claim it as mine. Even though I know I will soon, there’s something we need to do first. The dinner is in an hour, and if she thinks she’s getting out of it because of her past with Rodrigo, she’s sorely mistaken.

“Why?”

“We need to go to dinner.” I glance over my shoulder to look at my beauty. “There is a man I need to see, and you’ll be on my arm.” Walking into Rodrigo’s house with her beside me might be a mistake, but she lied and brought this upon herself.

As much as I want to leave her here, I know I need him to see she’s mine now. I’ll be the one paying for her surgery. I’ll be the one to save her, but she’ll be paying me back by being mine.

“Are these...? Is this man dangerous?”

“All the men I know are dangerous, sweetheart,” I tell her with a grin. I turn and leave her in the bedroom. She’ll know what to wear. I can picture her already, draped in something elegant, yet dick-hardening.

When I reach my office, I open the email I received earlier and hit respond.

SHE’LL BE THERE.

I HIT SEND BEFORE I sit back and pull out one of my cigars. I wet it, inhaling the scent, before I snip the end and light it. Once the smoke swirls around me, I feel the calm hitting my veins.

This should never have been as difficult as it’s become. She wasn’t meant to make me feel shit. Javier was right; we need to finish this, but we do it without hurting Sofia. I’ve gone and opened myself up to her, and when I saw her blood on my fingers, I knew there was no going back.

My office door opens, and Javi saunters in with a grin painted on his face. “I told you,” he says, as he settles in the chair opposite my desk. He rests one ankle on the opposite knee and leans back. His blue eyes dance with amusement, and I’m tempted to wipe the smile off his face, but I refrain.

“You told me what?”

“You have a thing for the girl. *Ella es tu veneno*,” he whispers, *she’s your poison*, before he continues, “Rodrigo isn’t going to give her up easily.”

“He doesn’t have to, I’m taking her to the address as requested, but before that, I’m going to find

out more of her secrets,” I inform him of my decision. His eyes widen as he regards me with the shock that I know he’s feeling. “I have a week.”

“A week to fall more in love with her?” he challenges, which doesn’t help my frustration. He’s walking a very fine line with his accusations, and I don’t appreciate it.

“If you keep on with that, you’ll be sorry. She needs to pay her debt. And it’s time to collect.”

“Why?”

“What do you mean? She needs to finish whatever she started. She lied, time to face the consequences.” Shrugging, I push off the chair and round my desk so that I’m in front him. I pull deeply on the cigar, blowing out smoke circles while I stare at Javier, waiting for him to challenge my choice.

“I understand consequences, Boss, but she’s not Gaia,” he speaks. The warning is clear as he spits Gaia’s name so low that I almost don’t hear it, but he knows the moment I do when I take my cigar and bring it to his eye. The heat of the cherry bud is causing tears to form, and even though it’s not touching his retina, I know he feels every bit of the simmer that could happen. The mind is a wonderful thing when it’s taught pain. After a while, it doesn’t faze you anymore. You can withstand it far longer than you expect. “Do it,” Javi challenges.

I smile. I laugh. I straighten and turn away from him. “You’ve been my right hand for a long time, Javi,” I speak, but I don’t look at him. I couldn’t hurt him. Not even if he brought that whore back into my house and fucked her on my desk. “I’m surprised it wasn’t your dick she was riding.”

“I’m not desperate for pussy,” he bites out, making me laugh. I know he’s not because it’s not the women in my life that he’s jealous of, he’s angry because I prefer pussy to dick.

“No, you’re not,” I tell him. “But Sofia is mine, and I’ll do with her as I wish. Tonight, she’ll accompany me to the dinner, and tomorrow, once she trusts me, I will take her to Rodrigo to explain what his issue is with her. Besides the money, there’s something she’s not telling me about.”

“You let her live, even after she lies to you?” This time I can hear the incredulity in his tone, but I can’t deny that he’s right. If it were anyone else, they’d be tortured, but I have a feeling that my little *juguete* is someone I can’t hurt physically, but emotionally. And whatever goes down tonight is up to her.

“Get the car ready,” I tell him, before facing him. “I’ll be down in a few.”

“I’ll always be by your side, Victor,” Javier tells me. “Always.” It’s a vow, one that I knew before he voiced it, but I nod in any case. I didn’t realize it until the moment I took Sofia’s purity. I don’t know if being with her gave me the clarity I needed, but I know Javier wants me, but, unfortunately, that won’t happen.

I turn to the window again and take in the grounds. Every fucking inch is mine. Time for the king to take down the men who want the kingdom.

“Do I look okay?” The soft voice comes from behind me, and I’m not prepared for what I see when I turn around. Sofia’s dress is floor-length, the red silk hugs her slight curves, with a deep V that dips between her beautiful tits. Her caramel skin sparkles with gold glitter, and I can’t stop my dick from waking up.

A thin gold bracelet adorns her left wrist, and her long chestnut hair has been curled into waves that hang down her back until it hits her tailbone. She watches me for a long moment while I take in every inch of her. The heels she’s wearing are also glittering with gold, and when I meet her forest-green eyes, I see the shyness dancing in them.

“I’ve never seen a more beautiful woman,” I tell her honestly, because it’s true. Yes, I’ve had many women in my house, on my arm, and on my dick, but I’ve never been as enamored by anyone

before.

“Thank you,” she speaks. “Could I see my father again soon?” She asks, and I know what she’s doing—using my distraction at her beauty to negotiate. Only, she can’t see him again.

“Perhaps,” I lie. Moving toward her, I run my fingertips along her bare arms and cast another quick glance at her slight cleavage, and I can’t help picturing coming all over her chest right now. “I’d love to mark you with my seed and walk you into the dinner party wearing my mark proudly,” I admit.

Her cheeks darken considerably, and I smile. She’s beautiful when she’s shy—sweet and innocent—like a seductive treat.

“I don’t think that would be good,” she tells me shyly.

Tipping my head to the side, I arch a brow before questioning, “And why is that?”

A small, playful grin tilts her glossy lips, and she tells me, “That’s caveman behavior, I didn’t think you were a savage.”

“Only a monster?” I challenge. Another smile before she nods. “I can take that. Fine,” I acquiesce, “I’ll leave your pretty flesh unmarked...” I whisper along her skin, “for now.”

A blush blooms even darker on her pretty face, and I find I’m enjoying our flirtatious banter. Even though I do prefer her fire, right in this moment, I’m enjoying her innocence.

“Why me? Besides being a payment for what my father took. You could’ve taken what you wanted from me and sent me away.” Her words are the truest form of confusion, and they settle in my mind, not leaving any room for me to think up a quick lie.

“Why do you think?”

“No, Victor, that’s not an answer. I want to, no, I need to know. I’m not someone who can give you what you need.”

“What is it you think I need?” I question, frustration burning in my gut just like the feelings she’s ignited inside me. She’s a beautiful flower I have no right to hold. *Fuck this shit.* Stepping back from her, I fold my arms across my chest, in an attempt to hide from her, but I know it’s no use. She’s already seen me.

“I don’t know why you try to show everyone how bad you are, when you’re not. I made a mess in this office not so long ago, and you could’ve easily killed me for that. But instead, I saw your humanity, it shone through when you dropped to your knees.”

“A moment of weakness,” I inform her.

“A moment of truth,” she challenges.

This is a mistake, Victor.

“I thought you were convinced I’m the Devil?”

She nods, turning her face away from me, robbing me of her heated gaze. And all I want are those beautiful gems watching me intently again. To see desire shining in them. This isn’t like me. To be so enamored with a woman. But with her, I can’t stop it.

She’s too young, too fucking innocent, but I’ve never once allowed morals to stop me from taking what I want, what I need. *Why now do I question myself?* She’s breaking me down, when I was meant to break her.

My body is tense when I voice my next question. “And what does that make you, Sofia?”

She awards me with a glance, green orbs burn with emotion. Fire. It burns me from the inside and out. Deeper, more potent than before, because she knows how she feels.

She’s falling.

And so am I.

“The Devil’s Plaything,” she whispers. Her blush flourishes on the apples of her cheeks.

I eat up the distance between us, and she doesn't retreat when I grasp her face in my hands and pull her lips to mine. Our mouths fuse with venom and passion, pure and feral, lust-filled and hate-fueled.

Her body is pressed against mine, and I allow my hand to trail down to her ass, gripping it harshly as I tug her impossibly closer. Her tongue darts out tentatively, licking against my lips, and I tumble freely into her depths.

The flavor of her intoxicates me, and for a moment, I'm not in my office. I'm not the Devil, I'm a man falling. The abyss has opened, and Sofia pushes me in, and I fall freely into her.

When I finally pull away, breaking the connection, I take in her glazed green eyes. She's shaking, and I pull her into a hug. Pressing my lips to her forehead, I close my eyes and inhale her jasmine perfume. There's a hint of apples that masks her hair, and I can't stop wanting another hit of her.

She's a drug.

Pure heroine to my veins.

And I want to inject myself with it, every second of every day.

SOFÍA

I'm trembling. My panties are soaked, and my body is pulsing for him to fill me. He may have broken my hymen, but he still hasn't taken me. *Would he send me away after he's claimed my body?*

"I don't know what you're doing to me, *juguete*," he tells me, his voice husky, dripping with seduction and danger, which doesn't quell the ache that he's caused. "Come, we're going to be late. And I don't like keeping friends waiting." He laces his fingers with mine, and heat spills into my stomach, awakening butterflies that lie dormant until Victor touches me. He pulls me along behind him, shutting the office door, and we make our way to the garage where the blacked-out SUV is waiting.

"Are you going to tell me where we're going?"

"A dinner with associates of mine," he informs me, as we slip into the back of the car. "They're visiting from America, and I need to talk with him."

"And I'm meant to be arm candy for the evening?" I question, turning my attention to him. I want to ask more than that, but I don't want to make him angry. My emotions are all over the place, fear and desire mingle together like a stifling perfume that holds me hostage.

"You'll keep his wife company," he tells me. He pulls me into the crook of his arm and traces his fingers of his free hand up and down my arm, causing goose bumps to rise up in the wake of his feathered touch.

"What are we doing, Victor?" I finally question, praying he doesn't get angry. "I mean, you have my father captive, you have me as a prisoner, but you kissed me."

His gaze snaps to the front of the car, and I turn to find Javier's stare locked on Victor's. *Did he know what happened?* Silence hangs heavily in the car as we swerve through the Friday night traffic.

Everyone is out partying tonight, and yet, I'm in the back of a car with one of Colombia's most dangerous men. The devil himself, and I'm curled up in his arms as if he was a boyfriend, rather than the man who took me as payment.

"Where is my father?" I ask, taking liberties, because he's not responding to me. Fear grips my stomach when his hand finds the back of my neck and his fingers tighten around the column. He holds me in place and brings his face to mine.

"Don't ask questions you don't want the answers to," he murmurs threateningly and suddenly, I feel sick for allowing my body to betray me when his lips touched mine.

"Why wouldn't I want the answers?"

"Sometimes, it's best you know nothing," he tells me easily.

I glance up, trying to see if he's lying, or if he's bullshitting me just to put fear in me, but when I look into those golden eyes, there's no amusement. My mouth falls open, the words burn my tongue like acid, and tears sting my eyes.

"Your father is at the warehouse. You saw him," he tells me quickly, before shaking his head and, once again, squeezing my neck in a silent warning. *Stop asking questions.* I should obey, but then again, I've never been the kind of girl to listen to authority.

"What about my other question?"

He doesn't answer me, but suddenly pulls me onto his lap, pushing me to straddle him. His hands bring my face inches from his and his lips quirk into a sinfully wicked grin. I want nothing more than to kiss him again, to make this real. To make him a good man and for him not to be the man who could easily kill me and my father.

"I will fuck you, *juguete*," he promises, and I have no doubt he means it. "And when I do, you'll beg me for more. You'll want nothing more than my dick in your pretty cunt. It's mine. You are mine." There's a possessiveness that laces every word he utters, and it makes my body come alive.

He presses his lips to mine. It's a gentle kiss, not like earlier in his office when he practically devoured me. This is a lingering whisper of a promise. He will be inside me, and I have a feeling it will be tonight.

The car comes to a stop, and I right myself, before the door opens and I step out to grasp Javier's hand. He looks at me for a long moment before he steps aside to allow Victor to take his place.

If I weren't so afraid of these men, I'd feel like a princess being the only one to steal the affections of the King. I don't doubt that Victor is the king of this world, but I wonder briefly if I could ever be a queen. *Could I stand by his side as he tortures men and kills them?*

"Victor," a deep rumble of a man comes from the open door of the rather large mansion we're walking toward. He's dressed in black, tattoos adorn his arms, and I can't help but shiver at how big he is. Muscles look like they're about to break through his shirt when he shakes Victor's hand.

"Nice to see you again, Lance," Victor chuckles, as the men do a one-handed hug, slapping each other on the back. The man, Lance, shakes Javier's hand as well, before turning his attention to me.

"And this beauty must be Sofia," he says, shocking me because I didn't think any of Victor's acquaintances knew who I was. *Did he go boasting about stealing me? Is this man evil too?*

"Hello," I say, and he takes my hand, pressing his lips to my knuckles in a show of chivalry that makes me smile. He doesn't seem bad, but then again, Victor is beautiful and handsome, but he's done heinous things.

"I'm Lance Knight," he tells me. "I have worked with Victor in the past. My wife is happy to hear there'll be another woman joining us for dinner."

"Oh?" *How can he have a wife? He looks so... dangerous.*

Just then, a beautiful blonde strolls out of the house. "Are we having dinner out here tonight?" She smiles as she slides into the crook of Lance's body, as if she were made to fit there. She looks young, and I can't help but feel at ease that there's another woman my age here.

"No, beauty. This is Sofia," he tells her.

"Oh, it's so good to have another woman to talk to," she says, as she pulls me into a hold. "Nice to meet you, I'm Giuliana." She looks like a princess; her eyes shine with happiness.

"Nice to meet you, too," I say finally. I watch in awe as Victor leans in to give her a kiss on her cheek before Javier does the same. It's like they're a family, and I suddenly feel like an outsider.

"Let's go inside and get our guests drinks." Lance pulls Giuliana inside, and we follow with Victor's fingertips brushing along the base of my spine as he leads me through their modern home.

Once we have our drinks, a glass of wine for me and a whiskey for Victor, the men disappear into the office and leave us in the kitchen. Their home is immaculate, but when I turn to Giuliana, she offers me the story.

“This is our holiday home in a way. When Lance needs Victor’s help, we come down here and spend a few days, sometimes a couple of weeks.”

“It’s gorgeous,” I tell her honestly, sipping my wine.

“How did you meet Victor? He’s not really a man who ever brings a date to dinner,” she tells me, whispering conspiratorially, and I decide then and there that I like her. Also, she probably knows Victor better than I do.

“I... my father works for him, well, he worked for Victor’s dad,” I tell her the truth, omitting the part of him stealing me as payment. Even though I like her, I’m not sure how much I can trust Giuliana with.

“You’re in love with him?” she asks, but it feels as if she’s making a statement.

“No,” I answer quickly, causing her to turn her attention on me. “I mean... He’s just someone I’m with for a short time.”

“Listen to me,” she says, before setting her glass down and giving me her undivided attention. “A man like Victor Cordero doesn’t just bring a girl to dinner with one of his closest associates.” She lowers her voice further, “And Victor also doesn’t speak possessively of any woman he’s ever had in his bed.”

“I’ve never been in his bed,” I retort, cringing the moment the words fall from my lips. “I’m sorry. I’m just not used to this. I grew up believing he was a bad person, and now...” My words taper into nothing, and I know she’s watching me, waiting for me to admit what I already know. But I can’t. I cannot bring myself to admit my feelings for Victor have changed.

Not yet anyway.

“Aren’t all men bad in some way?” Giuliana challenges me. “My father runs an organization called the Cavalieri Della Morte, Lance is one of his soldiers. They hunt, they maim, and they kill. But he comes home to me and he’s the man I love.”

“And how do you deal with knowing he’s a killer?”

“The people he does murder are criminals,” she tells me. “And hey, who knows why he and Victor are friends, but they are. I can’t deny that, at times, I’m fearful he won’t return to me. But I have to believe that my love for him will bring him home.”

“Always, baby girl,” Lance says from the doorway, as he eats up the distance to his wife in a few long strides and pulls her into his arms.

“Get a fucking room,” Victor complains, as he finishes his whiskey. We laugh at that, and soon, the tension that was twisting in my gut is gone. The drinks are refilled, and soon enough, we’re all seated at a beautifully set table with food steaming from the serving bowls.

The smiles that we share are genuine. The laughs are filled with happiness.

And for a moment, I feel normal.

VICTOR

The dinner went well. Lance needed my help, and I would do anything for him. I met him as a young boy, working for Arthur, and even then, I saw his potential. Now that we're still working on opposite sides of Arthur's rule, I know he's the contact I need in my corner.

The Cavalieri don't normally deal in my territory, so if something needs sorting out on this side, I'll help. But only if Lance is the one to bring it to my attention. The shipments arriving in two days are illegal girls being brought over from Europe, and the Cavalieri need to get onto the docks that I control.

All they need are a few hours to get the girls out, and soon enough, the asshole who thinks he can encroach on my land will face the consequences. My men will stand as back up. Even though I know Arthur's men can handle it, my team will always be on standby.

The moment we pull up to the house, I can feel the tension radiating from Sofia. I want to talk to her, to find out what she and Giuliana spoke about, but when I step out of the car, my phone rings, and I have to take the call.

Javier escorts her inside, and I answer, "What?"

"Your whore needs to be delivered, Victor." I sigh, knowing his demands are unfounded. I should've taken her to him tonight, but Javier's words sunk into my heart, deeply rooted, and I reconsidered.

"She's claimed," I inform him. "You want revenge on someone, come for me, asshole, because you're not getting Sofia." I hang up, knowing I've just pissed the fucker off, but he can't have her. I've decided she's mine, and tonight, I'm going to claim her.

Making my way into the house, I pass my office and head right for her bedroom. I find her pulling on a small tank top that does nothing to hide her ample tits and those pointed nipples that are hard.

I move toward her without a word. The moment I'm inches from her, I cup her cheeks in my hands and hold her head steady. "You're mine. I'm done trying to figure this shit out," I tell her and crash my mouth to hers.

When she doesn't push me away, my hands trail down to the hem of the top she's just pulled on and I tug her free of the material. Next to disappear are her sweatpants, and her panties follow.

"Sit on that bed and spread your pretty legs for me," I tell her, as I shrug off my jacket. She obeys without hesitation, and my cock throbs. He's ready for the party, and soon enough, I'm standing in front of her with only my boxer briefs on. She watches me as I step closer to her.

"What happened to your body?" she asks sadly, as her eyes drink in every scar I have marring my torso. The silver reminders of fights I've been in are just another thing I don't want to talk about

tonight.

“Not now, *juguete*,” I tell her. “It’s time for me to finally claim you.” It’s a promise. I shove my boxers down and fist my dick. I’m so hard, it’s as if I’m holding onto solid steel. Her eyes widen, her mouth pops open, and I smile. “On your knees, I want those lips swallowing my dick first,” I tell her.

A soft blush turns her cheeks dark, but she obeys with a smile on her face, and the moment her mouth engulfs me, I have to bite down on my lower lip to keep from coming too soon. She’s perfection. Sofia works my dick, moving back and forth over the shaft, as she gags when I hit the back of her throat.

I’m tempted to fuck her harder, but I fist my hands to keep from hurting her. For the first time in a long while, I allow a woman to take control. Every flick of her tongue makes my body shudder with desire so fierce that I feel it right down to my very fucking soul.

I feel my balls draw up, and I have to pull her off my cock before I fill her mouth with my release. “Enough. You’re far too good at that.” I speak in a low voice, and she blushes at my compliment.

I don’t know what this woman is doing to me, but I can’t let her go now. At first, I wanted her for a short time to toy with her, but right now, I want to bind her to my bed.

“Lie back, sweetheart,” I tell her. “It’s time my dick made acquaintance with your pretty pussy.” She slides onto the mattress, and I stalk her, crawling up her body until my mouth is hovering over her cunt.

My fingers taunt her gently, stroking up and down her smooth entrance, and I use my thumb and forefinger to open her to my gaze. Leaning in, I lap at her, my tongue darting into her wet heat, and I devour her as if she were my dessert and it was the last thing that I’d ever be able to eat.

