



Authors note:

Dear Reader: I am obsessed, I have to admit. Obsessed with Eve, temptation, love and sin, love and death, love and madness, with the dark side of love. I've made it a point to explore my obsessions, so please forgive me if my characters are not your every day heroes and heroines, nor the endings the ones you would expect. No one said love was easy...

In the Name of Love

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IN THE NAME OF LOVE

Eve Powers

"Mirror, mirror of them all, who's the fairest one of all?"

Leticia smiled at the beautiful reflection in the mirror, pleased with her appearance, as always.

It was she.

She was the fairest one of all.

And today, she was even more beautiful than usual, for today was a special day indeed.

She turned forty-nine today, although the cake would only hold forty-three candles. She'd always said she was six years younger than she truly was, and it was important that today she look even younger than that. After all, everybody who was anybody would attend the grand party. Movie stars, politicians, businessmen, even royalty would be driving through the gated entrance of her husband's Beverly Hills estate within the following hour. Leticia was an enigma to them, a paragon of virtue and love. The perfect trophy wife.

She studied her reflection, her face betraying no emotion as she scrutinized each and every single one of her lovely features. How beautiful she looked. She could imagine the attendants gaping at her while she walked down the staircase, her hand fluttering over the polished wood rail ever so lightly, like a queen. People would murmur, praise her beauty and poise.

They wouldn't hold her in such high regard if they knew what she really thought of them. If they knew that behind her polished manners lay another kind of woman, the desperate kind. But Leticia Marcos was never vocal about her opinions. Her mother, a conservative Catholic with Latin descent, had always said women were most beautiful when they were quiet. And the golden rule in the school she'd attended as a child was, "If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all."

Leticia had lived by these two rules. The words spoken from her lips were of nothing but praise, and she'd kept beautiful all these years because of the strict control she exercised over her facial features. She rarely smiled. She never frowned. And even the most minimal expression on her face was the product of hours of practice in front of a mirror. Her surreal beauty had amazed even the plastic surgeon. He couldn't believe she was turning forty-three. "Your skin is flawless," Dr. Gomez had said that morning she arrived to inquire about a face-lift. She'd already had a breast implant, two liposuctions in the hip area, and a body sculpting operation a few years back.

Raul didn't mind her splurging thousands of dollars on her body. The fact was that he both encouraged and demanded it. His secretary did a wire-transfer for twenty thousand dollars every weekend to her personal bank account, an amount she'd been ordered by her husband to spend solely and exclusively on clothes, accessories, and surgeons. "A queen deserves only the best," he'd said.

Raul strutted his wife like a male peacock strutted its feathers. He called her "doll" and he expected her to behave like one. He was so in love with his wife's physical appearance that he'd even refused to have a child with her. "Why mar your beautiful body?" he'd asked after they'd been married. "How could I bear watching you change soiled diapers and breast-feed a noisy infant?"

And Leticia Marcos had done what she'd been taught to do. To take it in obediently and quietly. Put her needs aside for her husband's. To perform her duty as wife, daughter, friend, and member of society. Her dreams and her fantasies were not as important as those of her husband. She shouldn't even think of thinking on her own. Much less of disagreeing with him. He was so rich he could get any woman to agree with him. And a good wife

must never allow her husband's attention to turn to a younger woman. Her husband was an important man, after all.

The men both feared and respected him. They wanted his wealth, his power, and yes, they wanted his wife. After all, she'd make the perfect lover. Beautiful and obedient. She seldom spoke, but when she did, people hushed and listened to her melodious voice. When Leticia entered a room, the whole gatherers would pause to watch her in both respect and admiration. She was frequently aware of the men's hungry eyes on her. Raul was also aware. Other men's blatant desire for her gave him pleasure. Every night after a gathering, Raul would undress her, recalling how this or that particular man had looked at her. "He wanted you," Raul would murmur in her ear. "But you're mine." And to prove his point, he'd claim her from behind, brutally so. There was no gentleness in his actions, no love.

"I'd kill you and anyone who'd dare lay a hand on you," he'd often say as he forced himself on her. It was always the same, and it was over very quickly.