Her hands fist in my hair, pulling and tugging me closer. Soft whimpers and mewls are my soundtrack as I lick her sweet cunt until she’s spasming around my tongue and her thighs shake as she screams out her orgasm.

I allow my fingers to enter her slowly, opening her, as I fuck her with my fingers until she’s on the edge again. Her core is soaked, and I know she’s finally ready. I know I fucking am. I crawl up her body, hovering over her, I hold myself up on my forearms, and I reach down with one hand and line myself up with her entrance.

“Uhm...” she mumbles, causing me to still for a moment, my gaze locked on hers. “I’ve... Do you...?” Her cheeks darken, but I know what she’s asking.

“I’ve never been with a woman without a condom,” I confess to her. “This,” — I smile at her — “Is the first time I will feel the warmth without anything between us.”

She nods slowly. “I want to trust you, but...” Her words slam me right in the chest, a pang so hard, so brutal, it steals the breath right from my lungs. I’ve never wanted a woman to trust me more than her, but I understand her worry.

I move over her, reaching for the drawer in the nightstand, I pull out the foil packet. Ripping it open with my teeth, I take the rubber and sheath myself. One day, I’ll take her bare, and until then, I’ll give her what she needs.

“Are you ready, *juguete*?”

“Yes, *Diablo*.” She smiles, a shy, seductive grin that makes every nerve in my body come alive. I slide in slowly, her body opening to accommodate my size. She’s so fucking tight, it’s like fucking her virginity away all over again.

I sink into her heat, feeling every pulse of her slick walls as I dip into her. Once I’m fully seated, I still for a moment and watch her face as it contorts in pain, then pleasure, when I circle her clit.

“Can I... Can I feel you without...?” Once again, Sofia’s shyness doesn’t turn me off, not even an

ounce. My dick is harder than it's ever been.

I slide out of her, watching the wince on her face, and I tug the condom off. "Are you sure?" I ask her, knowing she was apprehensive before.

Her wide eyes lock on mine, and she nods. "Yes, I want to feel you." I don't know why she's putting her trust in me right now, but I don't argue. I slide back in, gritting my teeth so hard, I'm sure they're about to crack.

I slowly thrust, in, out, and in again. Her smoothness, her heat, her slick walls hug my cock, pulling me into her, deeper, until I'm hissing through clenched teeth. "Stop fucking pulsing," I bite out, even though I know she can't help it, but I'm so close to coming, and I want to savor this for as long as I can.

"I-I-I can't, Victor," she moans, as I pull out and slide back in. Her body is sucking me in much like her mouth did moments ago, and I have to breathe deeply to calm my raging orgasm. I'm on the precipice, but I can't come yet.

My mouth latches onto her nipple, and I suck it hard, biting down until she's squealing, which only makes her cunt tighten around my cock even more, and I groan as pleasure zips up and down my spine.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," she mumbles incoherently, as I attack her other nipple and bite down, earning me her nails digging into my shoulders as I bring her to a toe-curling orgasm. Once she's soaked my dick in her juices, I fuck her hard.

My hips move so fast, I lose track of how many times I pull out and slam back in. I can't hold back. Her body feels so good.

"Yes, yes, please, Victor," she calls out, as I slam back in one last time and empty myself deep inside her. It's the first time in my life I've fucked someone without protection. If it were any other woman, I would be racing to buy the morning after pill. But with Sofia, I don't want to.

SHE LIES ON THE BED, ruffled within the sheets, looking innocent. But that's because she is. I took the one thing she's held onto all this time, with my fingers, then with my cock. I've claimed her, and I don't feel an ounce of guilt. I'm an asshole, and I want her to only want me.

The room is thick with tension when she scoots up, her body covered. I wish I could rip the sheets away from her and stare at her all night. To take in every inch of her caramel skin, to lick and taste her, but I merely stand at the foot of her bed, staring at her wide eyes.

There are so many things I want to do to her right now—bind her to my bed, explore her curves, suck on her nipples, make them hard as I graze my teeth along the buds, and taste her sweet cunt once more.

"I want you," I tell her with raw honesty. It flays me open, baring my very heart and soul to her, both are black as night, filled with demons from my past.

"What happened between us was a mistake," she tells me. "I can't... I mean, that can't happen again." The conviction in her tone makes me chuckle. It's as if she thinks she has a choice. She doesn't.

"Listen to me, *juguete*," I utter. "You belong to me. And if you think for one moment, after I've tasted your sweet virtue, that I'm letting you go," I pause, tipping my head to the side as I regard her. "Then you're sorely mistaken."

Spinning on my heel, I head out the door, shutting it behind me, I lock it and make my way down to the office. She bangs on the bedroom door, calling my name, but I ignore her. With every step I take, the sound gets fainter, and soon, I can't hear her any more.

I need a smoke. Time to think about what I'm going to do with my little Sofia.

"Victor," Javi utters, when I stalk into my office. He's sitting on the sofa, his cigar filling the room with the scent of cherries. I don't know why he smokes when all he enjoys are those fucking flavored sorry excuses for cigars.

"What are you doing here?"

"We have a job to go to," he informs me.

Glancing at the clock, I note the time. "It's midnight, Javi," I tell him, flopping into my chair, pinning him with glare.

"Is that code for you want to stay home and fuck your *princepessa*?" he chuckles, the sound grating on my nerves, not because it's him, but because of what he just said. There's another reason that's turning me into a raging asshole right now and it all has to do with the woman I just fucked and owned. The fact that she thinks I'm about to let her walk out of here, that I'm not already enamored, and stupidly so.

I want her.

"You were right," I tell Javier, "she's under my skin, she's so deeply rooted, I'm not sure I can get her out. Not anymore." My words still him, and I know I should've kept it to myself until I figured out what the fuck I'm doing, but Javi is my sanity.

"There's nothing wrong with feeling something for somebody, Boss," he tells me, forcing me to turn to him and regard his honesty like it's a beacon in the night. As much as I want to admit that he's right, something niggles at me. I'm not sure what it is.

This emotion is foreign to me.

I feel as if I'm back in high school, ruling over the cafeteria, and a new girl walks in, trying to steal the limelight, and I gladly allow her to have it. But this time, I don't want her to leave, I want her to stay by my side.

"Please tell me you have someone I can kill," I plead with my best friend. If there's one thing I know that can save me even for a short while, it's taking the life of an asshole who deserves it.

"New dealer in town, attempted an attack on one of our guys," Javi tells me.

Smiling at the thought, I tell him, "I think it's time we made a spectacle of the asshole. I need the violence to distract me from the feelings that are coursing through me right now."

He's right, we need to make sure others don't attempt the same thing. Our streets are just that—ours. "Sounds like a plan. Give me ten minutes, I'll meet you at the garage." He nods and leaves. I consider going to Sofia, telling her I'm leaving, but instead, I call on Valentina and ask her to take some tea and coffee to my girl with a note.

I think we need space for now. At least, I know I do.

But when I return, we will talk.

SOFÍA

After Valentina left the tray on my vanity, I sipped the tea while sitting at the window. Victor's note was scrawled in his beautiful script, and I wondered just what we needed to talk about. I'm fighting my emotions, there's a war raging inside me, and I don't know who's about to win.

I lower my feet to the soft, plush carpet and make my way to the door, expecting to find it locked. When it isn't, I pull it open and step out into the hallway. The house is so big, it could be a castle.

My feet pad over the softness that leads me down the hallways, and into various rooms. I push every door open, taking in the bedrooms that are all furnished beautifully, with dark woods and cherry carpets.

The king ruling a kingdom.

A home fit for royalty.

And I'm one of the mere subjects.

I find one room on the far end of the house that's breathtaking in its beauty. There are low hanging chandeliers made of black glass. The full moon shines through the floor-to-ceiling window, allowing a dim illumination to bathe the area in silvery light.

Against one wall is a baby grand, the same piano that stood in the store I worked in. And my heart thuds against my rib cage when I recall the moment I first laid eyes on Victor. It feels like it was months ago now, but it was merely a week ago.

How things can change over the course of a few days.

How can a man go from being beautiful, to evil, to attractive again in such a short amount of time? My heart feels as if it's swinging on a pendulum, back and forth. Between my hate and newfound attraction, I'm torn. I want nothing more to do with him, but then I think about how he feels inside me, how he makes *me* feel when he's around me, and I can't deny there's something between us.

I'm magnetized by the man who seems to want me as well. I didn't expect it. I thought he would've sent me away after our evening together. He finally got what he wanted; he stole the one thing I promised myself I wouldn't offer—my heart—and he doesn't even know it yet.

I settle on the small bench seat, my fingers hovering over the keys, as I close my eyes and allow them to dance over the ebony and ivory. The tinkling sounds of a melody take shape as I recall a song from memory.

The room swirls around me, I feel as if I'm on a spinning coaster that's never going to stop. I hear nothing but the keys as they taunt me with the ghost of my mother, of how she used to sit beside me at the store and play.

She was my everything.

She taught me all I knew, and now that she's gone, my papá is all I have left. I move with the song, as soon as it comes to an end, a new one starts. Again and again, I play and play until my fingers are numb and I can no longer keep my tears at bay.

The moment silence enters the room once more, it's broken by the clapping from the doorway. Victor stands, leaning against the door frame, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, blood splattered on his shirt, but he doesn't seem to care.

He looks equal parts man and monster. But I can't deny he's handsome in his violence. His angular jaw is dark with two-day old stubble, his eyes glow with satisfaction and danger, and his mouth curls handsomely into a grin that makes me squirm where I'm seated.

He closes the distance between us and stops the moment he reaches the piano. Golden orbs pin me to the spot, and I can't move as Victor watches me. I don't know where he's been, but it looks like vengeance was exacted.

"I've missed you."

"You've only been gone for a few hours," I tell him, rising from the stool before he can settle on the bench. I can't be near him, he takes all my confidence and injects it with fire of his own. I can't say no to him. I want nothing more than for him to pick me up and fuck me again, right here on the piano.

"Why did you buy it if you never play?" I ask suddenly, thinking back to the day I first laid eyes on Victor.

"Perhaps I do, and you've just never heard me." There's a smirk curling his perfectly rosy lips, the same grin that makes my heart stutter.

He reaches for my face, his thumb swiping against the skin, turning me hot and needy. Goose bumps rise along my flesh, and when Victor leans in, I can smell the scent of a cigar from his clothes and the whiskey on his breath. It's unmistakably Victor—cigars and bourbon.

"I want you," he tells me earnestly. "I want you here," he mumbles. "Now. Naked. On my cock while you play for me." Every word is huskier than the last, gravel strains his voice.

My thighs squeeze together to quell the ache left by him earlier, which is now, once more, ignited by his admission. I shake my head, *no*, but he merely offers me a knowing smile. My refusal is pointless because it's a lie.

"Sit down," he tells me, standing at the edge of the piano. I find myself obeying, settling on the bench seat. "Spread your legs and let me see my newly owned pretty little pussy." His voice is rough, filled with desire.

I'm wearing a pair of shorts, so I'm not sure what he wants me to do, but I spread my thighs, and allow him a view of my panty clad crotch. A smile appears, dancing on his lips like a lover between the sheets.

He leans in close, his hot breath on my ear, and he offers up his next instruction, "I want you to play with your cunt, *my cunt*, because I own it. And I want to watch you come."

"But—"

"Close your eyes, think of me eating your sweet pussy and come all over your fingers. And when you're done, I'm going to shove my cock so deep inside your body, it will be molded perfectly for mine alone."

A whimper of need escapes me as my body pulses, my pussy tightens at the thought of him inside me once more, and when Victor steps back, he waits. Trembling fingers find my core, and I push aside the material. I want him to own me. In this moment, right here, in his music room, I realize I want this

man more than my next breath.

I close my eyes and imagine him touching me. My fingers dance to their own song as I find myself wet. My teeth sink into my lower lip. Moans tumble from my mouth, my body already convulsing, so close, nearing the precipice of an orgasm while Victor watches me.

I don't open my eyes though; instead, I keep them shut for fear of seeing him. I want to be lost in the fantasy, and I allow my mind to drift to the moment he broke my barrier. He was feral and hungry, an animal taking what he needed, and that's the thought that brings euphoria.

When I finally come down from my high and open my eyes, I find the burning stare of the man who's so clearly taken everything I had to give. He leans in and lifts me up, before settling on the stool and setting me on his lap.

His cock is hard, pressing against my back. He rests his chin on my shoulder and brings my hand to his mouth. Taking my two fingers, he sucks them clean, licking my arousal from both digits before he murmurs in delight.

"You're utterly delicious." His appraisal makes me blush. "Play for me."

I'm not sure if I can even get a note out, but I try. My fingers hover over the keys, and I allow a song to flow through me. Victor's hand taunts my pussy, shoving my panties and shorts aside, his fingers dip into me, slow and steady, as if he's playing me as much as I'm playing the song.

His cock throbs when he dips deep into me. With a shuffle, he moves his cock between my thighs, and I feel the velvety flesh hard and hot against my core. Without a word, he slips into me. My legs are splayed on either side of his thighs, and he hits a spot inside me that has stars bursting behind my eyelids.

"So beautiful when you're lost in pleasure," he tells me. "Do you enjoy my cock in your tight cunt, *juguete*?" He murmurs along my shoulder, causing me to shiver.

"Yes, Victor," I tell him honestly because I do. I never thought much about sex, but with him, it feels natural.

"Can a captive fall in love with her captor?" he asks, as he lifts his hips and fucks into me again, drawing a moan from deep within my soul. "Tell me, *juguete*," he orders gently as he throbs inside me.

"Yes," I whimper the truth I never wanted to admit. Every moment with him is turning me inside out. My anger spirals into dangerous passion as my rage turns to unmistakable need.

Suddenly, he's lifting me up as if I weigh nothing. He never breaks the connection as he sets me on my feet and presses his hand down onto the middle of my back, making me bend over.

"Hold on," he tells me, before his grip on my hips turns hard and unrelenting. His body slams against mine. The musical notes of the keys fill the room, not making a recognizable melody, but it's our symphony of pleasure.

He pulls out, almost all the way, before thrusting into me so deeply that it steals my breath. His one hand releases my body and snakes around until his fingers are dancing across my clit, sending me spiraling into darkness that I welcome.

His cock thickens, spreading me almost painfully, to mold around him. My pussy flutters at the thought of him needing me as much as I do him. In this moment, there's nothing else that exists, just us. Our bodies entwined as pleasure courses through our veins.

Victor pinches my clit until I'm crying out, soaking his cock with my arousal, and with a low feral grunt, he empties himself inside me. I don't move. My legs shake, my knees buckle, as pleasure courses through me. Victor's arm wraps around my waist, holding me steady.

As we come down from the high, he places a kiss on my shoulder before he slips from my body. I

can feel his release trickling down my inner thighs, and I sigh when I think about allowing my walls to come down, just for this moment in time, and revel in the pleasure he's bestowed on me.

His talent in seduction has toyed with my emotions, along with my body. After all this time hating him, knowing he's bad, I find myself wanting that darkness to consume me. If I'm going to die, whether from a weak heart or the man before me, I want to experience everything life has to offer me.

He's etched his way into my mind, into my heart, and even though I've fought him in the beginning, I can feel he's weakening my defenses. As much as I know he's done bad things, there's something human under the cruel façade, and I want to see him break down and show it to me. I want to see the man beneath the veneer.

So, I let myself enjoy the fall.

Down into the darkness, where he's the one holding onto me.

And I silently admit that I've fallen for the Devil.

VICTOR

It's been forty-eight hours, and I'm at war with myself. She's been floating around my house like she's my queen, and I haven't refused her anything since we came back from seeing Lance Knight. My friend was impressed with her, more than I thought he would be.

He's offered me things to think about. But one question he proposed has been replaying in my mind since dinner. *Do I need a woman by my side as I rule my kingdom? Perhaps. Do I want it to be her? Yes.*

Closing my eyes, I attempt to clear my mind, but it's no use. She's taken over every part of me, and there's nothing I can do about it. I have four days to decide what to do with her, and as much as I would love to keep her as mine, there's still the issue of Rodrigo. He won't stop until I end his life.

Which makes me wonder if she's working for him. Women are liars; they play seductive snakes when they want something. And as much as I know Sofia loves her father and offered herself to me as payment for his debt, something still doesn't feel right.

Unless it's my consciousness being overworked. Picking up my phone, I tap the name I've been thinking about since my gut told me to call him.

"Mr. Cordero," he answers.

"Guillermo," I smile, but it's as fake as the rest of the conversation will be. "I want you at my compound in an hour. It's time we spoke."

"I'm not in the country," he tells me easily. "I'm dealing with business in Cancun."

"Ah, lovely, I need a vacation. I'll see you tomorrow."

He sputters, shocked that I even said that I'll come to him. "But—"

"If you don't wait for me, I'll have to get my men to find you, and that's not something you'd like because they're not as lenient as I am." The warning is clear, and he knows it. The man worked for Rodrigo for a few years until he walked out, vowing never to return to the country. If he can't offer insight into his little niece's relationship with that asshole, then I'll just kill him.

"Of course, Victor," he says. "I'll be here, we're at the Ritz."

"Lovely," I smile and hang up. Tapping out a message to Javi, I inform him to get the jet ready. We will fly tonight, and I will be taking my captive along for the flight. She'll get to see her uncle again before I end him.

Pushing up from the chair, I decide to pay her a visit. I don't knock on her door when I reach it, I push it open to find her naked, toweling her body down as it glistens with water droplets and my cock awakens.

"Victor!"

“Lovely,” I appraise as my gaze drinks her in. “Pack a suitcase, we’re going on vacation.”

“What? Where? What about my father?” She throws questions at me as she wraps the towel around her body.

“We’re flying tonight, make sure you pack those bikinis I had Valentina purchase,” I tell her, already picturing her in those tiny scraps of material.

“You haven’t answered my questions.” The fire I’ve come to know and love about her shimmers and dances in her eyes.

“All you need to know is that we’re going on vacation,” I tell her. “Your father will be cared for while we’re away.”

I turn to leave her, but she asks, “Am I going to be your arm candy again? Why can’t you take one of your whores?”

Spinning on my heel, I eat up the distance between us and grip her neck so tight, her face turns a soft shade of pink, darkening with every passing second.

“If you question me, I will make you pay,” I bite out. “You’re the only woman I want on my arm. No fucking whore will pleasure me while I have you.”

“While?” she chokes out. She doesn’t claw at my hand like the first time I had my hand wrapped around the slender column of her neck. Pushing my thigh between her legs, I press against her core, feeling her heat.

“You’re mine, *juguete*, understand that, know that, and never fucking question me again.”

“Victor,” she pleads, forcing me to loosen my grip on her. “I can’t keep doing this.” Her voice is a soft murmur of pain and agony.

My hand is no longer squeezing, and I allow my thumb to trace her fat bottom lip, watching as her tongue comes into view. I force the digit onto her pink tongue and press down, so her mouth opens further.

“You are not leaving me,” I tell her, my tone ominous, and she shivers at the warning. “The moment you walk off this property is the day I kill you.”

Sofia sucks on my thumb, her teeth grazing the flesh, which elicits a groan from deep within my throat. My cock throbs with need to be in her mouth. I pull away from her, my hands already working the buckle of my belt.

“Get on your knees,” I command, and she simply obeys. My cock is a steel rod when I grip it in my fist, and she looks up at me with those innocent eyes, which nearly has me coming undone. “Open your mouth and take me.”

Sofia obeys. I don’t wait to slide my dick into her warmth, deeper and deeper, until I feel the back of her throat constrict and the sound of her gagging fills my ears. Spit drips from her chin. My left hand is planted on the wall behind her, my other hand fisting her hair, tugging her head back and forth, as I fuck her mouth.

“I fucking own you.” My voice is scratchy, filled with need and a yearning I’ve never felt before, which scares the shit out of me. “You are mine.” Each word is enunciated by a thrust of my hips. Her tongue works my shaft, her throat vibrates around the tip, and my balls draw up in pleasure.

Every inch of my body grows tight with the impending release about to shatter me, and my eyes shut for a second as I bury myself so deep, I feel her convulse, and that’s when I empty my seed down her throat.

She works quickly, swallowing me like I’m her fucking sustenance. This woman is never leaving my fucking side because I can’t let her go, and I will kill her if she even attempts to. She’s burrowing her way under my ironclad armor, and day by day, I’m lost to her innocence, her sweetness, and the

light that shines in her eyes whenever she looks at me.