Leticia never participated in their lovemaking – if she could even call it that. Raul only penetrated her in the ass to prevent her from 'cheating' and getting pregnant on purpose. And lady that she was, she took it as it came. Did what she must to please him.

She was so good in pretending that he didn't even suspect that she had her own fantasies, fantasies she'd tucked away somewhere, and none of them involved him.

He was a strict man. His shirts needed to be hung according to color. The toothpaste must always be left with the cap on. The towels had to be white otherwise they wouldn't dry properly. She shouldn't use red lipstick because she looked like a hooker. The air-conditioner must always be at

twenty degrees no matter if Leticia were freezing. Any form of living thing that was found in the house, excluding a human being, was brutally murdered and disposed off. There should be no hair anywhere or else he'd go into a fit. Leticia always wore her coal-black hair in a bun at her nape. It gave her the sleek, classical appearance of a ballerina. And it kept her dark, restless hair in place.

Leticia bent over the granite counter and ran a soft shade of lipstick over her lips for a second time. She pursed them, then made a pout to verify the color and texture were as desired. She'd bought a silver-colored silk Valentino dress for tonight. An elegant sash held it together over one shoulder, leaving the other shoulder bare. The dress clung to her body like second-skin, hugging her flat stomach and curving against her womanly hips. Her heels were an expensive pair of Manolo's she'd picked up in New York after flipping over a picture of them on a magazine. They were exquisite, with rows and rows of Swarovski crystals that sparkled like diamonds when she took a step, peeking out from under the wavy long dress. She'd used silver eye shadow over her coal black eyes, and a coral peach color on her cheeks and lips. She could pass off as a thirty year old and she was grateful for it.

Because tonight Leticia was finally going to live. Live a life where she did as she pleased with no one to scold her or order her around. A life where she could be any woman she wanted to be. A life where she could be outspoken or quiet or both when she felt like it. Tonight Leticia Marcos was going to escape with her lover.

Yes, shocking as it was, trophy wife Leticia Marcos had a lover.

He was a man who could offer her nothing; he had no money, little education, and no connections. He was a man who knew nothing of stocks,

politics, or real estate. A man who had no car, and no belongings except the clothes on his back and a simple golden cross that tied around his neck with a taupe suede cord. He was a man with no family, and no past. But perhaps, if they tried, if they were brave, and fought for love, they could have a future. Together.

Leticia glanced past her shoulder at the LouisVuitton monogram suitcase, open atop the bed in a silent invitation, and felt her stomach clench. How she wished time would fly and this night would be over. How she wished she were already in a beach somewhere, far away from this luxurious, suffocating jail, and in the arms of her lover.

They had been lovers only once, and yet it seemed like they'd been lovers forever. They'd engaged, unknowingly, in foreplay for years. Although they had other servants in their estate, Franco was their premium 'handyman'; being bodyguard when needed, plumber when anything leaked, and chauffer when Leticia was driven into the city. He'd changed light bulbs and cleaned up after the guard dogs. He'd cleaned the pool and tended to the gardens when they needed tending.

And everyday she'd look at him with longing. And everyday he'd look back at her, with eyes so deep and so intense and so full of promise that she could barely stand it. They spoke little to each other. And yet their eyes said so much when they connected. So very much. They told of more things than they should, of dark pasts and deep pain, of longing and hunger. Franco knew everything about her. He could see right into the darkest pits of her soul. He knew the real Leticia; the Leticia Raul had silenced for over twenty-five years.

Franco. If Michelangelo's David were alive, he would have been jealous of the body her lover possessed: all hard bulging muscles, strained

and taut. Broad shoulders, and long, lean legs and arms. And his face; square, masculine, and dark. Those narrowed eyes, with that gray-green gleam in them, and those know-it-all pupils that missed nothing. Every minute she glanced his way, she caught him watching her.

He'd even seen her having sex with Raul. She'd been in the gardens when she heard Raul's furious bellows inside the house – he must have found a hair somewhere – and before she could race inside to placate him, he was already looming over her. He slapped her, and she jerked from the impact, but remained silent. He then grabbed her shoulders, forced her down on all fours – there, on the moist green grass, as if she were a dog instead of a lady – and in one swift motion both lifted her pleated Chanel skirt and tore off her silk black panties. She never allowed herself to cry in front of him, for if he knew she feared him, it would be worse. She'd seen how he treated men who feared him, and Leticia had no desire to be humiliated like that.