I catch her staring, and it's those times when she looks past the darkness that I hide behind that I don't feel like the monster that everyone believes I am. It's only in these short moments that I feel like someone worthy of her.

Sofia rises from her position, and I'm still staring into nothing when she touches my face gently. Her fingertips burn white hot against my skin, and I drop my gaze to hers and then I see it—that look.

In this very moment, Sofia looks at me like I'm a man—not a Cartel king, not the Devil, not a violent criminal, but a man who she cares for. And it's that look that stalls my heart in my chest.

“Are you okay?” Her question is soft and sweet, just like her. My mouth falls open, but I can't respond, because it's right then that I want to admit my feelings. I want to tell her to stay, to never turn and leave, but I don't.

Never show weakness.

Never show emotion.

As much as I try to convince myself of those rules my father set out for me, I know they're a lie. She's become more to me than I care to admit.

SOFÍA

We reach the small private airstrip, and I gasp when I see a beautiful, shiny white plane waiting. The steps have been lowered, and they're carpeted in bright red. The car comes to a stop, and I'm out and on the tarmac, taking in the plane I'm about to fly in.

"Beautiful, isn't she?" Victor asks from behind me, pride clear in his voice. It's only when I glance at the tail, do I see it—his family insignia—a gold crown above a throne.

"It's yours," I say.

"She is." He laces his fingers with mine, a gesture which has me stalling for a short moment. "Let's go. They're waiting on us." I follow him toward the aircraft, and he allows me to enter first. As lavish as this is, I can't allow myself to be wrapped up in the wealth that comes with being with a man like Victor Cordero.

He hasn't told me the reason for our *vacation* as he puts it, but I know there's more to the story than meets the eye. The inside of the plane is as luxurious as I expected it to be. The cream-colored leather seats face each other, and the dark varnished wooden tables and bar area are shiny.

"This is incredible," I tell him, as I settle on one of the sofa seats. They're soft, comfortable, and I can't help but feel in awe of everything.

"I'm glad you think so," he smiles, as he settles in beside me. I expected him to sit opposite me, but he doesn't, and his large figure looms over me as we wait to take off. When the plane finally starts moving, Javier settles on the seat opposite us, on the other side of the plane, and I wonder if he still hates me.

Victor's claim and *ownership* of me has been strange to accept. My throat still hurts at the memory of him fucking me earlier. I swallowed his release and found myself wanting more. *Is that what it's like to love someone? To ache to please them all the time.*

We race down the runway, and my stomach does somersaults, as I close my eyes to focus on anything other than having my body thrust into the air. I gasp when Victor's hand finds my thigh, inching its way toward my core. His fingers taunt me as we slowly inch into the air, and I can't concentrate on anything other than his fingers teasing my pussy with the expert touch of a man who knows my body better than I do.

He doesn't stop until we're at cruising altitude, and I'm ready to leap over the edge, but the moment he pulls his hand away, my eyes flit to his in shock that he left me needy.

"I'll finish that later," he winks, before gifting me a wolfish smirk that has me squirming at the dark promise in his words. When he can, he pushes off the chair and heads to the bar. I can feel Javier's eyes on me, but I don't look at him.

When Victor returns to me, he hands me a tumbler with amber liquid sloshing against the crystal sides. "Drink this," he tells me, and I accept it, and slowly sip the burning alcohol. I watch him swallow his own in one gulp, but I'm not that brave yet.

"Where are you going?" I ask when he turns toward the front of the plane.

"Business," he tells me, before disappearing from view, leaving me alone with Javier. I finally meet his gaze, which is boring into me, as if he's trying to dig out secrets from my soul.

"What?"

"If you hurt him," he tells me. "I'll gut you." The sneer on his expression is clear; it's a warning, and I'm not sure why he believes *I* can hurt Victor, but he does.

"He's not someone I can hurt," I tell him honestly. "If anyone gets hurt in this, it will be me." I meet his gaze dead on, trying not to show the way my body shakes with fear of the man who's the best friend of my captor. However, is Victor still my captor if I'm willingly staying with him? Is he still the bad man I've made him out to be if I've already given myself to him?

"You're right," Javier smiles. "You will be the one getting hurt because I will ensure that he sees your lies," he tells me.

"I don't know what you're talking about, I haven't lied. I've given him everything," I bite out, as frustration ebbs through me. Picking up my glass, I swallow the burning liquid and wince at the burn that travels down my throat.

"Javi," Victor's voice comes from behind me as he calls to his best friend. "I suggest you contact the hotel and let them know we'll be staying at the house instead." He settles on the chair beside me again, and Javier nods, leaving us alone as he moves into the back of the plane.

"He hates me," I tell Victor.

"Not really hate," he responds, "More like wariness. He doesn't like seeing me hurt."

"And he thinks *I'll* hurt you?" I laugh, the thought of it is ridiculous. I'm an eighteen-year-old girl falling in love with a violent criminal and they think I'm the dangerous one. Perhaps I'm insane, but I'm certainly not dangerous.

Victor places a hand on my leg, his grip hard, and unyielding before he leans in to whisper his lips across my cheek. "He thinks you'll break my heart."

"Do you have one?" I counter, causing him to chuckle in amusement.

He shakes his head. "No, *juguete*," he says. "I don't have one. I locked it up a long time ago, and it doesn't matter how magical your pussy is, it's never going to be released into your hands."

"Do you always have to be so disgusting?" I bite out, pulling my leg away, but he only grips it harder and drags it over his. I'm open to him and he can now toy with me once more.

"I thought you liked it when I was disgusting," he taunts. "I thought you liked it when I did filthy things to you?" His fingers dance along my inner thigh, teasing a pathway up to my core. "And I know you get wet when I hold you down and take what I want."

"That's... That... I'm..." My words falter when his index finger draws circles along my mound, toying with my clit through the thin material that covers me.

"You're?" he arches a brow at me in question, waiting for me to speak, but he knows I can't find my words because, once again, he's taking me to the edge, and I can't focus on anything other than my orgasm. "I thought so."

A chuckle leaves his lips, and I curse myself for being so weak to his ministrations. He does things to my body that I can't deny turn me needy for him. And I wonder if that's how it's always going to be, all he has to do is touch me and I fall into his arms.

It makes no sense. I didn't think I would feel anything for him, but I'm slowly lowering my walls

with him. I've seen glimpses of a man—the gentle side beneath the cold exterior that he puts on for others.

I thought he was pure evil, but there is another side to him. A broken, scared man who's been hurt before. And I wonder if that's why he hides behind the high walls he's built. Perhaps he's trying to keep himself safe.

Am I breaking through? Am I the one person he's finally letting in?

I want to believe that my feelings for him are real and that he's not going to throw me out when he's done with me. And as much as I try to ignore how my heart aches for him to be near me, I can't deny something inside me has changed, and it's calling to him.

VICTOR

The moment we land, one of my cars is waiting, and the driver helps us with our luggage. The tension between Javier and Sofia is thick and suffocating, and I know I need to diffuse the situation as soon as possible.

I know he's looking out for me, but I need him to trust me. I can handle the beauty, but I have a feeling it's my feelings he's concerned about. The drive to the house is silent, filled with excitement from beside me, where Sofia is perched on the edge of her seat, looking at the beach as we drive through the narrow streets.

It's hot, humid, and I'm already thinking of all the ways I can get her into the ocean and claim her with my dick. When I'm around her, nothing seems to make sense, especially my emotions. The need to make her mine, to mark her makes no sense to me.

It's been a very long time since I ever *wanted* to claim someone. To have her and keep her as mine. The last time I allowed those feelings in, I had to kill the whore for cheating on me. But Sofia is different, I can see it in her actions, hear it in her words. She's nothing like Gaia, and that's what I should fear. Sofia may be the woman who can bring me to my knees.

The dangerous question remains—*Will she kill me as I fall, or will she fall alongside me?*

My focus needs to be Guillermo, and the moment she finds out we're here to see him, I know she'll beg and plead to talk to the man who I know is like an uncle to her. Hector spilled the name when I spoke to him last, and that's why I have a feeling there's more to this story with Rodrigo than meets the eye.

"Do you come here often?" Sofia asks with the innocence she possesses. The fire that's normally present in her eyes is gone and it's been replaced with awe.

"Not as often as I'd like," I tell her, then meet Javier's gaze in the mirror. He was the one who suggested we come here. *Did he know Guillermo was here all along? Or was this purely a coincidence?* I've trusted him with my life, and if I find out he's been working behind my back, he knows I'll not think twice about ending him.

He will answer to me.

I'll make him confess.

"It's so beautiful," Sofia speaks, drawing my attention away from my best friend. "I've never been outside the city; never left the small suburb I grew up in. That's why I wanted to study in New York. Just to be away from my home that's brought so much heartbreak to me."

She darts her gaze toward me, her eyes wide with shock at her admission. I didn't think she'd ever really and truly open up to me, but that was evidence that she's held back. Of course she has;

she's fearful, and she has every right to be afraid of me.

We pull into the driveway, taking the long path up to the house that sits on a hill overlooking the ocean. Just the way I like it. Being near the water makes me feel free, even though I'm not.

I don't respond to Sofia because I have no words to offer her. Exiting the vehicle, I round it and open her door before Javier can do it. I take her hand and lead her toward my holiday home. Even though I planned to stay at the hotel, the threat of anyone seeing me with Sofia was too great.

I push open the door, allowing her to step inside. The open plan lower level is all glass and mirrors, with white Italian marble and black furnishings. I've kept it minimal to show off the space.

"Victor," Sofia gasps, spinning around to take in the view. From the entrance foyer, you can see into the living room, which has floor-to-ceiling windows and two patio doors that overlook the ocean in the distance.

The sky is clear blue, along with the water. The azure waves lap at the white sandy beaches, and the area just outside the garden is overtaken mostly by an infinity swimming pool.

"This is more than I ever expected," Sofia tells me, a smile lighting her face, and her eyes sparkle with excitement. I never once *wanted* to please someone before, but for some reason, she's making me want to see that smile more and more.

"Well, I'm glad you approve, *juguete*," I respond, moving through the house and into the kitchen, which sits to the left of the living room. Opening the fridge, I find a beer along with water, which I take out and hand to her. "Take your medication."

She stills for a moment before she says, "I wanted to thank you for buying the pills. My father tried, and even though he stole from you, I know you didn't *have* to get them for me."

"No," I say, shutting the fridge, "I didn't have to, but what good would you do me if you were dead." As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I want to pull them back. The stupid comment makes her cringe. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that, but... I'm an asshole."

"Yes, you are." She smiles as she swallows four pills and takes a big gulp of water. She sets the bottle down and glances over her shoulder at the swimming pool. I can see the need in her eyes.

"Why don't you go change, and we can sit at the pool for a while, before we need to head out." I offer, knowing that I'm doing this more for me than for her. I am dying to see her in one of those tiny bikinis.

I'M SITTING at the pool in my swim shorts when I hear bare feet padding toward me. I don't turn, I don't lift my sunglasses, but the moment Sofia steps out into the dying sunshine, my cock hardens without me needing to touch it.

Her curves are encased in a white string bikini, which hugs her bubble butt, and her tits that are a little more than a handful. She's an hourglass born to taunt me.

"Does this look okay?" she asks me with a small smile on her pouty lips. *Jesus, she may as well hold a gun to my head.*

"More than fucking okay," I tell her honestly. "You're not to wear that down at the beach." I add on, knowing that when we head down to the party tonight, she'll need to dress the part.

"What? Why?" She looks genuinely shocked at my words. She folds her arms across her tits, which makes them push together, not helping my fucking hard on one bit.

"Because I fucking said so, *juguete*," I bite out, setting my drink on the table and pushing off the

lounger. I stalk toward her, but she's fast, leaping into the water before I have time to get to her. The ripples her dive causes make it look like her body is dancing in the luminous blue water.

She reaches behind her neck and tugs at the strings, while keeping her eyes locked on mine. She's taunting me, a fucking she-devil herself. I watch her movements without blinking as she bundles up the wet bikini top and throws it my way.

I catch it without flinching and bring it up to my face. Even though it's wet from the chlorine water, I can still smell her perfume on the fabric.

"Are you really taunting me today, *juguete*?"

She tips her head to the side, innocence painted on her beautiful face. "I don't know what you're talking about, *diablo*," she pouts. Her hands cup her tits, and she gently teases her hardening nipples between her fingers just like I want to.

Without thinking, I jump into the pool to join her and wrap my arms around her, before she has time to wade her way through the water. Dragging her into the deep end, I pin her against the wall, keeping her caged against the cold concrete and my hard body.

"Tell me again, little toy," I murmur, keeping my voice low. "Tell me how you're not teasing me." I grip her hand, bringing it down into the depths, so she can feel my length. "This is what you do to me. This is how you make me want to break you."

"You can't break me, Victor," she says softly, before wrapping her fingers around me. The friction of her hand and the material of my shorts elicit a groan from deep within my gut. "But if you'd like to try," she says on a smile, "then I suggest you do it now."

Without another thought, I rip at her bikini bottoms and tug them free, my hand finding her slick cunt, my fingers dipping in between her folds. Her head drops back against the tiles as her mouth falls open on a gasp.

I continue fucking her with my fingers, deeper and faster than I ever have before. Her slickness coats my fingers as I crook them against the spot inside her that forces a cry of pleasure to tumble from her parted lips.

I bring my hand up, both digits still wet from her arousal, and paint her mouth with the sweet, musky essence. And then I steal her breaths with my own and swallow her moans as I lick the flavor from her lips.

One word escapes me as I breathe her in.

One word is the truth as it falls free.

And it's that one word that will be my end.

"Mine."

SOFÍA

After Victor claimed me with one word in the swimming pool an hour ago, he got out, leaving me breathless and needy. He didn't fuck me. He didn't do anything more than plant his lips on mine before turning away.

I'm not sure what to do with the way he possessively gripped me, how he growled the word *mine* like there was no debate about it. I wanted nothing more than to follow him, but something told me not to.

We both needed space, and I would give that to him. Twisting in front of the mirror, I take in my appearance. I'm wearing a short white chiffon dress that's draped over my curves. Underneath, I'm wearing a red bikini that has much more material than the white one Victor ripped from my body earlier.

I didn't want to taunt him in front of other people tonight because I wouldn't put it past him to fuck me in front of them. The door slides open behind me, and I turn to take Victor in. He's dressed in a pair of black slacks and a black button up shirt. His dark hair is tousled, styled in a messy way that makes my fingers tingle.

The corner of his mouth is tilted in a smirk as his dark gaze takes me in. From head to toe and back again. My stomach somersaults when his tongue darts out and licks his lips before he closes the distance between us in a few long strides.

"I'm sorry about earlier."

"What do you mean?" I ask, tipping my head back to regard him.

"I don't know," he shakes his head as he watches me. Emotion dances in his eyes, something I can't quite put my finger on. "Don't ever make me jealous, *juguete*," he warns me, his tone low and hard.

"Why?" I challenge. I know I'm poking the bear right now, but I need to know what's going on between us. His hand comes up, cupping my cheek gently, but his hold is fierce. Barely there restraint causes his jaw to tick. He wants to do something violent, and I find that I want him to take me—violently.

"Because if I have to remind you who you belong to, you'll be in a world of pain. *No puedo ser amable cuando te anhele con tanta violencia*," he tells me. His words—*I can't be gentle when I crave you so violently*—turn my body hot. Electricity shoots through every vein in my body when his mouth claims mine for a searing kiss.

His full lips mold to mine, his tongue tangles with my own, dancing erotically along the length, and I suck him into my mouth, my teeth grazing the flesh, which draws out a deep growl from him.

Victor steps back, his eyes burning with desire. He shakes his head before ensuring there's more space between us, and it's only then do I see his hands fisted at his sides.

"Do you want to kill me?" I ask what I've been wondering since I first laid eyes on him. "I know I'm the payment for my father's indiscretions, but I feel as if something has changed."

"Don't expect love from me, *juguete*. I may have feelings for you, but it will never be love." His body is rigid. A bomb waiting to be detonated, and I wonder if it were to explode if we would all be pulled into the aftermath.

"I never asked you to love me, I asked if you were going to kill me," I bite out, frustration turning my mouth sassy. Victor's gaze darkens even more, not the color, but the expression, turning him from a handsome man to a villain.

The distance between us disappears when he nears me. I step back in shock at the way his mouth twists into a sneer. "Would you like me to kill you, *juguete*? Be careful what you wish for because I can make your dreams come true."

"I told you once, and I'll certainly tell you again, I'm not afraid of death." My voice is hard, testing the restraint he's clearly holding onto, and for a second, I see him calm, but then my stupidity takes hold and I taunt him once more. "Nothing you do scares me anymore."

He grips my shoulders harshly, spinning me around, so my back is flush against his front. The mirror before us reflects a couple getting ready for a night out on the town, but it's a lie. His hands land on my ass, then they lower to the hemline of my dress as he shoves it up over my hips.

"Hold your fucking dress," he grits through clenched teeth. I don't argue, I obey. He smirks when I do, and then his hands are on my panties, shoving them down to my thighs, and he kicks my legs wide. "If you move, I'll cut you open and watch you bleed while I stroke my dick. Am I understood?" he warns, but I know he won't do that. Somehow, deep in my gut, I know he won't.

I nod.

He shuffles his slacks. The tip of his cock slides between my thighs, against my pussy, and the motion makes me bite my lip to keep the whimper from falling from my mouth. He jerks his hips, fucking himself against me.

I watch in the mirror as he uses me like a fuck toy. That's what I am to him, his *juguete*. And I'll never be anything else. That's what he's trying to tell me with his actions. But when he lifts his dark eyes, there's something else flickering in them. A candle of emotion that steals my breath.

His expression is pained pleasure. His hands hold onto my hips, and I'm sure he's going to leave bruises, which is exactly what he's trying to do. He wants me to remember I'm his. His body locks, and I feel the stickiness of him coating my body.

When he stills, he opens his eyes and meets mine in the mirror. "Pull your panties up, you'll wear my cum on your cunt all night, and when we get back here tonight after the party, I'm going to take your ass."

I do as he says, as he puts himself back into his slacks. Once we're both presentable, he pulls me alongside him as we make our way out to the car. I notice that Javier isn't with us, but I don't ask him about it.

I've angered him enough for tonight. The wetness of him mingles with mine, and it's almost as if I can smell his masculine scent on me. He wanted everyone to know I'm his, and he's done so in the most erotic way I've ever experienced.

The silence in the car hangs heavily between us. His tense muscles brush against mine as the car drives through the potholed streets. We pull up to the edge of the beach ten minutes later. Upon exiting the vehicle, Victor pulls me beside him, ensuring I'm almost hidden in the crook of his arm.

The beach is full of people who are dancing, drinking, and talking. There are so many women, most of them stare at Victor as we pass by, but he doesn't even offer them a glance. I don't know if it's because of me, or if he really has no interest in them.

We make our way up to a fabric beach cabana, and when the curtains open, I gasp when I see the man inside waiting for us. Guillermo, my father's best friend. He looks like he's having the time of his life while my father is locked up in a dungeon.

"*Tío?*" My voice cracks on the word as disloyalty hits me in the gut.

"Sofia?" He pushes off the lounge, coming toward us, but Victor only tightens his hold on me. "What are you doing with her?" Guillermo questions the man beside me. He looks genuinely shocked at me being with Victor.

"She's payment for your friend's thieving ways." My body shakes with fear at the coldness in Victor's tone. I've heard him angry before, but this is something else. "You lied to her, you made her believe the bullshit that you fed Hector."

I'm so confused, I have no idea what they're talking about. Guillermo pales at Victor's words as the men regard each other.

"What the hell is going on here?" I bite out, pulling away from Victor, to look at the man I grew up calling uncle. The man who was my father's confidante. The man who promised to always be there for me.

"I-I—"

"Not so easy to admit how you fucked up when your head is on the chopping block. Is it Guillermo?" That's when I see Javier appear behind *tío* with a pistol aimed at his head. He takes a step back before realizing he's surrounded by Victor's men.

"Please, Cordero," he pleads. "I didn't mean for this to happen."

"Tell her the fucking truth," Victor hisses, violence drenching his tone, dripping off every word. "If you don't, I'll slice you open slowly while you confess."

"*Tío*, what is he talking about?" I ask again, my chest tightening with fear, and my heart rate slowly skyrockets. As if Victor can feel my pain, he slides his hand in mine, his fingers lacing with my own, which seems to calm me somewhat.

Guillermo's gaze doesn't miss the link between us and realization dawns on him. He glances at me before sneering, "You fuck this man?" He points at Victor, his finger shaking. "He's the villain. How can you tarnish your reputation with the filth of our country?"

Victor's fingers tighten around mine in an attempt to calm himself, and I offer his hand a squeeze as I step forward, pushing into Guillermo's face. "Are you going to tell me what he is talking about?"

"He's a liar."

"Am I?" Victor challenges. "Shall I bring out the proof?"

Guillermo's eyes widen in shock, and he steps back once more, only to be butted by the barrel of Javier's gun. He glances over his shoulder, the fear apparent in his expression.

"I-I b-betrayed your father." His admission tears a hole through my chest, and my heart is in my throat. Anger surges, my blood boiling as I step even closer, my free hand coming up to make violent contact with the old man's face.

"You bastard!" My screech is loud, echoing around us, but I don't care about the people who stop to stare at me. "You fucking bastard!" I'm about to rage when Victor's arms wrap around my waist, and he lifts me off my feet. I'm small compared to the man who's captured me, and he walks me down the beach as if I weigh nothing. I'm still screaming when we reach a darker, more secluded area.

"*Juguete.*" The word is a warning on Victor's lips. "If you don't calm the fuck down, I'm going to

pin you to a tree and fuck the anger out of you.” The threat makes me still, my mouth still open in shock.

He leans in, his thumbs swiping at my cheeks, it’s then that I realize I’m crying.

VICTOR

Her tears make me hard; yet, they hurt my chest. When I see her crying with sadness, I want to mend her, to heal her pain, but when I watch her emotion trickle from her eyes in pleasure, I want to bestow more on her beautiful body.

I'm still fighting with myself, a war rages inside me at the emotions this girl has brought out of me. *Is this love?* Shaking my head, I focus on her. She wraps her arms around my middle, her small body shaking against mine as she hiccups.

"What did he do? Why has he hurt my father like this? They were friends, loyal to the end." I can understand her confusion. I have always prided myself on my loyalty. Her watery gaze meets mine, and I want to wash away her fears, her troubles, and her pain. Even if I'm the one who caused them all.

"The basic needs of the human race are at times more overpowering than the emotional vows we make." I tell her. "Men aren't always genuine, no matter how much you offer them, and no matter how long they're tame, there is always a wildness inside a male heart."

"Like yours?" she whispers. Her eyes are wide, shining with the pain that's so clearly etched in her broken heart. My mouth opens, but I can't find the words to answer her.

Am I like them?

Am I as fucking weak as the men I've killed?

"I didn't mean it like that," she tells me. "I mean, you have a darkness inside you, Victor. It shines at times and it scares me."

"Then why are you here, in my arms?" I challenge. I know what I want her to say, but I fear it too. If she utters those words, the three words that I am slowly trying to admit to myself, I'm not sure I can ever walk away from her. That was my plan: to leave her, to allow her to live her life. To be a normal girl, to fall in love and find happiness with a man who isn't me.

"If you asked me that two weeks ago, I would've told you because you're keeping me captive," she replies confidently. Sofia tips her chin back, looking up at me as we stand in the dimly lit area of the private beach. I could take her right now, nobody would know. I could run away with her and never return, leaving everything that's been left to me to lie in ruins. And I find myself not caring at all.

I know Javier would be there. He'd care for the legacy my father left behind. He would make sure that the men worked, and my home was seen to, but it's not who I am. I don't run away into the sunset for love, and I certainly don't promise a forever.

"I'm asking you now," I tell her. "Why are you here, in my arms?"

She stares at me, her eyes locking on mine, boring into the depths of my darkened soul. She sees my heart. I've locked it away for so long, I didn't know it still existed, but it does, and I know that Sofia is the only one who will be able to keep it safe.

"Because I've fallen in love with you." And there it is, the truth: brutal, blatant, and dangerous; yet, it warms every part of me. It holds me in its promise, and I don't know what to do with it.

"I'm not a man you can love."

"You may believe that, but it's all a lie you've conditioned yourself to repeat time and again. If you say it enough, you'll begin to believe it's true."

"I'm dangerous."

"You're affectionate."

"I'm violent."

"You're passionate."

We throw these affirmations back and forth, but I see her resolve shining in her gaze. She's not giving up. I thought she would run. I didn't think she'd stand here, looking into my eyes, and tell me *those* words.

"What am I to do with you?"

A smile turns her lips upward at the corners, making her smile light up her face. Even in the darkness, she is a light that shows me the way. Javier was right, he knew it before I did. I never wanted to tell her that I felt something for her. I fought it. All this time, I hated myself for craving her as much as I do.

But I can no longer hide it.

"You can tell me the truth. I want to hear it from your lips to my ears. Nobody else is around, none of your men will hear it. Only me." Her plea is clear. She needs this as much as I do. I can't believe I'm laying claim to her because once I utter these words, I'll have to give her a ring. She will be the queen who sits by my side.

I have a choice to make. *Do I send her away? Or do I admit my emotions?*

"I'm in love with you, too, *juguete*," I tell her.

"Victor," Javi calls to me, breaking the spell, and I step back from Sofia. Her lips are still parted, the soft breaths from her mouth tempt me to move closer, but I need to talk to Javier.

"Don't move." She nods at my command, and I turn to my best friend. "What's wrong?"

"Rodrigo is in town." The name sends ice through my veins. He's going to be a dead man soon, and it will be by my hand.

"Set up a meeting," I tell him. "Plan's changed."

"What?" His brows shoot up, he glances over my shoulder, taking in the beautiful woman who loves me even at my worst. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," I affirm, "She's mine, Javi. You were right, I should've listened to you when you said it weeks ago." His eyes betray him; he's shocked at my change of heart. "Are you going to fight me on this? Because if you are, I'd rather know now." He knows if he does, he'll not walk out of this alive. The only time a man leaves my employ is when he's six feet under, and it doesn't matter if he's my best friend or not. That's the way of life for us. He understands it. We've learned from a young age that we cannot allow anyone to walk away unscathed. The vow we take is for life.

"I told you before, Victor," he says, laying a hand on my shoulder. "I am here through anything you need. I will never betray you. Loyalty is in my blood."

"As it is in mine."

He nods. "Then I'll get the meeting set up." Silence hangs between us for a long moment. "I'm

happy for you Victor,” he says. “You need to find love again after Gaia.” At the mention of her name, I feel the tension twisting in my gut. I don’t believe that Sofia would do what *she* did, but the fear is there.

I don’t want to have to hurt Sofia in any way, not long term anyway, but if I ever found her with another man, I’ll not only cut his dick from his body and watch him bleed out, I’ll do the same to her, slicing her open until she begs for a merciful killing.

“Go now, I need to talk to her,” I tell Javi, who offers me a knowing wink. He turns on his heel and leaves me to my queen. Although, she doesn’t wear my ring yet, it’s only a matter of time before she does, and when that happens, the tides will turn in the Cordero household.

“Sorry about that,” I tell her when I turn around.

“I heard you mention Rodrigo.”

I nod. No need to lie to her, nothing I say will send her running, at least I fucking hope so. “I’m meeting with him. He’s on the island, and I need to sort some things out with him. For starters, I need to know why he wants you.”

“What? Me? He said that?” Her panic is palpable. She looks like a deer caught in headlights at the thought of seeing him again, which only confirms my suspicions. Something is wrong, very fucking wrong.

“What are you not telling me, *juguete*?”

Her eyes—that hold so many secrets—meet mine. I can tell she’s hiding the truth, and that’s only going to make matters worse for her. If she can’t trust me by now, then I’m not sure she’ll ever trust me.

“Sofia, if I don’t know the whole story, I’m never going to be able to help you,” I tell her, hoping she’ll see the honesty in my gaze. Never have I met a more stubborn woman. Yet, I’ve never met a woman I want more.

SOFÍA

The truth sits on my tongue, threatening to steal my life like a poison if I hold onto it. But if I told him what I had done, he would never forgive me. Perhaps he would kill me right here on the beach. He'd enjoy watching my blood spill.

But also, there's another way this could go—I would tell him, and he'd take me and show Rodrigo just how powerful he truly is. I'm not sure which I want more; if he kills me, at least I'll be free. The thought of never having to worry for another day fills my stomach with warmth, but the idea of never looking at Victor again chills my heart.

"Sofia," he says my name in warning. All those fantasies of living happily ever after with Victor fly out the window, and I know honesty is the only way I can get through this.

"When I first came to your house," I start, the confession burns me from the inside out, and I know there's no longer a choice to keep it to myself. He will learn when he goes to Rodrigo. "I didn't know what I was doing. My naivety kept me silent in admitting the truth to you. I was being blackmailed by him, and I had no choice, but—"

"Shut up," he grinds through clenched teeth. Anger morphs to fury, then to rage, as I watch his gaze darken before my very eyes. It's as if someone is flicking through an animation as it twists and turns page by page.

"Victor, he told me if I got him intel on your security, he would be able to free my father from your dungeon. I believed it because I was afraid. Until I learned who you really are, and then, I knew he was the liar and not you."

"You broke my trust?" he finally speaks, the words spat with venom as he leans into my face. The sneer that curls his lip has disgust written in his expression. My body shakes as he grips my hair, his hand fisting in the strands, as he drags me across the sand until we reach a boulder that hides us from view.

"No! Victor, listen to me!"

"Shut. The. Fuck. Up!" His voice booms around me.

If he killed me right here, nobody would miss me. No one would know. He shoves me into the sand, my body falling to the coolness beneath me. I deserve this, I did break his trust. Even though I was a payment he took, he didn't hurt me more than I deserved.

"You fucking took from me, you made me love you and now you're telling me it was all a lie?" His voice booms around me, as if circling me. I'm captured once more, this time, not by the man I've come to love, but by the Devil I still hate.

His body vibrates, his hands fist at his sides.

“Tell me, *juguete*,” he bites out, his teeth clenched so hard I’m certain he’ll crack them. I await the violence, but it doesn’t come. “Did you fuck with me just to make me love you, then you planned on bringing him into my home to kill me?”

“No! No, Victor,” I call out to him, needing him to listen to reason. “I was afraid at first. All I could think about was my father and that you had him locked away.” I crawl toward him, my hands and knees scraping along the sand. “I wanted to save my papá but then I fell in love with you while I was with you.”

“Love? You don’t know what love is,” he grits angrily, as he leans forward to tug me to my feet by my hair. I cry out as my scalp pricks, and my eyes turn watery from the sting of pain. “You fucking lying bitch.”

“I’m not lying, I didn’t mean to hurt you. I didn’t do it, I—” My words are broken by the gun he pulls on me, the safety unlocked, and he shoves it into my mouth. We’ve done this before, when he did, I wet myself in his office. But now, I no longer fear death because I knew this would come.

“You fucking lied to me.” His accusation breaks my heart more than it already is. “He wanted you as payment and now I know why. He wanted you out of my house so he could attack.”

I try to shake my head as I look deep into his dark eyes. I want him to see I love him, for him to look into my heart, but he can’t, not under the guise of fury that’s holding him hostage. He forces the barrel into my mouth, until it hits the back of my throat. I swallow around the metal, the harsh taste coating my tongue.

My eyes are wide, pleading with him silently to think about what he’s doing. If he can just clear the angry fog that’s clouding his judgment, he’ll see. I don’t fight, I don’t flail, I’m ready for this.

“Victor,” Rodrigo’s voice comes from behind him, “Javi here said you wanted to meet, so I thought I’d bring the party to you.” The coldness in his tone doesn’t belie the satisfaction in his expression as he takes in my situation. “Ah, you can pull the trigger. I was going to do it when she returned to me.”

The truth clicks inside Victor’s mind as he looks at me again. He doesn’t move, he doesn’t pull the trigger as suggested by his enemy, he sees me. A tear trickles down my cheek, free, lonely, and in need of his tender touch.

I think he’s about to do something stupid like pull a gun on Rodrigo, but he doesn’t. Instead, Victor lowers the gun and drops me to my knees. He turns slowly, his weapon still in hand, and I’m shaking as fear strangles me at the way Rodrigo is looking at me.

“She’s of no use to me,” he tells Victor.

“I thought she was your pet,” the man I thought loved me sneers. “You can have her back; I’ve already taken what I need.”

“Victor, no please?” I beg from the ground, my hand reaching for his leg, but he doesn’t even look down at me. He always told me he enjoyed seeing me on my knees, but right at this moment, I feel the cold aloofness he is expressing by not even acknowledging me.

“Ah, lucky man.” Rodrigo chuckles as he shoves his hands into his pockets. “I always thought she would give it up easier, but she seems to have held out for you. What did it cost you? A few pills? Some coke?” The taunt and gibe he throws my way cause me to flinch.

“I’m not a whore,” I bite out, but my only response is a laugh—dark and foreboding.

“I beg to differ.” Rodrigo grins down at me. “You look rather lovely on the floor, on your knees.” He turns to Victor. “Tell me, Cordero, are there any women left in Colombia you haven’t fucked?”

“This meeting isn’t about my male prowess. I want you out of my territory. I will buy yours, and you will walk away unscathed.” The challenge is there—leave or be killed.

“I will consider it.”

“This isn’t up for debate. I rule Colombia, every fucking acre of it.” Victor takes a step forward as he says this, and the men that flank Rodrigo lift their weapons.

“No! Don’t hurt him,” I cry out, not thinking about what this means for me. But I can’t watch Victor die. I’ll die in his place, I’ll offer myself to them, but I can’t see the man who’s stolen not only my body, but my heart, fall down in death.

The dark, manic eyes of the man I used to trust fall to me. The corner of his mouth twists into an evil grin. “I want the girl.”

“Is that it?” Victor challenges.

Rodrigo nods. “Give me the girl and I’ll move out of Colombia. I hear Mexico is quite nice this time of the year,” he chuckles, as if it’s the most amusing thing he’s thought of.

I’m shaking my head, pushing off the ground and coming to stop beside Victor. “Please, don’t do this.” I touch his arm, but he flinches away from me. “Please, Victor, think about what we spoke about, think about what we said.”

He finally turns his dark eyes on me, and I see it—resignation. He doesn’t believe me anymore. He thinks that I’m working with the man who’s bartering me like I’m an animal being sent to the slaughter.

“Fine,” he says the word, responding to Rodrigo, but he’s looking directly at me. “Take her and get out of my country. If you ever return, I’ll kill you both.”

“No! No!” My voice bounces around us in the dark as two men walk forward and grip my shoulders and hold me steady. “No! Victor, I love you!” I scream, but it’s no use. He’s not listening to me anymore.

I did this.

I should’ve been honest from the beginning.

In an attempt to kick out, I make contact with one of the men’s knees, causing him to buckle to the ground. The other one grips my neck, squeezing it, and then I feel the pinprick in my neck, and slowly, my world turns to black, and the last thing I see is Victor’s sneer before my eyes close.

SOFÍA

Darkness holds me in a tight grip. The cold has seeped through me, right down to my soul, and I shiver when I think of men looking at me. I can feel their eyes on me, and I don't know how to hide from their gazes.

I can't roll over. My hands are bound to either side of the headboard, and my ankles are chained to the bottom of the bed. I'm splayed, and the tears that form on my lashes spill when a touch feathers over my exposed flesh. A light flickers on, causing my eyes to shut at the sudden illumination.

"He took your purity, *puta*," the deep rumbling tone of Rodrigo spits as he trails his thick fingers up and down my entrance. I pray to a God I'm not sure can help me for him not to push inside me. I'm not wet like I was with Victor, and I know it's going to hurt if Rodrigo decides to penetrate me.

"Please, Rodrigo," I beg. "Please don't do this."

His hand fists my long hair, tugging my head back painfully. The agony that shoots through my neck causes me to cry out and all he does is laugh it off. I always thought that Victor was the Devil, but he's so far from it. The man who's now holding me hostage is pure evil.

"Your cunt is no longer of value to me, Sofía," the man I used to trust grits the words at me, and then he spits on my face as if I was nothing more than a piece of garbage to him. "But I don't think the men will care. As long as you're not completely broken, we'll take care of you until your *boyfriend* tries to save you."

"He's not—"

"Don't fucking lie to me, *puta*," Rodrigo growls in my ear. "He's the one who sold you to me for a measly country who doesn't love him like you do. I wonder if he even realizes how much he fucked up. As much as he denies it, I know better. And you want to know what I think?" he speaks, but I don't respond quick enough, because he continues, "he's in love with your whore cunt."

"No."

"He wanted to bring you to me anyway; this way, I get you sooner than I expected. He told me I could have you any way I want. He's done with you, no longer the pure virgin."

"Fuck you," I bite out, anger and fear mingling into the violent mix of betrayal.

"He did, but I won't. I don't stick my dick in used cunts," he sneers. "He didn't want you anyway, had no use for you after you bled."

"You're lying."

"Am I? I have proof he confirmed the trade."

The words sink into my mind, down to my heart, and evidently, right into my soul, and for a moment, I think about how Victor changed over the past couple of weeks. Now I'm here, without my

medication, and I don't know if I'll be alive long enough for Victor to find me.

I don't understand why he *wanted* to bring me here. He told me he felt everything I did. That he wanted me and nothing else. But now I'm here, bound to a filthy bed, at the mercy of a man who knows no compassion.

A buzzer sounds in the room, and Rodrigo turns to the glass in the corner of the room, which overlooks my bed, then he sneers, "I'll be back." The moment he releases my hair, I can't help but sigh in relief. My body aches, but the real agony comes from my chest.

The heavy steel door shuts, and I find myself alone in the cold. The lights dim, and I'm bathed in darkness once more. Turning my head, I attempt to look around the only section of the room that's visible from my position, and I see it—the red light of a camera.

They're watching.

Closing my eyes, I picture Victor. I try to pray again, but I can't find the words. I'm going to die here, I know it. The door slides open again, and the yellow glow of the overhead lamp shimmers to life.

"Your little *puta* is beautiful, Cordero," Rodrigo speaks, causing my eyes to snap open, and I notice he's on his cellphone. He's grinning down at me, the maniacal expression on his face is evidence that he's enjoying this. He loves hurting people, I should've second guessed myself when I took his money.

"Please, Victor!"

"Shut it, bitch," the man spits out, before his hand comes down hard on my face earning him an ear-splitting scream. My body is shaking from both fear and pain, and my heart rhythm is completely out of whack. "She's going to break," Rodrigo tells Victor, and soon enough, he's laughing darkly. "Before I leave, I want to know you will not come after me. Since you gave her up so easily, I want something more, fifty million in coke. Once I have the drugs, I'll get the flight out, with your *puta*."

I don't know what Victor is telling him, but it can't be good because Rodrigo is glaring down at me with pure venom dripping from his expression. The curl of his mouth is taunting as he looks at me, but I can't tell what he's going to do. I don't know if Victor would give up everything he's inherited from his father.

"Forty-eight hours," my captor informs him. "Midday, the land between your compound and the ocean. I like watching the water while I slice stupid whores limb from limb. Perhaps I'll see how much your *puta* can take tonight before she finally breathes her final breath." He chuckles before hanging up.

The darkness that swirls around me in the next moment makes me retch. Normally, if I've eaten and had enough water, I don't feel dizzy, but I don't know how long I've been here. And I have no way of telling if I will make it till tomorrow.

"Wake up, bitch," Rodrigo's voice sounds far away, and even though I try to open my eyes, I find the lids heavy. "I said, wake the fuck up," his words are spat against my cheek, and I feel every pronunciation in my ear as I force myself to look at him.

His dark gaze locks on mine, and the desire that dances inside it makes my stomach roll as the bile quickly rises to my mouth. It burns my tongue, and I can't swallow it back down. A harsh swat lands on my ass when he notices the puke that's now coating my face.

I think he'll move me away, but he doesn't. He merely unbuttons his jeans, and then I hear the zipper hissing as he takes out his hardness. The slick tip paints my dirty lips, and soon enough, he's forcing himself down my throat. I can't fight him. My body is slack, I don't have the energy to bite down on him.

His hips move back and forth with the force of a hundred men. The feel of him sliding down my throat makes more puke rise up, and soon enough, it's spilling free coating his cock. He laughs when this happens, and his one hand is, once again, fisting my hair, pulling my head back, and slamming me against his groin.

The coarse hair brushes against my nose, over and over again, and soon enough, he's spilling his putrid tasting seed on my tongue. He pulls away from me, crouching to my level, and his eyes bore into mine.