It was when Raul slid his throbbing member inside her and began to pump wildly into her ass that she caught sight of him – Franco. He was across the bushes, standing deathly still, his eyes boring into hers. Leticia felt a rush of heat at his gaze, the blood boiling in her veins and throughout her body, making her feel feverish. Suddenly it wasn't Raul pushing into her, but in her mind, it was him. Franco, inside her, pushing, his big cock enveloped in her tight ass, pumping, taking, fucking. She never broke his gaze. Even when she shuddered in ecstasy, her eyes were still on his. It was he who turned away first, disappearing behind the trees, and leaving her feeling as if she'd done something wrong, betrayed him somehow. Silly, isn't it? Because Raul was her husband, after all.

After this episode Leticia grew addicted to seeing him, teasing him. It was as if she had to test him, see how much he could stand. When he was in

the pool, cleaning it, she would saunter outside in a topless bikini and swim naked for hours. When he was tending the gardens, she would read a book under the shade of a tree and slowly caress her body. When he was in the house, she would walk around in her sexiest, sheerest lingerie. When he drove her around town, she would wear no panties, and would open her legs so that he could see her neatly shaven pussy through the rearview mirror. At other times, she bent forward ever so slightly, in order to give him ample view of her cleavage.

When Raul wanted to fuck her, Leticia would sometimes walk towards the window, so that he would take her there, by the window, and hopefully, Franco would be there and watch. Most of the time, he did watch, and she would get frenzied by it. It was as if his eyes made love to her from afar. One time, Raul noticed he was watching, and he climaxed almost immediately just by the thrill of it – the thrill of watching Franco watch him fuck her. He later said, “That bastard should be reminded where his place is.”

Leticia knew nothing of Franco, except that Franco was his last name. She remembered very few details from the work application he’d submitted when Raul had first hired him five years ago: only that he was Italian, thirty-six years old, and had no family in the United States. Other than that, the only thing she knew was that her body longed for him, for his touch, ached for it. Loved it. Loved *him*.

It was only a month ago when it had gone on long enough; the torture, the agony, the pain. Raul had gone to South America on an important business trip. Leticia never asked about Raul’s business dealings, as she was instructed not to, but he was gone for almost a week. Luckily, the dozens of

men he always kept at his side followed him to South America, so she was almost alone in the house except for a few servants...and Franco.

She was in her room that afternoon, with the door slightly ajar, while Franco was out in the hallway, polishing the gold-leaf frames of the artworks that hung there. They did not really need polishing, but Leticia wanted him near, and she kept making lame excuses to bring him upstairs. She wore a pair of black pointy high heels and black net stockings that reached mid-thigh. Her buttocks were completely bare, fabulously firm and sculptured, and her breasts perky and round. She'd brushed golden powder all over her body and her skin looked liked polished gold.

As she heard Franco toil with the frames outside, she slowly walked around her room, the shoes tapping softly over the wooden floor. Several times she walked by the door just to give him a glimpse of her breasts and her naked body. She could see him straining to see through the two-inch opening, and it gave her pleasure to know he was dying to look at her, just as she was dying for his touch.

It was not completely unexpected that this time he thrust the door open and for a moment just stood there, his legs braced apart, his arms into fists at his sides, his chest heaving. She paused in mid-room, her breath catching in her throat at the sight of him, in those jeans and tight cotton shirt, his unruly black hair tousled. They stared at each other for what seemed to be hours. Suddenly he reached and pushed the door shut behind him.

He crossed the room in less than three strides, and within seconds had her pinned against the wall, his hands locking her wrists above her head, his face inches from her own. "What is it that you want from me?" he demanded, his accent thick and sultry.

She couldn't think, much less speak, and she could hardly breathe. Her breasts heaved against his chest. He looked down at them and saw they were crushed against his body, then glanced up at her face. "You're driving me crazy," he whispered in agony.