"I thought you didn't fuck used cunts?" I bite out the vile words as puke rises to my mouth. I taste the bitter acid, and I swallow it back down. The knowledge that I'm going to die tomorrow ensures that I no longer fear the man who just hurt me, stole from me, took what wasn't his to take.

"I changed my mind, if Cordero is so in love with you, I wanted to see what the fuss was all about," he tells me. "Let's see how long you last when I do that over and over again." A dark rumble of a laugh vibrates deep in his throat. "And when I finally give you back to Victor tomorrow, you'll be nothing but a used-up fuck toy."

My mouth opens, but no words come out, merely a choke of pained emotion. I know begging him for mercy won't do anything. The man is incapable of human emotion. He's no devil, he's a fucking demon made from the darkness of hell.

He rises, pushing his cock into his jeans, and I sigh when I hear the zipper hissing its way back up. My jaw aches, my whole body is in agony. Seconds later, I feel a pinch against my arm, and soon enough, there's a warmth spreading through my system.

Drugs.

I don't know what he's shot into my veins, but I'm struggling to keep my eyes open. Once again, darkness slithers up my spine, and I allow it to steal me.

I'M on my back when I wake up again. There's an ache in my chest, and when I open my eyes and look up, I come face to face with Rodrigo. He's perched across my body, straddling me. There's a glint from the left, and I turn to see he's holding a sleek blade, twisting it back and forth.

He doesn't speak. He just stares at me, and fear attacks me with a vengeance. He shoves down my body, watching as I shiver, when he places the tip of the blade on my neck. The pinch of the steel making me wince.

Ever so slowly, he trails it down my chest, over each of my breasts, teasing my nipples until they harden. His eyes glow with ferocious lust, and I want to puke. I have nothing in my stomach to throw up, and the burn of acid is fierce, bringing tears to my eyes.

When Rodrigo reaches my navel, he presses the blade into the indentation and chuckles when I whimper in fear. My eyes are wide, waiting for the fatal blow, but it never comes because when he reaches my core, he flips the knife over, and shoves the handle into my body.

My back arches, and I kick out in an attempt to free myself, to move away from the invasion, but I can't. He laughs darkly, amusement dancing in his dark eyes, and I know I can't do anything other than take his assault.

There's no longer pain, and when I close my eyes, I focus on the darkness instead of the action. He smiles, evil and feral, no longer a man but an animal. He enjoys the torment, and I can feel his hardness pressing against my thigh as he fucks me with the weapon that I know can take my life at any

second he chooses.

Another pinch against my arm causes my eyes to snap open. It's not the same stuff they gave me earlier, because I don't feel warmth, I'm merely tingly all over, my limbs feel as if they've fallen asleep.

I can't move my body anymore, and my head feels as if there's a heavy weight holding it down. My mouth opens, but no words come out. A scream is lodged in my throat, but it never escapes, it merely chokes me with its force.

"Can you feel this?" My tormentor chuckles when he picks up a clamp and attaches it to my clit. I can't answer him, he knows this. He continues to clamp my nipples. Once he's happy with his handiwork, he pulls out his cock again, fisting it as he looks down at me.

Tears escape my lashes, they stain my cheeks, but nothing can ever cleanse me of the agony that's slowly coursing through my veins. Rodrigo pushes his cock into me, and it feels like I'm breaking apart.

I can't move, but I can see him. I can't fight him off, but I can watch him. He's taking everything from me, and it's not because he hates me, it's because of my love of Victor.

VICTOR

Two days.

Forty-eight-fucking-hours.

I fucked up. When Javier returned to the house with me the same night that I *gave* her to my enemy, I went on a rampage. I broke through the room where Sofia was staying and found the phone that the asshole had given her.

It was broken, shattered into a million pieces. When I had one of my guys look at it, he tested the signal, and no information had been transmitted.

She tried to tell me. She begged and pleaded, and I ignored her. In my rage, I gave the only person I ever loved to another man, and I don't know how many times he would've raped her by now, but I vowed to find her.

My gut told me there was more to the story, but I focused on the past betrayal and pinned it on Sofia. What Gaia did to me broke me, it shattered everything good inside me. It was Sofia who put me back together, mending the man I am, into the man I used to be, before loyalties were broken.

"You couldn't have known," Javi tells me; I know he's trying to calm me down, but it's not helping. Nothing can help me now. My men are on the hunt, searching for that asshole, but it's going to take time because he's far too intelligent to be caught with a tracking device, and he's too quick on his cellphone to allow us to pinpoint a location.

"Leave me. I need to think." I turn to the window, looking out over my land, the same acres of beauty I wanted to share with Sofia. If she ever returns to me, I'm not sure she'll forgive me for my actions.

In the past, I wouldn't have cared. It wouldn't have fazed me if she hated me, I'd still lock her in her bedroom and take her when I needed it, but we admitted love to each other. That meant more than my mistakes. Surely.

The door clicks behind me, and I allow myself to recall a memory of when she was by my side.

HER BODY IS ENCASED in simple clothes. She looks like the innocent she is. The pure soul I know her to be. Nothing can stop me from taking her, not even her. I've wanted nothing in my life, I have the money, I have the women at my beck and call, but Sofia Montero is something different.

She moves through her room as she investigates everything. Touching the fabrics, running her fingertips along the smooth, dark wood of her four-poster bed. She smiles at something, perhaps a

memory, and I want to know what it is that brightened her face that way.

Was it another man?

Jealousy courses through me, unbidden and unwarranted.

Even though she's in my home, I cannot lay claim to her. She's my possession until she's paid off a debt. But that won't stop me from partaking in a taste. Surely, I'm allowed to devour the fruit, even before it's fallen from the tree into my grasp.

I take my cock out of my slacks, fisting the hard steel, I watch her as she decides on something. A shower. She slowly drops her sweatpants, offering me a view of her pert bubble butt. Then, she tugs at the tank top, dropping it on the bed.

I wonder if she knows I can see her. Would she still put on a show for me if she did? It's been two weeks and she's allowed herself to accept her position in this house. She strolls toward the bathroom, and my gaze focuses on the lower screen. In the privacy of the room, she rids herself of the panties she's wearing, gifting me a full view of her now naked form.

Her tits are perfect, a little more than a handful. Her pussy is smooth, bar for a patch of dark hair at the mound, just above her clit. My hand moves faster as she steps under the spray, allowing the water to cascade down her body.

She wets her hair, tugging at the strands, and my fingers tingle to do the same. To wrap the dark locks around my fist and to tug her head back as I take her from behind, reveling in watching her ass jiggle as I slam into her.

Would she scream?

Would she cry or fight me?

Or would she moan my name in pleasure?

She lathers her flesh, the shimmering, tanned skin that beckons me is now beautifully slippery, and I imagine how soft she would feel against me. Her tits jiggle when she turns and rinses herself. Her fingers lower to her stomach, and I watch in awe as she leans against the tiled wall. She spreads her legs, taunting herself gently with just the tips of her fingers.

She doesn't enter her cunt, but toys with the nub, circling it. Her head falls back and her mouth parts as her pleasure jolts through her and into me. It's as if I can feel her pulse, and my release shoots from the tip of my cock, coating my hand in the seed I would give anything to mark her with.

SHAKING MY HEAD, I attempt to clear my mind of the memory. I never told her about those cameras. I omitted something just as she did to me. She didn't want to tell me about the device because she knew I would get angry.

And even though she had it on her, she didn't use it. Which makes me believe her words when she told me she loved me. Anger surges through me, but I no longer focus it on her, it's focused on myself. I'm an asshole. Of all the things I've done in my life, this is by far the worst.

I delivered her to a man who will hurt her, not for pleasure, but for pain. He will enjoy it, more than I ever have. He is sadistic, I know this because I run in the same circles he does, and I know what he's like. I've heard the stories, and I know they're not rumors. These are real, horrific events that have occurred in his home.

My office door flies open and Javier, along with Alejandro, enter, and I notice the man who they're shoving into my private room. Guillermo. He's still alive, barely, but he looks like he's about to piss himself.

“Where is Rodrigo?” I ask, before he can mutter any fucking lie that will make me kill him on the spot. I don’t want a mess, though, so I refrain from my train of thought and look at the old man. “I asked you a fucking question.”

“I-I don’t know. I truly don’t,” he mumbles, the fear clear in his eyes. “He never told me where his hideout is. We met in public, and he offered me the money to ensure Hector would be caught. When I walked away, telling him it’s been done, he disappeared, and I didn’t hear from him again until two days ago.”

“So, you sold out one of your best friends, a man who loved you like a brother for a wad of cash, which is gone now?” He has the balls to look guilty. The temptation to kill him that was strong before becomes all-consuming, and I stalk toward the asshole, stopping a couple of inches before him. “Tell me, Guillermo,” I ask. “Did you ever stop to think about what you did?”

“Have you thought of what you did giving her to Rodrigo?” he counters, and my hand has a life of its own as I bring it up and slam it into his cheek. The metal of my ring cuts into his wrinkled flesh, and I smile when I see blood.

He drops to his knees, his hands clasped as if he’s in prayer, and he looks up at me. The plea is clear—he wants to die. But that would be too easy. Surely, there are better ways to deal with traitors.

“Take him down to the cells, I have an idea that would make him even more comfortable,” I order. Alejandro jumps into action, and Javier watches me through narrowed eyes. My mind formulates a plan of torture that I know my queen will never allow if she were here, but to keep my thoughts on something that’s *not* her, for a moment, may do me some good. It may bring some clarity to the situation.

I glance at my best friend. “Make sure he doesn’t do something stupid,” I tell him and turn to my desk. Opening the drawer, I pick up the item I need. It’s been a long while since I played with it, and I guess it’s time to bring it out of hiding.

IT’S BEEN FIFTEEN MINUTES. I can’t wait any longer because the more I sit in my office, the more I think of Sofia and the fact that DÍAGO hasn’t found her yet. Deep in my gut, frustration blooms like a bloodstain on a crisp white shirt.

Stalking through the hallways of my palace that no longer feels like a home without her, I make my way to the cells beneath the house. When I reach it, I find my men guarding Guillermo.

“Are you ready to meet your maker?” I ask him, as I motion for them to bring him out. The heavy metal doors that lead to the stairway, which takes you into the back garden, are opened. Men bind the old man to a chair, and soon enough, he is shaking with terror.

“What are you doing?” he gasps when he sees the small burner that I’m holding. I twist the switch on, and the hiss of the gas echoes around us.

“I’m going to show you what happens to men who fail to be loyal to those they promised it to.” I tell him, before stepping closer. I lower my hand, allowing the blue flame to toy close to his hand. He can’t move, but he tries anyway.

He begs, “Please, Victor, I know the error of my ways. I’ve learned my lesson. Please Victor.” I’ve always enjoyed this part. Knowing I hold their life in my hands, I’ve reveled in the power for so long that I can’t remember a time without it. But that’s a lie, I do, because it was when I had Sofia by my side.

At the memory of her, I trail the flame over the old wrinkled flesh of the asshole who set all this in motion. If he didn't force Hector's hand, causing him to get caught, I would never have captured him. And I would never have taken Sofia as mine. But even as I think that, I know it all worked out for the best. She's mine, and I'm happy with her. I love her. But this asshole needs to pay in flesh for his part in this.

The sizzle of flesh stings my nose, the stench heavy in the air as I move the blue flame up his arm and watch as it slowly melts away. The human body is so fragile, so easily torn and broken.

The screams of my victim bounce off the concrete walls, but I don't stop. Because with every thought, I see her in my mind's eye. She's the one. I knew it from the moment I laid my eyes on her. The pattern of flesh and bone leads up to his shoulder, but I stop short of his neck.

I don't want to kill him too soon.

That would be tragic.

I chuckle.

I'm no longer a man in this moment, I'm *Diablo* which my beauty calls me. If she saw me now, would she run? Perhaps, but that would make the chase so much sweeter. For her and for me.

I know she enjoys the darkness; I've seen it shimmer in her eyes. When she sees my violence, my monster within, she taunts it. And I offer it to her on a silver platter.

I continue my torture, moving to Guillermo's left hand. He's almost passed out from the pain. Of course, the men slap him to wake him up again. His eyes are going blank, as if his soul, at least the one I think he has, is slowly being etched away.

Life is fragile.

More so for Sofia because of her broken heart. In that moment, I decide I'm going to call the doctor. "Javier."

"Yes?"

"Call the doctor you found; we need a heart transplant scheduled for two days from now." He knows why. He knows everything about me, about Sofia, so when I meet his blue gaze, he nods, happiness shining in his eyes.

Even though he didn't approve of her before, something has changed within my best friend. Perhaps he can see the love I have for her. But all I know is that she's not going to die without me fighting for her life one last time.

VICTOR

I'm going out of my ever-loving mind. I've been pacing my fucking office for three hours while Díago searches for her. They're not on the Alvarez property. I know he's probably already hurt her; I can feel it right down to my veins.

Rodrigo Alvarez will pay; I'll make sure of it.

I made the biggest mistake of my life by *giving* her to him. I'll freely admit it. But I'm going to spend my whole fucking life making sure I do right by her. The thought grips my heart, and I realize she's changed me. She's etched herself in my veins, in my heart, and I've fallen in love. Having her away from me has done something, it's broken every fucking wall I built up when I found Gaia fucking one of my men.

"I found them," Díago saunters into my office with Alejandro following behind. The two men look pleased with themselves. Javier enters afterward, he's carrying a large, black duffel, and I know he's ready to take the fight to this asshole.

"Then what the fuck are we waiting for?"

If he's put his dick anywhere near her, I think, but deep down, I know. I'm going to fucking torture him until he's bled out all over his expensive clothes, and then I'll set him ablaze, and watch with satisfaction as he takes his final breath. He'll burn in the fires of Hades himself.

"Let's go," I tell my men. "Did you get the team ready?"

"Yes, boss," Javi answers. He's not mentioned anything more about Sofia and I, and I'm thankful for that. I can't have him being angry at me when we're about to head out to kill these fuckers.

Once we're back home, with my girl safe and sound, I'll talk with him. But right now, business has to be done.

All five black SUVs make a move, as we follow behind the two guards that I have making sure no assholes attempt to take my life. Díago's driving with Alejandro sitting beside him. I pull out a cigarette in the hopes it will keep me calm until we arrive.

"Where are they? How far out are we?" I ask Díago.

He glances at me in the rearview mirror and tells me, "Three hours, Boss." He doesn't call *anyone* 'boss', but I notice he's made it a point to offer me that name. He's a freelancer, he doesn't answer to anybody, and I'm lucky he's agreed to help me.

"Drive faster," I order him, as I pull on my smoke, allowing my lungs to fill with nicotine. *Focus, Víctor*. I should've downed a shot of bourbon or something, but I wanted to keep a clear head. I'm far too wound up to think about anything other than the man I'm about to slice open and have his entrails all over my hands.

By the time we pull into a driveway, my body is like a coiled serpent ready to spring on its prey and devour it whole. The house that comes into view looks abandoned, but I know better. Looks are deceiving when it comes to predators, and this asshole is so much worse than a hunter.

I'm out of the car and on my feet before the SUV comes to a complete stop. With my 9mm in hand, I don't wait for my men; instead, I'm racing toward the backyard before I have time to think. I'm about to round the corner when I'm pulled back by Javier.

"Are you trying to get yourself killed?" he hisses at me in frustration. That's one thing I've always been terrible at, patience. "You don't know the layout, DÍago does, let's allow him to lead us in." I know he's right, but I can't think straight when all that I'm picturing is the woman who's stolen my heart being tortured.

I have no doubt about what's going on inside the house. And each time I see his face in my mind, my grip on the pistol in my hand becomes tighter.

"Fine," I acquiesce, allowing Javi to abate me just this once. Normally, I would tell him to fuck off, but it's only because I know this time around, there's something personal involved—Sofia Montero.

"There are two men on the front door, interior, three men at the back, also interior. He keeps his guards close at hand. No men on the perimeter," DÍago informs us. His voice is confident as he explains that he'll take Alejandro to the front, and I'll take the back with Javier. There are four men on my team following our lead, and soon enough, my feet are carrying me forward, toward my girl.

Lifting my weapon, I grip my wrist with my free hand as we close the distance between us and the door. I spy a man dressed in black, opening the glass door and stepping out onto the patio. When he lights his smoke, I take aim and pull the trigger. The silencer on my weapon keeps the kill quiet, and we move closer until I hear the whoosh of a bullet passing my ear.

Javier has just taken out the second man. One left, and I'm going to be the one to take him out. I slip into the kitchen when I see him at the table. He notices me; in a split second, his hand moves for his gun, but I'm faster.

The bullet wound I put in the middle of his forehead ensures our pathway is clear. We find DÍago and Alejandro in the hallway entrance. The rest of the house is silent, and I wonder where he's keeping her.

DÍago gestures upward, and I nod. We follow behind him as he makes his way onto the landing, heading left, he glances at his phone, then turns right as soon as we hit the hallway. There's another staircase, this one shorter and darker, which we take to a third floor and that's when I hear it.

A muffled scream wreaks havoc on my mind as I push past DÍago, ignoring the hiss from Javier, and the cocking of weapons behind me as I kick in a door. What I find on the other side makes my stomach curdle in a fury so fierce, my lungs struggle to take in air.

"Just in time for the party," Rodrigo chuckles, as he puts his blood coated dick back in his slacks, and I see red. Pulling the trigger, I put a bullet in his crotch before I drop my gun and use my fists. Blood spurts from where his filthy cock is, and I know I've hit my mark.

His cries of agony make me smile. My control has snapped, and with every crunch of bone I hear, I can't help but feel like Satan himself taking out a putrid soul. Darkness clouds my vision, and I see nothing but death. I want to kill him right here and now, but it's Sofia's voice that calls to me, breaking the darkness that has taken hold.

"Victor," she cries out, the agony in her voice, lacing my name like a poison, drags my attention to her and I'm on my knees, crawling to my queen.

"Take that fucker to the warehouse, I'll be there in an hour. Javi, call the hospital, we need

Fonseca ready now.” My orders are obeyed without question, and I pull Sofia into my arms.

Glancing down, I notice the blood that’s soaked the mattress she’s lying on, and I know the fucker has raped her. My body rages from within, the monster I keep buried deep inside me has woken up, and there’s nothing to do to tame him until I get my vengeance.

“it’s okay, sweetheart, I’m here. I’m going to make it all go away.” My mumbled words are lost on her because she’s shaking so violently, I can’t calm her down. I know she’s struggling; I can feel her heartbeat ramming into my chest as I pull her up and scoop her into my arms.

I make my way down the steps, and the moment I step out onto the gravel of the entrance, the ambulance is already waiting. Two men step forward with the bed, and I set her down. They go to work getting her on a drip as I lean in and whisper in her ear.

“You’re going to marry me the moment you’re out of that fucking hospital.” There’s no doubt in my conviction. I want her. I want this. And she’s not dying on my watch. Her hand that’s holding mine squeezes once, and it’s as if she’s shoved her hand into my chest because the moment she does it, my heart squeezes just the same.

“We have to go,” one of the paramedics tells me, and I nod, following him into the back of the ambulance. They know who I am, they know that I’m not leaving her, so it doesn’t take long for the doors to shut, and, soon enough, we’re on our way, speeding down the drive and out onto the road.

VICTOR

The ambulance races through the streets. The men who are trying desperately to keep my girl alive are glancing at me warily, knowing who I am and what I can do to them if she dies. My body is tense, my jaw aches from the clenching of my teeth, and I'm fisting the knife in my belt sheath as if it's the only thing keeping me calm.

There's blood everywhere. Her body is bruised, and I know the fucker took what wasn't his to take. It's going to be pleasant when I gut the asshole like a fish. But first, I need to make sure she's okay. My cellphone rings, and I pull it out to find Dr. Fonseca's name flashing on the screen.

"Doctor."

"I'm at the hospital, we're ready. We have the heart, and my team is prepped to get the transplant underway." His words are like a salve to my wounded psyche.

It's just then that we pull into the emergency bay at the hospital. "We've just pulled up. See you in a bit, doctor." I hang up before he can say anything more. The doors swing open, I'm out and on my feet in seconds, watching helplessly as they wheel my beautiful *juguete* into the sterile building.

"Mr. Cordero," Fonseca shakes my hand in greeting. "She's in good hands. I promise."

"Don't let me down, doctor." I may sound like a concerned man, but there's a threat hanging heavily in my words. If something happens to Sofia, this man will lose his life, and I wouldn't think twice about slicing his chest open and taking his heart.

"I don't know how long it's going to take, but I'll save her." His promise is confident, and I nod as I watch them disappear through the doors. I can't go farther than this, so I close my eyes, inhale a deep breath and pull out my cellphone.

"Javi, I want to finish this tonight," I tell him.

"I'm around the corner," he informs me and hangs up. I head out the doors again and pull out my smokes and light one in the hopes that my racing heart can ease its violent thudding against my ribs. Making a kill will do that, but for now, a cigarette will have to do.

One of my black SUVs pulls up. The door swings open, and I slip into the passenger seat with Javier at the helm. He doesn't say a word; instead, he pulls out onto the road, and soon, we're on our way to the warehouse.

I'm chain smoking and on my third one by the time we reach our destination. My body is thrumming, my blood simmering, and I'm lost to the violence that's electrifying every nerve-ending in my body.

Jumping out of the car, Javi and I make our way toward the large, looming building. I can't believe it's been almost eight weeks since I first brought Sofia here to see her father. And I can't

believe it's almost been two months since I stole her as payment.

"I want this. I'll finish it," I tell Javi, as we step over the threshold and into the dank space that holds nothing more than a chair and a body that will soon be taken away in pieces. Rodrigo is bound tightly, his face a mess from my fists making contact with it earlier.

I reach him, and his eyes snap to mine. There's a dark, sadistic smile on his face. I can't wait to wipe it off with my blade. Most of my men carry guns, and I have a collection of beauties, but I find that a knife is so much more... *personal*.

"Has your whore died yet?" he chuckles, and my fist makes contact with his jaw yet again. Another blow makes contact with his nose, and there's a sickening crunch, which makes me smile. Rodrigo's grunts of agony are music to my ears.

"Did you enjoy trying to claim her?" I hiss in his face as I pull out my weapon. I toy with the blade across his lips, and slowly, ever so gently, I press the tip of steel against his bottom teeth and allow it to lower until I'm making contact with his gum.

With a slow, gentle push, I watch the crimson stain get bigger and bigger. More pained sounds come from this asshole, and it brings me pleasure. I push deeper into his mouth until he's coughing up blood.

"Mm... seems you're unprepared to get throat fucked, *bastardo*," I tell him, as I shove the thick weapon into his mouth, toward his esophagus. Gagging sounds bounce off the walls, a symphony of torture that makes me happy. "*Te gusta?*" I ask—*do you like it*—as he regards me with tears streaming down his face.

I pull the knife from his mouth. It's coated in blood, and I trail it down to his neck, pressing into the clavicle, watching more of his life force trickle from the wounds. I gesture to my men who rip the shirt from his torso, and I continue my trail down his chest. The red line that follows my blade is beautifully artistic. I think.

"Her cunt was everything and more," he spits at me. "So tight, warm, and wet for me. Did you know she was wet for me as I fucked her hole? *Nada más que una puta*."

Rage burns through me, and I pull my Zippo from my pocket and flick it until the flame dances before me. I bring my knife to the orange heat and watch as it sizzles with the crimson bubbling. Once I know it's hot enough, I place the flat surface of the hot steel against his skin, and I can't help but laugh when he screams in agony.

"Does that make your dick hard?" I chuckle, warming up the weapon once more and placing it against his stomach. Motioning for my men, I step back and watch them remove his jeans and boxer briefs. Once he's naked, I turn to Javier. "It's time." Turning my attention back to Rodrigo, I tell him, "Ask for mercy. Or apologize to me."

"I will never ask for mercy," he spits at me. "And you can go fuck yourself. I got what I wanted. Your whore's cunt belongs to me. She'll never feel you again."

I smile. Javier hands me the metal clippers and closes the distance between me and the asshole I'm about to show just how much I think of his threats. Placing the clippers at his groin, I push each metal blade on either side of his limp, shriveled dick, and I shut the clippers.

"If you for one second think that your poor excuse for a dick did anything to my beauty, you're sorely fucking mistaken." I hand Javier the clippers and watch as the final part of my plan is about to come to fruition.

Two of my men soak Rodrigo in the clear liquid. Every inch of him is wet with gasoline. I haven't done this in a long time. The first time I saw a man burn alive was when I turned ten, and my father made sure I watched him torture someone. The man in question had been one of my mother's lovers,

and the moment Luis Cordero found out, he made sure the man felt agony like nothing before.

That's one thing I learned from dear papá is that when you love, you do it with everything inside you. There are no half-assed attempts.

"Time to say your prayers," I tell Rodrigo, before I drop a match on the ground. The flames eat up the distance quickly, and soon enough, all that's heard echoing around us are the cries of a man on fire. The stench of burning flesh permeates through my veins, and I know it's a smell that won't go away anytime soon.

"Quite the spectacle," Javier remarks. "I thought my one and only friend had gone soft," he chuckles from beside me, as we watch the fucker burn.

"Nothing soft about me, asshole," I bite out with a grin on my face. When I turn to him, I nudge him toward the door. "Take a photo of the aftermath, then let's get back to the hospital. I have a woman waiting on me, and I can't leave her alone for too long."

Time to save my girl.

SOFÍA

B *eep.*
Beep.
Beep.

It's an ongoing sound that I can't place. I can't move, and fear skyrockets through me, before I feel warmth on my body. A hand. Someone is touching me, but I don't know who. My mouth opens, I think it does, but I can't find my voice.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

Again, a hand moves to my face. It's a gentle, commanding touch, and the moment the cologne of my visitor invades my senses, I calm. The spicy scent mixed with the smell of cigarettes tell me exactly who it is.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

"I'm here, *juguete*," Victor's voice is like a salve to the agony that's taken over my body. All the things I want to tell him I can't, not yet. Memories take hold of me, and I can feel the tear trickling down the side of my face when I recall what happened.

I was taken.

I was stolen from my captor and imprisoned by my attacker.

All the while I spent with Victor as his prisoner, I was never hurt. He may have threatened me, but his affection for me won out. The man who took from me, who forced himself in me was Rodrigo Alvarez, and I feel the bile rising up to my throat once more.

My gaze snaps open, and the harshness of the bulbs above me burn my retinas. My body convulses, and I choke out the acidic fluid. My body is held, I'm kept on my side while I puke up my guts. And it doesn't take long for me to empty everything that was inside me into a bucket.

When there's nothing left, I lie back and meet those golden eyes of my savior. He looks at me as if I'm fragile, as if I'm the most precious thing he's ever seen. He wipes my mouth with something warm, and he cleans the rest of my mess with the caring of a man lost to love.

"You scared me," he tells me. My chest aches. There's pain shooting through me, but something warms my veins in the next second, and I turn to see the drip that's plugged into my arm.

The drugs work quickly, and the pain, that had appeared, eases. Victor's lips press against my

forehead, and he settles in the chair beside my bed. It's strange to see him in this setting. I never would've pictured a man like him to be in a hospital waiting for someone he cares for.

"W-w-where's... R-R-Rodrigo?" I choke out the words, my throat feels as if it's filled with sand, and before he answers, Victor brings a glass toward me with a straw peeking out at me. Gingerly, I accept the offering and suck the cool liquid into my mouth. It feels so good, but I know I mustn't overdo it.

"He's been taken care of," Victor finally tells me, once I'm lying back again. "I made sure that he won't ever see the light of day again."

"W-w-what d-d-did y-you do?" I'm curious to know what a man like Victor Cordero is capable of. When he cares for someone, he does bad things, but if he hates someone, what on earth would he have done?

"I throat fucked him with my knife," he tells me, as if he's recalling a fun day out at the beach. "But not before I shot his dick off." He shrugs nonchalantly, as if he's telling me about a daily occurrence that is natural, and not at all violent. I know he's a Cartel leader, and I've seen firsthand how he chopped someone's fingers off, but the thought of him doing that still causes me to shudder.

"Y-y-you sent me to him. You g-g-gave me up to R-R—" I can't bring myself to say his name as the burn of acid thickens in my throat. I'm conflicted by the man I love and the man who sent me away, and they're the same fucking person. I don't know how to feel—pain and anger make my chest hurt, but then the happiness and elation that he found me trump all that rage. I want to cry, I want to bawl my eyes out, just to let myself expel the hurt.

"I was a fucking idiot. Stupidity won out, and I will spend the rest of my life paying for it. The guilt of what I put you through..." His words taper off, silence hangs between us, and then Victor's gaze locks on mine. His eyes, which are normally filled with either desire or cocky mischief, are now burning with agonizing remorse.

"Y-y-you r-really wanted m-me gone?" Tears burn my eyes. The pain of his betrayal still stings, and I can't breathe because all I can think about is how I was violated because of Victor's rage. He didn't believe me and it stings, my heart aches so fiercely, my breath is stolen.

"Never. I never fucking wanted you gone. And when you were, I realized just how much I'd fucked up. You scared me in ways I never felt before. You made me love even when I knew I could never be capable of such an emotion." This time, it's Victor who blinks, and I'm awed by the tears rolling down his cheeks. "I love you, Sofia. I am in-fucking-love with you. More than I've ever loved anyone before. You are my life," he insists, his voice thick with emotion, and my heart stills for a second.

I can't deal with the tears right now, even though we do need to talk this out some more, I need to focus on something else, so I ask, "T-t-tell me w-w-what h-happened next?"

A victorious smile, one I've come to love, paints his face with a light that I haven't seen on this man ever. And he leans in, his hot breath at my ear, and he whispers, "I burned him alive. I watched as his skin sizzled."

"O-oh God, V-V-Victor," I mumble, nausea following me around like a shadow at the thought of someone's flesh on fire. It sounds horrific, sickening, but there's no way I can argue with him and tell him he did something wrong.

He did it for me.

"And you know what, sweetheart," Victor tells me. "It made my dick so hard, all I wanted to do was fuck you, so you didn't have to ever remember what he did to you." Even though I know Victor would never hurt me, I don't know if I could feel happy with having someone touch me sexually

again.

The pain between my legs was nothing compared to the moment he pulled out of me and painted my body with his sticky seed. He was so pleased with himself that he didn't see the men coming up behind him.

"I... I..."

"Don't speak," Victor says. "I know you're nowhere near ready for that." He keeps his voice low, there's a promise in his tone, in his words. "But when you are, I'll remove every trace of him. It will start with my mouth, over and over again. Then, when you're used to that, it will be with my fingers. And finally, once you're healed, once you beg me for it, I'll push my cock into you."

He trails his knuckles over my cheek, wiping away the tears that are now falling freely. I can feel the anger emanating off him, I felt it the day he saved me. And I have a feeling, I'll be feeling it over the course of the next few months, years even.

I don't know if it's guilt, or if it's shame that he didn't get to me on time, but deep down, when I look into those golden eyes, I know he loves me. He told me the moment I fell into his arms, and when he picked me up off the ground, he held me as if I was in pieces and he was attempting to put me back together.

He cups my cheeks and rests his face against the top of my head. The gesture is simple; yet, it speaks volumes in the silence of the room. I keep my eyes closed, focusing on the sleepiness that's slowly overtaking me.

It feels like I've slept for weeks. Months even. "Victor." His name is a plea on my lips, escaping easily as he holds onto me. I would've died if he didn't make it on time. The operation was a success, and I cry because my father isn't here.

"I will make this better," he vows quietly, and if it was any noisier in the room, I wouldn't have heard him. "I'll make it all go away."

"You've already made me better," I whisper against his chest. "All that's missing is my dad," I tell him, and he stills, his body turning rigid. Fear worms its way through my body, and I wonder if he did something. I know my father had to pay for stealing, but surely Victor didn't kill him.

"He will be here to see you soon," he promises, and I breathe a sigh of relief. He wouldn't lie to me. I know he wouldn't. It's one thing he always told me; his word is law. He never breaks a promise, and this time, I pray he isn't just saying it to abate me. My eyes flutter closed. Victor moves away, pressing his mouth against mine, before he smiles. "Go to sleep, I'll be here when you wake."

I'm held safely in the arms of Victor's promise, as I allow my body to relax and sleep to take hold. When I wake up, I hope both the men I love will be here.

"I love you, *juguete*."

VICTOR

I didn't want to leave her, but I needed to come here before she wakes up again. I promised her the one thing that I never thought I would do, and I'm a man of my word. For her, I would do anything—beg, borrow, and steal. I've killed for her, and I would certainly, happily, do it again.

When I pull up to the remote safehouse, I find Hector outside. He's looking better. After I made him pay for stealing from me, I had my men clean him up and move him out here, so Rodrigo couldn't find him. As much as I wanted him dead, I knew the moment I put a bullet in his head, my girl would hate me forever and that wasn't something I could live with.

She was mine before I realized, before I admitted it. Javier saw it, though. He knew the moment he looked at me, and even though I wanted to deny it, I couldn't. Exiting the vehicle, I make my way up to the porch.

"Mr. Cordero." He looks at me with a smile. "It's good to see you."

"Call me Victor, you no longer work for me, and I'm here to speak with you." I gesture for him to sit down, and I lean against the railing that surrounds the house. He looks concerned, and to be honest, if I were in his shoes, I would be, too.

"What is it? Is there something wrong with my baby girl?" His eyes dance with emotion—fear and love—for his daughter, and even though I could drag this out just to torture him, I don't.

"I'd like to marry her," I tell him bluntly. "I love her, I want to keep her as mine for as long as I live, and I thought it was only respectful to come and inform you of my decision." I may not sound like the perfect son-in-law, but I know I can make her happy.

Isn't that what husbands are meant to do?

"Well," Hector says, rising to full height, "I never thought I'd ever say this, Victor." He shakes his head, and for a moment, I think he's going to deny me. *What would I do if he did? Kill him? No.* Probably not.

"Listen, Hector—"

"If you ever hurt her, and this is coming from my heart," he says, as he meets my gaze dead on, "I will kill you. I'll slice you limb from limb," he promises. There is no mistaking that he would hurt me. But then again, if I ever hurt my girl, I would kill myself, because she's far too good for me, and I'm the first to admit it.

"You have no reason to worry, Hector. She means the world to me. I didn't expect it, I didn't even think I was capable of love," I admit. My heart is being laid bare on my sleeve, and he stares at me as if he's trying to decide if he can believe me.

He finally nods, and I breathe a sigh of relief. "You have my blessing," he tells me. "I'd like to

one day see her again.” There is so much sadness in his eyes, and I decide I’ve tortured him enough.

“Well, then you better get ready, I’m taking you to see her right now,” I tell him, which has him snapping his gaze to mine. “She’s in the hospital, she’s been hurt, Rodrigo got to her, and I was too late.” My voice is thick with rage and anger.

“What? What the hell, Cordero? You were meant to keep her safe from that asshole, not send her into his house to get... Oh god! Did he...?”

I nod slowly, even the thought of what he did burns the flesh from my bones, just as I did to his. He paid for his sins; I listened to his cries of agony, and even though he was alive as every inch of his body burned, I wish with all I have that I could’ve put him through more pain.

“My baby,” Hector drops to his knees, and I feel his pain right down to my soul, because that’s how I felt the moment I saw her lying there, bleeding. The doctors thankfully have said she’ll heal, but I don’t know how the mental scars ever will.

“I killed Rodrigo,” I tell Hector. “I burned him alive. His skin melted from his bones.” My voice holds no remorse, no guilt, just pure satisfaction. *How can Sofia want me when I’m so cold and callous?* I know the asshole deserved it and I would do it again and again without a second thought.

“Thank you, Victor,” Hector smiles at me, grabbing my hand and holding onto me as if I’m his lifeline, just like my girl holds me. I never thought of myself as anything other than a heartless bastard, but it seems that I am capable of feeling something other than hate.

“I didn’t... I couldn’t get to her on time. But I’ll make it right, I’ll fix her,” I vow. There’s no doubt in my mind that I will make sure she forgets what happens. And if she needs to kill a man to get over it, I’ll give her that too.

I should’ve let her kill the bastard, but I couldn’t stop myself from exacting revenge. Nobody hurts someone I love, and I needed to make it known that she’s claimed.

Mine.

“You’re a good man, just like your father,” Hector says, causing me to still for a moment. I knew my father; Luis wasn’t a good man. Well, not completely. He did things that were questionable more times than I can count.

“I don’t know about that.”

“Listen to me, Victor. Your father may have been the head of the most dangerous Cartel in the world. And yes, he may have killed, maimed, and tortured, but he loved his family with a fierceness of a hunter. If anyone dared to touch you or your mother, he would’ve burned the world to get his vengeance.”

My chest tightens painfully. For the first time in a long while, I think about my dad being a father. Not just Luis Cordero, ruthless asshole, but the papá who I forgot he was. To me, he was a hero; to the world, he was a criminal—just like me.

“You’ll have kids one day and you’ll see,” Hector tells me with a sparkle in his eyes, which causes me to chuckle. *Can I be a father?* With Sofia, I can be anything.

“Let’s go see your daughter,” I tell the man who’s still holding onto my hand.

“Yes, let’s go see your future wife.” He grins.

I leave my men to lock up the house and slip into the bench seat of the car. Hector joins me, and two of my men, who are up front, offer me a nod before we head out toward the hospital.

I’ll be married soon.

To the woman who stole my heart after I stole her as payment.

VICTOR

Two weeks later

We haven't spoken about her time with Rodrigo. And the more days that pass, the more I itch to learn the truth. She would never come right out and say what happened, which only makes me angrier. But I've given her time, I've given her long enough, and today that will all change because I need to know the truth.

I'm sitting in the office when she enters wearing a long black dress that hides her curves. Her long hair hangs down her back, and I'm tempted to fist it, pulling her back while I take her over my desk.

She looks at me, and I can tell that she's wary, and she should be because, today, I will learn the truth. Her eyes are flickering with secrets, and I'm tired of hidden stories between us.

"Sit," I offer her the chair. Sofia has been distant, which I can understand, and I allow her to be far from me for the time being, but I'm going to cleanse her of whatever the hell is bothering her.

"Are you busy?" she asks, attempting to look at the desk, instead of meeting my inquisitive gaze.

"No," I tell her. "I'm waiting for you."

She finally lifts her mischievous stare to mine. "Oh?" She's playing coy, which only solidifies my need to know what happened. I fist my hands, feeling the bite of pain from my nails digging into my palms.

"We need to talk."

"That sounds ominous."

"It is." I sigh, pushing up from my chair, I round the desk and make my way to the liquor cabinet where I grab two tumblers and fill one with whiskey and the other with fruit juice from the bar fridge I keep in my office. I hand her the juice while I gulp down the alcohol. "I need to know what he did, *juguete*."

"Why?" She turns angry, closed off, and it doesn't help with my temper that's slowly burning through my veins. It's the passion I have to protect her, and the need I have to kill someone for her pain.

"Because if you don't tell me, I might feel guilty about killing the fucker," I bite out, finally admitting that he's dead.

"You killed him?" Sofia's eyes widen in shock, as she regards me. I head back to the bar, because

I know this is going to take more than just one shot of whiskey. I swallow down another mouthful of burning liquid before I pour a third measure.

“Of course, I did.” I shrug, pouring another shot, before turning my attention to her once more. “No man touches what’s mine, and I made it very clear that you are mine, Sofia.” She’s on her feet, closing the distance between us, and this is the closest I’ve been to her since she got back from the hospital.

“I-I...” She shakes her head slowly, her gaze trained on the floor. Her expression is filled with despondency that eats away at my soul. I reach for her, expecting her to flinch, but she doesn’t. I tip her head back with my finger under her chin, forcing her to look at me.

“Tell me.”

“He... He raped me,” she confesses, and rage I’ve never felt before surges through every pore, every vein, and every nerve in my body. I swallow hard, clenching my jaw to keep from breaking something. I want to punch a hole in the fucking concrete wall, and I know the rage I feel will break through it. “He told me... He said I was nothing. He made me bleed and then he laughed.” Her words are mumbled, whispered so lightly that I can barely hear her.

I take a step back, nearing the bar, and spin on my heel to look away from her, before I swipe my arm across the countertop, sending the bottles of alcohol crashing to the ground. The echo of shattering glass bounces off the walls, and my office door flies open. Javier enters, without asking, and he’s at my side in seconds, his gaze flitting between Sofia and me.

“What the fuck is going on?” Javier is shaking my shoulder, and when I meet his gaze, I lock on those blue eyes and convey my pain with a single look.

He nods.

Understanding.

Valentina is next to enter with cleaning supplies, and I turn to Sofia, pulling her behind me as I lead her through the hallways. She doesn’t say a word, there’s one thing I’m going to do right now and that’s show her who the fuck she belongs to. I’m going to make her forget that piece of shit and I’m going to reclaim her, cleanse her of the pain he put her through.