He bent down to nuzzle the mounds of her breasts with his face. His stub grazed her flesh. Leticia moaned, sunk her fingers into his silky black hair and clutched his face to her chest. He sought a pink puckered nipple. His tongue slid out to flick it, wet it with hot saliva, then he drew it into his mouth with a sucking motion. It sent tingles all the way from her breasts down to the pit of her stomach.

She thrust her head back and moaned deeply from the pleasure he produced. His head came up and he looked at her, his eyes feasting in her beauty. There was a stormy look to them, something dark. She could feel her own gaze, clouded with want, with need. There was determination in his jaw, in the angle of his chin. "Today I will have you no matter what," he whispered against her face as his hand traveled downwards, slowly, across her navel, only to halt there, in that special place, that wet pool of desire.

"Yes," she said in a breath.

He slid his finger inside her, and she yelped at the feel of such long, expert fingers, embedded inside her sex. His lips swooped down on hers and he kissed her like a starved man. His tongue thrust inside her mouth and ravaged it completely, while his finger slowly penetrated her again and again. His free hand cupped a breast, caressed it with his thumb, then squeezed it with more urgency, his grip hard and possessive. Leticia's hands shook when she reached for his jeans and frantically felt for the buttons to part them open. Not breaking the kiss, Franco eased out of them until he stood naked in regal splendor, like a primitive beast, a simple gold cross

glinting against his tanned chest, and his rock hard penis hard, tall and proud. At the sight of him, all Leticia could do was fall to her knees before him and suck that proud, unyielding cock into her mouth. She was greedy for him, for his taste. He was hard, salty, and pulsing inside her mouth.

Franco could see their reflection on the mirror above the vanity. He could see Leticia on her knees, her naked body curvy and perfect, her skin gleaming. He saw his penis enter her hot, starved mouth only to disappear inside it, the sight nearly undoing him. He grabbed her long sable hair and forced her to stand so he could kiss her. He kissed her like he meant it, his mouth savage. Then, with burning force, he took her by the shoulders and shoved her onto the bed. The mattress creaked under the impact of her weight.

For a moment he stood there, looming over her, his eyes feasting on her image. There, on the bed, she looked sultry and pliant, her body shimmering in sweat. Her lips were swollen from his kiss, her eyes dazed with desire. He moved like a panther getting ready to strike and slowly spread her legs open, exposing her wet, engorged, shaven pussy. Slowly, he placed a hand on each side, and parted the lips with his thumbs as he bent down and buried his face between her legs. His tongue darted out to taste the sweet honey flowing from her lips. He was starved for her.

Leticia arched her back, groaning, and cupped her breasts with her palms as his lips tortured her. His tongue swiftly penetrated, bringing forth another moan from her, then slipped out, only to move up and flick the tender nub, taunt it. As his lips and tongue assaulted her in slow, circular motions, a long finger slid inside her and embedded itself into her very core. She was out of control, her body on fire. Leticia had never made noise during sex, but she had never been loved like this. She felt as though she

were being consumed by the heat. Her body felt coiled, tight, and ready to spring.

Franco knelt over the bed and placed his hands on her hips to raise them. She felt the tip of his hardness pause at the very entrance of her being. Very slowly, as if afraid to hurt her, he entered her, his cock so hard and full it could barely fit inside the walls of her tight, wet muscles. His hands were strong as they held her hips firmly in place and he slowly began to move inside her. At first he moved slowly, but she was desperate for him, wrapping her legs around his waist and arching her hips to receive his fullness. Her moves drove him mad with desire. He pounded into her, full force. Her breasts bounced from the impact of each of his thrusts, and her nails clutched at the silk bed sheets like a lifesaver. She felt tense, climbing. He looked like a wild beast, his expression twisted and dark, as he rammed his hips against hers, furiously now. When wrecking spasms took hold of her body, he immediately pulled out from inside her and stroked his dick rapidly above her body, his face contorted in pleasure as the shudders rocked him, too. He spilled his semen into the air, above her face. Her mouth greedily opened to receive his salty flavor, and her tongue darted out to taste whatever it could.

After that afternoon Leticia became mad. Obsessed. She thought of him and only him. She frequently masturbated in the shower just remembering, and when Raul fucked her, she closed her eyes and imagined it was him; Franco. She didn't even know his first name, but she didn't care. It was Franco. *Her* Franco.

She continued to torture him, torture herself, and once, she even masturbated on the bed while he was working out on the hallway. He watched her the whole time, listened to the animal-like sounds that tore from

her chest and resonated in the room like music, and she could see he was stroking himself as he watched her. She'd hoped he would be sufficiently aroused as to join her, but to her dismay he didn't. Perhaps because there were other servants around the house, or perhaps because they both knew deep down that this love, this desire, shouldn't be. Only when she shuddered did she notice his own explosion, visibly rocking him as he spilled the thick, white sea-foam over his hand.

A few moments afterwards, he pushed the door open and stood in the doorway in silence. He looked angry, almost desperate. "This is dangerous, Leticia. Your husband is capable of many things if he finds out about us. We should beware." He left before she could answer.

Raul was a dangerous man. Leticia knew little about his dealings, and her place was not to question, but she knew Raul was a man who took things way too seriously, and everything with him was personal. The men around him hid guns inside their coats—she'd noticed on several occasions when the day was hot and some men casually removed their jackets, only forgetting to hide the strapped guns around their waists. She knew they were not police officers, and she feared to learn what they were. Yes, her husband was not a man to be trifled with. Hadn't he instilled so much fear in her that she'd dare not displease him, much less defy him, for all these years? And yet Leticia couldn't help it. She was sick with need, sick with love for Franco. She had to find a way to be with him. To escape.

Tonight she would make plans with him. Tonight at the party, when Franco served the champagne, she would slip him a note and meet him at the shed. With so many people around, Raul would never suspect. Before he'd even realize what happened, Leticia would already be far, far away from here, where he couldn't reach her.

This whole day, Leticia had felt eager, nervous, like a young teenager on her first date, waiting anxiously for the time to be with her loved one. Now, walking towards the open suitcase, she couldn't help but pray for strength. Strength to see her plan through. Strength to fight, in the name of love. She clamped the top of the suitcase shut, and hid it beneath the bed. It would not be noticed under the floral red bed-skirt, and she would be able to easily retrieve it later.

Franco consumed her mind like a virus. As she descended the stairs and greeted the arriving guests, every cell in her body seemed to be on high alert, waiting for him. Franco.

She was sitting on a floral yellow sofa, discussing the perils of liposuction with a few other ladies, when he walked into the room. It was as if nothing else existed but him. He wore a tuxedo, and he wore it well; his gorgeous tanned skin contrasting sharply with the crisp white shirt and dark black jacket. He looked tall, strong, and elegant. The other men in the room seemed tiny and unimportant compared to him and his formidable presence. One of his hands held a silver tray up in the air, the tray crowded with tall slender glasses filled with bubbling champagne. His eyes met and held hers. Her heart raced and for a moment she feared it would burst in elation.

"My, my," one of the ladies said. "The waiters couldn't get more handsome if they tried."

Leticia cleared her throat and pasted a cold smile on her face as she watched him approach. She was acutely aware of the other women's eyes on him and yet she did her best to look calm and composed. Regal, as she should.

"Good evening," he said with that sultry accent Leticia loved, lowering the tray to their reach.

The ladies smiled at him sweetly as they each lifted a cup from the tray, though Leticia knew by their looks that their thoughts regarding him were anything but sweet. Finally he came over to her. “Mrs. Marcos,” he said, bending his head just slightly, his eyes poring into hers.

She deftly slipped the note she’d previously written on the tray and lifted her own glass, nodding curtly. She saw that he swiftly retrieved the note and proceeded across the room to offer drinks to the men. From the corner of her eye, she followed his every move. He moved like a panther, sleek, agile, and silent.

When the tray was finally empty and he headed towards the kitchens, Leticia rose and excused herself from the ladies, saying she would be back shortly. Breathless in anticipation, she exited the house through the double glass doors that led to the gardens, and headed towards the storage barn where the gardening equipment was put away.

The door was open. Glancing around to make sure no one was in sight, she briskly entered and closed the door behind her. Franco was casually leaning back against a John Deere mowing truck, looking like a lazy moon God waiting for his Goddess. Moonlight streamed through a small window, casting a mystical glow to his eyes, making them sparkle. In such a confined space, he looked bigger, and the very nearness of him seemed to overwhelm her. Her heart leapt to her throat, and most of her other body parts rioted in unison. “Franco,” she whispered, taking a step towards him.