We reach my bedroom, our bedroom, and I stop just inside the threshold. Kicking the door shut, I step away from the exit and look at her.

“Take off your dress,” I command, as I make quick work of discarding my own shirt, then my slacks and boxer briefs.

“Why? What are we doing?”

“I’m going to heal your broken heart,” I tell her. “Because you’re mine and this is going to be the only time that I will offer you a gentle love making.” It’s a promise. A vow. She slowly sheds her dress, and I find her naked underneath the flimsy material.

Offering her my hand, I wait for her to accept. The softness and delicate touch of her hand is intoxicating. I lead her into my bathroom. Twisting on the taps of the shower, I wait a short moment for it to heat up, before I take her hand once more and lead her into the tiled space.

We’re both under the spray when I reach for my body wash, it smells of spice and cinnamon. Gently, I fill my hand with a dollop and proceed to wash her. Every fucking inch of her perfect body, including the scar that adorns her chest. I touch her as if she were fragile.

From head to toe, she’s lathered up, bubbles all over her tanned frame. Her eyes are wide, wet, and I can see the etchings of pain in her gaze as she watches me. I drop to my knees once I’ve rinsed the soap off her.

“Lean against the wall,” I tell her from the ground, and she obeys silently. I spread her legs,

hooking one over my shoulder, and I lean in to inhale her cunt. My tongue darts out, and I lap her entrance, tasting the sweetness of the woman I love.

Her hands tangle in my wet hair, and I continue working her body. With one finger, I slowly stroke her folds, opening her to my ministrations as I dip the digit inside her core. She's warm, tight, and she cries out when I push inside her all the way to my knuckles.

"Please, Victor," she cries. "I don't know if I can."

I look up at her, meeting her eyes. "Yes, you can, because you're my strong, beautiful queen," I tell her. I pump my finger in and out as I suck on her clit, grazing the bundle of nerves with my teeth, and I feel her pulse around my finger.

"Oh god, Victor," she moans, when I add a second finger, moving slowly. I'm close to coming myself just from the tension that's twisting in my gut. I love this woman with a ferocity I've only ever felt with her.

Her fingers tug at my hair, pulling me closer, and I give her more. It's then that her hips move. She rides my finger and tongue, taking her pleasure. I look up to see her head fall back as she cries out my name over and over again.

Her release drips from her cunt, and I lap it up like it's my last remaining sustenance. She drenches me, and I smile at her when she looks down at me. A small, shy smile dances on her lips, and she whispers, "Thank you." And I know we're going to be okay.

I'VE LEFT SOFÍA to sleep; she needed the rest, and I'm in the office, planning out the takeover of all Rodrigo's men, his customers, and anyone who worked with him. The asshole is gone, and his legacy will be forgotten once I'm done with it.

"Hey." My beauty walks into my office once more, and I'm on my feet and closing her in a hug within a few long strides. She's wearing a knee-length summer dress, which makes me want to do more than just hug her, but I know I need to take it slow. What she went through is something no woman should ever experience.

"I'm sorry I left you, I had work to do."

"It's okay," she tells me. "Thank you for... I mean, thank you for the shower."

"I'm sorry I lost my temper earlier," I whisper into her hair, pressing a kiss on her forehead. "The anger that was burning me was something I've never experienced before. Not even when I've killed. I needed you to know that you're mine and that what happened to you is something we will work through together."

Her gentle eyes lock on mine. "Thank you, Victor. I felt..." She shakes her head as she considers her words. "I felt dirty, broken."

"You're neither of those things. I love you so much, *juguete*." I use the nickname I gave her since the moment she walked into my life, not to humiliate her, but to show her just how much I crave her to be everything to me. "You are my life, my love, my fucking queen. You're beautiful, you're strong, and you will rise."

"You're so sure."

"I am," I affirm. "Because I've watched you grow since you walked in here as a young girl. You're a woman, a warrior."

"But still your *juguete*?" Her dark brow arches, causing me to chuckle. There's a small flicker of

the flames that would always dance in her eyes, and I pray they return to the inferno that I know will take over not only her life, but mine. Because I bask in her fire.

“*Eres el aire que respire,*” I tell her—you’re the air I breathe.

She smiles, and it lights up the whole goddamned room. “*Y tu eres el fueo que me mantiene caliente.*” Her words—*And you are the fire that keeps me warm*—makes my heart soar.

“I have something for you,” I tell her, leading her to the desk. Pulling out the small box, I drop to a knee in front of her and pop the lid. “You will be my wife, my queen, my forever.”

A gasp falls from her mouth as she stares at the ring. It’s simple, elegant, and classic. A diamond just like her.

“That wasn’t a question, *Diablo.*” She laughs.

“I don’t *need* to ask you because I know you will say yes.”

Another laugh, which makes me smile. But she doesn’t refuse. Instead, she holds out her hand, and I slip the ring on her finger.

A perfect fit.

Just like us.

SOFÍA

The ring doesn't feel real on my finger as I twist it back and forth. But it's the only thing that grounds me to the chair.

"Sofia?" The gentle tone of the doctor drags my attention to her. She's looking at me with sadness in her eyes, and it grips my heart painfully. Victor insisted I see her, he even wanted to be here, in the session with me. But I told him I'm strong enough to do this on my own. For now, at least.

"He had me chained to a bed," I tell her, and she doesn't flinch. She's probably heard much worse in her line of work. "He called me names, said... he sounded so... satisfied."

"Men like that enjoy the control they have, the violent tendencies that come with the act is how they... get off. And when they see the fear in your eyes or see your body trembling, that's what they need to find satisfaction."

I nod. I know this, and I should appreciate her trying to talk me through it, but I feel frustrated. "He used me, I bled." I blink, one, twice, and then the waterworks start. "I wanted Victor there, I prayed so hard." The pain of what happened, the memory of Rodrigo is still there as if he were lying on top of me, forcing himself inside me.

As much as I know Victor wants to help heal me, I know it won't happen overnight. The trauma is still fresh in my mind.

"And when Victor didn't get there on time... Were you angry at him?"

Shaking my head, I respond, "No, I wasn't because I knew he would come for me. And when he did, he didn't look at me as if I were broken."

"But you *felt* broken."

"Of course, I did." My voice raises higher than I want it to, but she doesn't say anything. "I felt betrayed, but in some way, I understand that I'm not responsible for it. I don't blame myself, and I don't blame Victor. I know that R-R-R..." I shake my head because I can't say his name out loud.

"It's okay, Sofia," she tells me with a kind smile. "It takes time, and we'll work through this. One day at a time." Her reassurance calms me slightly. "You know, I think that you have a good man who loves you, and after a few sessions with me, I would recommend him sit in once you're ready."

I nod. "Yes. We can do that." My voice cracks. "Will I always feel... tainted?"

"Not always, I think over time, you'll realize how *you're* not to blame. You didn't ask for it. Most victims think it's their fault, but the broken mind of the assailant is the culprit."

"I want Victor to be able to touch me, I want to be able to touch myself without feeling dirty." I feel lost. I feel alone even though I know I have people who care for me. And I hate that loneliness that seeps into my veins.

“I know. And that will come. It’s something you slowly work toward. If it happens too fast, it may trigger you. Start slow. Tell me what you felt when Victor arrived?”

“Relief. Happiness.”

“And do you know what he did to the man who attacked you?” she questions, not mentioning the name of my rapist either, and I’m thankful for that.

“He took care of it,” I tell her. Victor told me she’s worked for his father, and him, for years. She knows what they do, so she isn’t someone who would be shocked by his actions.

“And how do you feel about it?”

“Relief. Happiness.” It’s like those are the only two emotions that I can feel right now. And in some way, I think it’s good, but I’d also like to find my way back to *me*. “But I want more. I know it’s only been a few weeks, but I feel like I should be stronger.”

“It takes time to overcome a trauma,” Dr. Santiago tells me with a gentle smile. “I’m here to help you through it. And you will get through it.”

“What if I don’t?”

“You will, Sofia. Tell me about that night? Are you still having nightmares?”

“I am. There are some nights I wake up in a cold sweat, it’s as if I’m right back there. As if I’m still being used, bound and helpless.”

“The helpless feeling is normal, what you’re experiencing is normal.” I watch her make notes in her book, then she looks back at me. “I’ve had clients who’ve been through the same thing, and they’ve overcome it, just like you will.”

“I’m meant to be planning my wedding,” I tell her. “He loves me so much.”

“Do you love him?”

“Yes, of course.” My response has no doubt in it. There was never a question about my love for Victor. And I know his feelings are the same. After the betrayal of him sending me to that asshole, he’s made up for it by being there for me twenty-four-seven.

“And when you look at yourself in the mirror, who is it you see? Sofia Montero or Victor Cordero’s wife?” I frown at her question, my mind drawing a blank for a moment, but then I realize what she’s trying to do.

“They’re one and the same. I’m Sofia Montero, soon-to-be Mrs. Cordero.”

“And you’re a strong woman who is stepping up to sit beside a Cartel leader.” Her voice has a hint of pride in it, and I can’t help but smile, just a little.

“Yes.”

“A queen can heal from any wound,” she tells me, and I know in that moment, she’s right. I will get better, I may not be the girl I once was, but I’ll be a woman who is stronger than ever before.

SOFÍA

One month later

Victor's office door whooshes open, and a woman walks in. I recognize her immediately. I saw her once when I was here as a prisoner. She tried to lay a silent claim to Victor, but she seems to have moved on because she's wearing a large diamond ring on her left hand.

Camila.

"You're quite the talk of the town, princess," she says, as she strolls forward on her four-inch heels. Her dress shimmers in the dim light of the office, and I smile at her, satisfaction painted on my face.

"It seems everyone needs royalty in their lives. Perhaps they wanted someone they could look up to alongside their king."

The corner of her mouth twitches, her eyes don't hide the venom that's she's so clearly wanting to throw my way, but nothing can change the fact that Victor chose me over her. I'm not here for a cat fight, but if it came down to it, I'd claw her eyes out if she even attempted to take my man.

"I've come to return Victor's key," she tells me, keeping her expression schooled and her voice cold. Her disdain for me dances in her gaze, and I allow her to see that I'm unaffected by her attempt at pushing a barrier between us.

"Thank you. He did tell me to take out the trash when I was done with his office," I inform her, snapping the key from her blood red fingertips. "I trust you know the way out."

"I was the one promised to him."

"And I *am* the one he chose." I rise to full height, stalking around the large mahogany desk that Victor just fucked me on an hour ago before he left for a meeting. I settle on the edge, my arms crossed over my chest as I regard her in a challenge.

"You won't last," she tells me.

"And why is that?"

"You're too soft. Nothing like the women who Victor is used to. And you wouldn't be able to stomach having to kill someone if you had to."

"I'll gladly pick up one of Victor's knives right now and show you just how *soft* I am. Shall I demonstrate?" Tipping my head to the side, I regard her through a narrowed gaze. I want her to force

my hand, my blood burns hot in my veins. If she wants a fight, I'll happily give her one.

She allows her stare to trail over me, as if she's assessing me to see if I'm capable. I can assure her, I am. Victor and I have been training every day. He's been in the gym with me, showing me how to fight, how to take a man down, and how to use a blade.

I love the way he teaches me, taunting me while educating me. Camila shakes her head, dipping her chin in a show of respect. "I apologize for my rudeness," she says, her eyes locked on mine, even though her chin is bowed.

"You can leave now," I tell her, with a wave of my hand, and watch as she stalks out of the office. Moments later, Javier saunters in dressed in a sleek black suit that hugs his muscled frame.

"What did she want?" He asks, unbuttoning his jacket before settling in the chair opposite the desk. He looks elegant, as if he were heading out for an awards ceremony in Hollywood.

"She was returning the key to the apartment she was staying in," I tell him, as I settle in Victor's chair.

Javi smiles. "You look good on the throne," he appraises, gesturing to me in the chair. I've sat behind this desk a few times, but today is the first time I'm sitting here as Victor's soon-to-be fiancée. He didn't want to make a big show of it, but I know he's planning something that's going to blow my mind.

He loves surprises, and he loves to taunt me with them. "Thank you." I smile at Javier. "I never thought you would be the one to tell me that."

He shakes his head. "I had to look out for him. I've seen him heart broken, I've seen him violent with rage over it, and I never wanted to see that again. He may be a cold-hearted monster that could kill without flinching, but when it comes to matters of the heart, he has the biggest one."

"He does." I have to agree. I've seen what Victor can do. And even though he hasn't changed very much with regards to his ruthless nature, he's the man I love, and he shows me the reasons for my feelings every day.

He's gentle in the way he conducts himself around the children within his compound, and he's rigid in the rules he sets, but he's fair.

"Welcome to the kingdom." Javier smiles, rising from his seat, before pulling out a packet of the cigars he smokes. They look like cigarettes, but the paper is brown, and it offers up the sweet smell of cherries when he lights it.

"When are you going to fall in love?" I question, intrigued by the man who is always there when needed. He's a good person, and I wish he would find happiness. It's been a while since I first met him, and he's seemed to have accepted me being in Victor's life.

"Perhaps one day. Who knows what the future will bring us? We certainly didn't know you would arrive and turn Victor into a pussy." He chuckles, teasing his best friend, just as Victor walks through the door.

"I can still take your ass down in combat," Victor reminds Javi with a grin. He passes him, giving him a slap on the back, before making his way toward me. His eyes locked on me in his chair, and he smiles.

"Yeah, sure you can, old man," Javi taunts, causing me to laugh because they're the same age. I know they grew up together and learning about their friendship has been eye opening.

"Yeah? Old? I'm only as old as the woman who's going to one day soon give me lots of babies," he informs Javi, as he wraps his arms around my middle, his large hand planted on my belly, rubbing it gently as if I'm already growing life inside me.

"I'm heading out if you don't need me for anything else?" Javi says, as he glances at his

wristwatch. He lifts his gaze, meets Victor's, and he waits. I can tell he's got somewhere he needs to be because there's tension tightening his jaw.

"We're all good," Victor tells him. "See you tomorrow?"

He nods, offering a salute to us both, before leaving us in the office. Victor's stubble tickles my cheek as he kisses me, his lips warm and soft against my neck.

"What are we doing tonight?" I ask.

"Practicing for that family I want so badly," he murmurs, sending hot sparks of electricity through me right down to my core. His low, gravelly tone spikes the desire that's flaring through me like a wildfire.

"Can we eat dinner first? I'm starving," I tell him, as I spin in his arms. He nods, placing two fingers on my chest, right near my heart. When I was wheeled into surgery, he told me he'd never been so scared in all his life. I now bear the scar, and every night, Victor places soft kisses along the mark where I was cut open, where my new heart now resides, giving me a new lease on life.

"Anything you want to do. We will do it. I will never say no to you," he vows. After the journey we took to get here, I feel like I'm finally at my happily ever after. The books I would get lost in when I was growing up weren't as dark or as dangerous as my own fairytale; the princesses never fell in love with the villains, but I did, and I couldn't be happier.

"Then we should return to Cancun for a week. Take time off from your meetings and take me to paradise," I tell him, before leaning up on my tiptoes to place a kiss on his cheek.

"I can take you to paradise right here on the desk," Victor murmurs into my neck, nuzzling against me, making me laugh out loud at the way he tickles my sensitive column.

"You know I didn't mean sex."

"Of course, but a man in love can try. Can't he? The joys of being with a woman you love is getting to have sex with her every day, at least twice a day." His tone drops to a seductive drawl, and his accent thickens, just the way his cock is now pressing against my core.

"I have to agree with you, Mr. Cordero," I whisper in his ear, my teeth catching the lobe and biting it hard. "Perhaps it's time you showed me what a bad girl I am and fuck me on your desk."

Victor doesn't waste any time in lifting me up and setting me on the cool, smooth surface. He steps back, admires me for a moment, before he starts unbuttoning his shirt. The material falls open, and I'm met with the smooth, tanned skin of his toned torso.

The dips and peaks of his muscles have my mouth watering for a taste, but I'm not in charge right now, and the way he's watching me like a hunter, while I sit on his desk as his prey.

He drops his shirt, unbuttons his slacks, and leans back against the windowsill. He crosses his arms in front of his chest, his muscles bulging from the position. He leans his chin on the knuckles of his left hand as dark eyes regard me.

"Spread your legs, get your cunt wet for me," he orders in a growl. I obey him, slowly opening my thighs, I flash him my pussy, which is bare of any panties. His gaze burns me from the inside out as he watches my fingers dip between my folds. The arousal that's already slick coats my fingers, and I use it to circle my clit.

A deep rumble vibrates in Victor's chest, which spurs me to continue. My skirt is bunched up to my hips, and I plant my feet on the desk, opening myself to him. My fingers slide easily through my wetness, and when I push them into my heat, I cry out as pleasure shoots through me. It feels as if I'm being electrocuted.

Victor grins when he reaches behind him, pulling out the blade he keeps in a sheath on his belt. He takes a step toward me, and my heart gallops in my chest like a wild horse. He takes the handle, spins

it around so that it's facing me, and lowers it between my legs.

My chest tightens, sending cold trickles of fear through my veins, and I meet Victor's gaze with a worried one of my own. "Why?"

"Because you're mine. I want you to see this and see me. Nobody else. Look into my eyes, *juguete*," he speaks softly, the gentle timber of his tone is calming, but the coolness of the weapon against my heated flesh makes me shiver. "Don't look down, my face is the only one you see."

He gently pushes it into me. Out, then in. Back and forth. Over my lips, into my cunt, and I lie back, enjoying the danger that courses through my veins. My blood turns hot, and even though fear still holds me hostage, it's not debilitating. And I breathe through the panic before Victor's lips take mine in one of the softest, sweetest kisses he's ever given me.

He continues fucking me with the knife, the handle slick and slippery with my arousal drenching it. His grin is manic, feral, and his eyes are dark and hooded as they look right into my very soul.

"Come for me, *juguete*," he orders, and my body obeys the command. I cry out, my nails digging into my palms, and I recall the first day he made me come without so much as a fight from me. I wanted him then, and I hunger for him now.

"Fuck me, please, *diablo*," I plead. His hands move swiftly, and he hands me the knife, which I hold onto, my tongue darting out to lick at the slickness, which causes him to go wild. His cock is at my entrance, and he slams into me, without warning, filling me to the hilt. My body is stretched beyond comprehension as his thickness opens me wide.

Our bodies move in sync, Victor's mouth steals my essence from the weapon in my hand, and we share it in a kiss. I taste myself on him, on his tongue and lips, where I was always meant to be.

"You were born for me, made for me," he murmurs, his words falling freely as he fucks me violently, and my body is so close to orgasm that I feel the flutter around his shaft. He doesn't stop, he doesn't relent his attack on me, and I welcome it.

His hand slides up my body, over my breasts, moving higher, after he tweaks my nipples. His fingers grasp at my neck, wrapping around the delicate column, and he tightens his hold. His other hand is on my hip, his fingers digging into the flesh, marking me, bruising me.

His hips slam into me, the desk shaking with the exertion of our love making, as he bottoms out, his body deep within mine. We're connected. One person. One soul. He growls as his free hand, which had a harsh hold on my hips, finds my clit, and he circles the hardened bundle of nerves with his thumb, pushing me over the edge, and I fly into oblivion with him as I feel him empty his release inside me.

Victor collapses on me, sweat slicking his skin, and I find purchase on his shoulder, my mouth latching onto his smooth flesh, and I bite down gently, feeling him shudder as I taunt him with my teeth.

"Mine, *juguete*," he mumbles into my hair.

"Yours, *diablo*," I promise.

EPILOGUE

SOFÍA

Six months later

I watch from the window of our bedroom to see Victor and Javier attempting to set up the wedding decorations, which consist of a large, ornate archway. Even though I told them I'd have the men do it, Victor was adamant that he wanted to do something special. I still can't believe he's down there, wearing a wife beater, and a pair of shorts, while he lifts a gazebo along with his best friend.

My father is behind them, shouting orders, which makes me laugh. Even though our start wasn't one of those epic romances most girls dream about, Victor gave me back my father, along with a love that I wouldn't change for anything in this world.

The three men are at odds over something, but I turn to Valentina and smile when I notice her shaking her head at their antics. "Men."

She nods. "He loves you so dearly," Valentina speaks from behind me. I turn to regard her. She's dressed in a simple black shift. She's much older than me, by a number of years, and I know she's worked for Victor almost all his life.

"What was he like as a child?" I finally ask the question that's been burning on my tongue for months. Victor has told me about his years growing up on the compound, learning from his father, but I want to hear it from one of the women in his life who was like a mother to him.

"Bad boy through and through," she smiles fondly, looking down at him. "He was always following Luis around. His father enjoyed it, though, he liked having a little part of him around after his wife died. But Victor learned quickly. The business would always be his, and when he finally stepped into his father's shoes, I knew he would be as good a man as Luis was."

"He doesn't talk much about his mother," I observe, and I notice the flicker in Valentina's eye. There are so many secrets, but I need to learn about them before I marry him.

"She wasn't a good woman. Strangely enough, you'd think his father being the leader of a Cartel would be the evil one, but she was something else." There's anger lacing her words, and I'm even more intrigued. "She was never in love with Luis. She wanted the protection this life could offer, but when he found out she was still whoring herself out, he took her life in a fit of anger."

"Like Gaia did to Victor?" I gasp, recalling the story of how he found his fiancée with another man. I shudder when I remember what he did to her.

Valentina nods. "Much the same." She sounds so sad. "But now that he has a good woman to set him right, I'm happy." This time, she pulls me into a hug that feels warm and affectionate, and I

embrace her.

“Thank you for telling me.”

“I’m sorry to have heard what happened to you,” she whispers, as she holds onto me. The reminder of my time in captivity with Rodrigo spills free, and I have to blink back the tears. Thankfully, nothing more than bad memories came of it.

The fear I had of him impregnating me burst free when Victor found me. I cried and begged him to save me, to help me. And it was when I was healed, and once more his *juguete*, did he pull out a goddamned ring when we were in his office, drop to his knees, and tell me to marry him.

Yes, he didn’t ask.

He commanded it.

And how can I deny a man who gave me not just a new life, but a new heart.

VICTOR

Two years later

I WATCH Sofia alongside her father as they walk down the garden, behind her are our two-year-old twins. A boy and a girl, who are perfect, just like their mother. I never thought I would want a family, but the moment I realized I loved Sofia, I knew the moment I could, I would fill her belly with babies.

We stopped at the two, even though I wouldn’t mind seeing her swollen with more kids. Even though I know she’s healthy, and her heart is strong, I wanted her to be here until we’re both old and gray. The fear of losing her suddenly is always there, at the back of my mind. And I would much rather have her here, than have a brood of children without their mother.

They look up at my office window, as if she knew I was watching, and they offer me a happy wave. Sofia and I are magnets. It doesn’t matter where I am, I feel her nearness, and she feels mine.

“You’re a lucky man,” Javier says behind me. The kids love him to pieces, and every time he’s around, they climb up his leg and into his arms.

“I am.” I turn to regard him, there’s something bothering him, and I wonder if it has anything to do with our new shipments coming in. “What is it?”

“I wanted to ask you if I could travel to America to meet with Monaghan,” he asks. I was meant to travel in a couple of days to see our newest client in Los Angeles, and while there, I wanted to see Franco Moretti.

“Alone?”

“If you trust me,” he says with a smile. “You should be here for the twins’ birthday.”

“And what are they going to do without their Uncle Javi?” I chuckle.

He laughs, his eyes crinkling at the corners, but there’s still something he’s hiding from me. I can read him better than any book in my overstuffed library, and I know when my best friend is hiding something from me.

“You know, Javi,” I turn to my desk, opening the top drawer, I pull out my cigars. Handing one to him, I place another between my lips before I light the end. Pulling deeply, I savor the fragrance of the cigar. It’s one of my favorite past times, besides fucking my wife. “I’ve known you for a long time, longer than most people in this house.”

He nods.

“And when you lie to me or omit something from me, then trust is something I would think twice about offering.” My voice is low, serious, and I keep my expression schooled with him.

“There’s someone I’d like to see while I’m up there,” he finally admits, and it’s not what I was expecting. Javier has had women and men in his bed, some who I’ve sent to him, but he’s never once given any of them a return visit and I wonder if he’ll ever find what I have with Sofia.

“Oh?” I arch a brow, waiting for him to continue, because now I’m intrigued by Javier. There’s a squeal coming from down the hall, and I know our conversation will be shelved for later.

“*Papá! Papá!*” The little voice of my sweet girl comes the moment she steps over the threshold. She’s wearing a pink sundress that’s swishing around her little legs as she races toward me. Not long after, we’re joined by my son who’s in a pair of dark jeans and a T-shirt with some sort of dinosaur on it. I’m not sure what Sofia buys them most times, but that has to go.

“Julio, Juliet,” I call to them as they slam into my legs, nearly knocking me off my feet. *Can the King of Colombia be so soft with his heart?* Certainly. Not with everyone though. “Uncle Javier was just telling me he won’t be here for your party tomorrow,” I tell them, knowing I’m causing trouble for him with the two monsters.

“Awww,” Juliet mumbles, just before sticking out her lower lip and pouting as if it’s the end of the world. “Where are you going, Uncle Javi?” she asks him, her wide eyes locked on his. She looks just like her mother, with those beautiful green eyes that, at times, flash with gold, which I know comes from me.

“Victor,” Hector greets me as he enters the office a few minutes later, along with Sofia who’s got her hand on her stomach, which has my interest piqued.

“Good to see you, Hector,” I greet my father-in-law who settles in one of the wingback chairs opposite my desk.

“Uncle Javi,” Juliet calls to him, “Why can’t you come to my party?”

“Our party!” Julio shouts, causing us all to chuckle.

“I’m going to visit a friend, little one,” he tells her gently, as he presses a kiss to her forehead. He’s good with her, with Julio as well. I’m thankful I have him in my life.

“Oh no,” Sofia goes to him, touching his arm. “Why? Where are you off to?”

He smiles at my wife, and my blood simmers. “There’s someone I’ll be meeting in New York. I told you about her,” he tells Sofia, and she grins.

“Yes, I’m so excited.” She turns her attention to me. “I’m so glad you’re letting him go.” My wife closes the distance between us and pulls me into a hug, before pressing her lips to my stubbled cheek.

“Yeah, I’m such a good guy,” I mumble around my cigar, before Javi picks Juliet up and takes Julio’s hand.

He offers me a wink before he takes them to the door. “We’ll go see how the birthday party set-up is going,” he tells us with mischief in his blue eyes. *Asshole*. Running away from me before I have time to admonish him for not telling me everything. “Come on, grandpa,” he calls to Hector who’s already on his feet. He’s been a godsend in Sofia’s world after her trauma. And being around the kids has brought us together as a family.

“It seems you’re the confidante now,” I remark once we’re alone, as I settle in my chair and pull Sofia into my lap. She straddles me easily, and I revel in her warmth.

“Jealous much?” Sofia challenges me, and I can’t help my palm from twitching with the need to spank her pretty ass.

“I am.” Nodding, I pull her closer, I steal her lips with my own and dip my tongue into her mouth.

She's warm and sweet, deliciously intoxicating. Her body shivers when I reach between us and press my fingers against her mound. "But I'm hard too, so take your clothes off, I'm fucking you on my desk."

"You're a caveman," she laughs, but she obeys as she rises and pushes her panties down. The dress she's wearing is perfectly hugging every fucking curve of her frame, and my cock appreciates it.

I spin her around, bending her over the desk, and hiking up her dress moments before I sink into her tightness. *Fuck*, she was made for me.

"Shit, Victor," she mumbles, as I grip her hips, fucking her into the desk, hard and fast. I love how she enjoys this. The risks we take. My cock throbs, and my balls draw up. It's been too long since we did this.

Reaching around, I circle her clit, taunting her for a few moments, before she mewls her release, which causes me to grunt out nine seconds later. The moment I feel my dick softening, I want another go at my wife.

"Perhaps we've got number three in there," I tell her when I help her up and touch her stomach gently. The smile on her lips tells me that she may want that too.

"You've made me the happiest man on earth, *juguete*," I tell her.

"And you've made me the happiest woman in this world, *diablo*," she smiles.

THE END

DID YOU ENJOY THE DEVIL'S PLAYTHING?

Keep reading for one exclusive snippet from one of my other dark romances, Beautifully Brutal!

PROLOGUE - LANCE

The thick stack of pages lying on the table before me contains information about my current job. Everything I need to know about the mark currently slumped against the wall, dripping blood all over the cool concrete beneath him.

“I-I know A-Arthur—”

“Shut up,” I bite out, ash flitting from the burning cigarette hanging between my lips. I glance over at the table, noting the tumbler sitting beside me is empty. I turn toward his bar, lifting the decanter, and pour another shot of clear liquid.

The logo on the front of the manila folder I’m flicking through shimmers in gold and crimson. It’s been years since I first laid eyes on it, and since then, till now, I feel a sense of pride. It’s a place I belong to. My life has changed considerably since I became a part of them; The Cavalieri Della Morte have become a family — twelve men and our leader.

For longer than I can remember, the word *family* has been a curse. My father killed himself when I was twelve. I walked into the office as he pulled the trigger, and I watched as his brains splattered along the wall of his books, which sat behind his desk.

Grabbing the glass, I empty the contents over my mark’s leg where the bullet wound is seeping claret fluid. His cries are otherworldly, making me smile. I prefer torture; it makes the memories of my father’s scattered brains less painful to me. Seeing something like that could break a kid, and for a while, it did.

My mother tried her best, but a wayward son is never easy for a woman alone. Once I hit fifteen, she was already high every night with a different *boyfriend* strolling into the house as if he owned it.

When I couldn’t handle it anymore, I packed a duffel bag and ran from the small two-bedroom home my father had left her in his will. I didn’t know where I would go, but I knew I needed to get out of there or I’d turn out just like him — a brainless corpse.

Sauntering over to my array of tools, I pick up the small knife on the table. The handle is hand carved from ebony, with a Cavalieri logo etched into the wood.

Smiling, I lean in and hiss in my victim’s ear, “Are you going to tell me where the money is?” My voice is low, dangerous, and he can tell from the look in my eyes that anything he tells me won’t save him. Not today, not ever.

His mouth opens, but no sound comes out, and I’m reminded of the moment my father stopped moving. When the gun thudded onto the carpet, the sound was like a damn foghorn.

“Well shit, you have bigger balls than I expected.” Pressing my heavy combat boot on his groin, I make sure all my weight is on the one foot, causing a wretched scream to fall from his lips.

“P-please, I-I-I c-c-c—”

“Please, please, I have money,” I taunt him, knowing what they all beg and plead just before I end them. This is part of the job I enjoy more than anything. The high of having someone’s life in your hands is heady, like a drug.

“I-I-I c-c-can’t—” The voice drags me from my thoughts. Pressing the cigarette between my lips, I take a long drag as my eyes flutter at inhaling the sweet smoke. I reach for his bleeding leg, shoving my fingers in the wound in an attempt to find my bullet. His screech is one of pain and agony, causing my heart to catapult wildly in my chest. Pleasure surges through me at seeing this piece of shit in pain. My inked hands are now drenched in the thick, slippery crimson fluid from the wounds I’ve inflicted on the man who’s dying against the wall.

Lifting my foot, I press down on the mangled limb, earning me another dick-hardening cry of pain. There’s nowhere for him to go. He can’t run or hide. His leg is contorted in an unnatural way from me stomping on it. I heard the bone crack when my heavy black boot made contact.

Reaching behind me, I pull my gun from my belt holster. I lift my Glock and aim it at his head first, watching as he scrunches his eyes, awaiting the shot, but I don’t pull the trigger just yet. I lower my arm, aiming for his other knee cap. The ringing of the shot is loud, and then his sweet, agonizing cries fill my ears.

Placing the gun on the table, I glance at the man, my mind ticking over the options. He’s gripping his leg, begging more than he was moments ago. There’s something that clicks in a person’s mind when they know they’re going to die — survival instinct or resolution. Either they’ll attempt to beg their way out of what’s coming, or they give up.

“I think it’s time we played a little game, don’t you?” I question, picking up the blade from my array of tools. Leaning in close to his trembling form, I award him with a smile while I slice away his shirt. I find his hairy chest, which concaves as he sucks in a breath. The asshole is nothing to look at, graying hair, beady eyes, and wrinkles on his fifty-year-old face.

“P-p-please, I c-c-can pay, anything you w-w-want.” His promise makes me chuckle. There’s only one thing I want, and it can’t be found. I reach for the bottle that travels with me on every job. I twist the cap, chucking it on the table as I turn to my mark.

I lean in close to his sniveling face. “It’s time to learn how much your payments are worth,” I tell him. Tipping the container, I watch as the clear fluid trickles over his chest, the stench of burning flesh invading my nostrils. It doesn’t make me sick since I’m used to the smell. As if there’s a steak sizzling on a hot grill, I hear the sound of skin turning to nothing as it bubbles and disintegrates.

His screams are drawn right from the gut slowly disappearing under the acid. My gaze is locked on his, noting how his eyes roll back in his head as pain takes over. The flesh that rots from his bones gives way to his intestines. Blood pools at my feet, and I know I’m going to have to clean my motherfucking boots again.

“You’re making quite a mess, Senator Hopkins.” I smile when I step back. “You know, the Cavalieri would’ve come sooner, but I had a woman on my dick last night, and she was more entertaining than you are.”

The old man attempts to shake his head, pleading for mercy. His movements are slowing, then I see it. The light flickers off, and he’s dead.

“You didn’t last as long as I thought you would,” I tell the corpse. “Too bad.” Shrugging, I pull out the crisp, white handkerchief and wipe the blade clean. Dropping the material on his corpse, I smile when I notice the white of bone peeking at me through the ripped pink flesh and pooling red.

I make sure each of the weapons I used are clean before sliding them into the briefcase. With a

glance around the room, I ensure I have everything. We exact justice, and this time it's no different. Once I'm ready, I take one last look at his shriveled insides and chuckle.

I press dial, then lift my phone to my ear. Once I hear the line click, I inform them, "Clean up," before hanging up. I head to the exit and my SUV.

Time to go home.

After I'm in the driver's seat, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. The scent of metal is still rooted in my nostrils. I doubt I'll ever get it out permanently, but one night with a pretty whore will sort it out temporarily.

The roads are quiet, the night sky hanging heavily with bright pinpricks of lights. The moon is full, round as if it's watching what happens in the dark. Putting my foot down on the accelerator, I zip through the empty streets, needing to get home. I'm exhausted. I need sleep, but I know I'll only be plagued with dreams of her.

When I pull into my parking garage, I wait till the gate is shut behind the car before exiting. My phone buzzes wildly in my jacket pocket, and when I pull it out, I notice Seth's name on the screen.

"What?"

"Lance, beer tonight?" he questions. We've had some good nights, but Seth is much younger than me, and sometimes, I just need time on my own.

"Not tonight, man. I'll see you tomorrow." Hanging up before he can respond, I head inside and hope the rest of the evening is quiet.

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NEED SOMETHING NAUGHTIER?

I've included a snippet from one of my Sins of Seven Series, book one, Kneel!

PROLOGUE - NATE

Greed is my vice. A sin that leads to my addictions. One of the seven deadly sins to be exact. Perhaps greed didn't lead to my demise, but it did, in many ways, change me. My tastes differ from most men. I enjoy the tears on a beautiful rosy hued cheek. I revel in degrading women in sexual ways for my gratification and theirs.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying my tastes are right. All I'm saying is that there are women out there who come to me to be degraded. At thirty-six, I've had many slaves in my dungeon. A Sir to beautiful, intelligent, and submissive women who enjoy being called names while I'm fucking them.

In their humiliation, I command them what to do, while spitting out taunts at them. You'd be surprised how many get off on it. As if being called beautiful was wrong. In this world etched with darkness, that's where I find comfort. It's where I'm most myself. Where I'm allowed to let go of life's stresses, to see things in a completely different way.

Where I revel and play with my demons, other's shy away from their true, animalistic needs.

I've currently got a raven-haired beauty on her knees before me. She's being watched by three other dominant men while she kisses my shoes in exchange for an orgasm. I can tell she's needy because her breaths are ragged and I can smell her arousal. It drenches the room in a scent so intoxicating, the men watching have their dicks out, stroking themselves to the slave on her knees.

Like darkness feeds and preys on my soul, I do the same with curvaceous beauties. "Up, on your back. Open your legs as far as they will go," I command, my voice raspy with lust.

Her real name is Kristine, but in this dungeon, where devils come to play, she's called Fuck Toy. It's written on her stomach, just above her belly button.

Her smooth-shaven cunt is bared to me, the soft pink flesh glistening. Picking up the champagne glass I brought into the dungeon only moments ago, I drizzle the contents over her mound, watching the clear, bubbly liquid drip down her folds.

"Please, Sir Nate," she begs.

They all plead at one time or another. Her thighs are trembling. Her big green eyes peek at me with unabashed need. I pick up the scrap of material she was wearing, a thong, pink and girly, yet there's nothing innocent about her. Kneeling at her cunt, I push the silk into her hole, fucking it into her like I would my cock. Her moans skyrocket through the room. The desire, lust, and darkness is palpable. A living breathing entity joining us in our depravity's.

I glance at the men. They're edging, bringing themselves to edge of orgasm to make their lust last. They're in awe of the woman who's allowing me to degrade her. "Come on your panties. Soak them," I grunt before clamping her clit with the metal teeth attached to a slinky chain, which is connected to

the clamps on her nipples. She screeches in pleasure, pain, I don't fucking care. All I know is that I need to be inside her. "You love being a slut, don't you?" I ask, but all I hear are her moans and whimpers. The sounds vibrate through her and she shudders.

The three men to my left grunt as they find their own releases. I move to her mouth, gripping my thick cock in my fist and slamming it down her throat, gagging her.

"That's a good whore," I growl as my own release shoots through me. And like any good slave, she swallows every damn drop.

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NEED SOMETHING EVEN DARKER AND TWISTED?

Keep reading for a snippet from Stolen, the prequel to my Taken Series!

PROLOGUE - DRAKE

DRAKE

There are only so many dead bodies you have to bury before your life becomes nothing more than a long-winded repeat.

Over and over.

Again and again.

The blood is the same.

The graves are the same.

I smile when I do it now. When I dig a six-foot hole, I revel in the harsh stench of bodies — rotting and vile. It's a reminder I'm a Savage. I was born into this life, and I'll die in it.

The pieces of flesh and bone still chill me to my soul, but there isn't any salvation for me. My life has been tainted by the sins that come with the last name I've been born with.

I bear the sins of my father.

I carry the cross of his actions.

And one day, I'll be forced to run the organization he's built.

With each body I dig a grave for, and with every heart I've seen cease to beat, I know there's no escape. As much as I want to run, there are people here I can't leave.

Two boys.

My brother.

My best friend.

They'll forever have me here, living the life the man who's kept us prisoners for so long has forced us into.

A dark journey.

A sordid road.

And there is no escape.

Unless . . .

We're severed.

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Beautifully Brutal (Cavalieri Della Morte)

How the Mind Breaks

Taboo Novellas

Sunshine and the Stalker (collaboration with K Webster)

His Temptation

Austin's Christmas Shortcake

Crime and Punishment (Newsletter Exclusive)

Malignus (Inferno World Novella)

Virulent (collaboration with Yolanda Olson)

Tempting Grayson

Gilded Sovereign Series

Cruel War (Book #1)

Volatile Love (Book #2)

Sins of Seven Series

Kneel (Book #1)

Obey (Book #2)

Indulge (Book #3)

Ruthless (Book #4)

Bound (Book #5)

Envy (Book #6)

Vice (Book #7)

The Taken Series

Stolen

Severed

Four Fathers Series

Kingston

Four Sons Series

Brock

Carina Press Novellas

Pierced Ink

Madd Ink

Broken Series

Broken by Desire

Shattered by Love

The Backstage Series

Callum

Liam

Ryan

Forbidden Series

From the Ashes - A Prequel

Crave (Book #1)

Covet (Book #2)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dani is a *USA Today* bestselling author of a variety of genres, from romantic suspense to dark erotic romance and even BDSM romance. She loves to delve into the raw, emotional journeys her characters venture on, and enjoys the dark, edgy, and sensual scenes that fill the pages of her books. Dani's stories are seductive with a deviant edge with feisty heroines and dominant alphas.

Dani lives in the beautiful city of Cape Town, and is a proud member of the Romance Writer's Organization of South Africa (ROSA) and the Romance Writers of America (RWA). She has a healthy addiction to reading, TV series, music, tattoos, chocolate, and ice cream.

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