“Say no more,” he said as he pulled her into his arms and kissed her. “You look beautiful tonight.”

“So do you,” she whispered, her eyes sparkling as she gazed longingly up at him.

His hands were warm as they cupped her cheeks. “I want you so much, Leticia,” he confessed, his eyes roving her face, as if memorizing every inch of it.

“I want you, too,” she breathed.

As if she couldn’t stand it a second longer, her hands flew to unzip his pants, and when they did so, she found his cock, hard and thick, peeking from under his white underwear and aching to be released. She pulled his underwear down to his ankles, and knelt before him. Gently, her tongue traced the tip of his cock, first around the folds, then slowly along the length of it. She licked every single inch of it, tasting and savoring his soft, silky skin. Then her mouth opened and drew his dick inside just lightly, without engulfing him completely, merely teasing the head with her lips and tongue. His hands came to rest on her hair, gently caressed it, as she continued to play with his throbbing organ.

She ducked her head lower and licked one of his balls, then the other. He threw his head back towards the ceiling and groaned as if in pain. Her hands moved upwards along his thighs and hips and settled on his rock hard buttocks as her tongue continued flicking and playing with his balls.

“You torture me,” he said breathlessly.

“Yes,” she breathed, finally engulfing his whole penis into her mouth and sucking on it. She heard his groans, and they sounded so primal they produced all sorts of havoc within her. Her senses reeled, making her suck on him with more urgency, like a starved woman.

“Let me kiss you,” he begged. But she wanted his dick, wanted to continue tasting him, felt hungry with desire. When she continued sucking him in a frenzy, he pulled her up by her hair and his lips swooped down on hers with a vengeance. His tongue thrust inside her mouth, dueled with her

own hungry tongue. His hands grabbed her shoulders and forced her around, then pushed her down against the John Deere mowing truck. Whimpering with need, she spread her palms over the shiny green hood, her breasts pressing hard against the cold metal, as he lifted the skirt of her dress.

His hands found the naked humps of her buttocks. They spread them apart so he could see the little pink ass inside, and with a fury he bent down to lick it, kiss it. The pleasure of his hungry tongue on her little ass was excruciating. Leticia went wild, pressing her pelvis against the metal of the truck in sheer morbid pleasure. Then she felt him press the tip of his cock at the entrance of her ass.

“Franco, please,” she begged. “Now.”

His dick slowly sank into her, while one of his hands came around her hips to reach between her legs. His fingers began stroking her sex as a painter stroked with his brush. Slowly, knowing just where to touch. It drove her wild with desire, this stroking, this penetration, in both of her pleasure zones.

He withdrew his cock from her ass, then entered it again, with more force this time. His lips ravaged her nape, almost bruising the tender flesh there, then came up to conquer her ear, his breathing harsh and labored against it, sending warm and tingling vibrations all the way down to her toes.

They climaxed together, their bodies shuddering in unison. For a few seconds afterwards they merely lay there, their bodies mingled, as they slowly tried to recover their breath. It was Leticia who stirred first.

“We must get back,” she said urgently, slightly pushing back at his weight. He rose and put his hands on her elbows to assist her. Leticia straightened, then began arranging her hair and flattening the wrinkles on her dress while he fumbled with his pants and underwear. When they were

finished they looked at each other in silence, as if neither of them knew what to say.

Finally, she took a deep breath and said, “Franco, I want to run away.”

He was silent for a moment, his expression unreadable. She laid a hand on his chest ever so lightly, as if afraid to touch him. “Would you run away with me? I want to be with you.”

“My love, this is dangerous...”

“I love you, I’d do anything to be with you,” she insisted. Leticia knew Raul would never accept a divorce. He’d never let her ruin his name and reputation with a divorce scandal. This was her only option.

Tenderly, he took her chin between his thumb and forefinger, and nodded slowly, a lock of hair falling on his forehead as he did so. “I would do anything for you,” he said at last. “For this love I feel for you.”

She exhaled her breath and nodded, a soft smile curving her lips. “Meet me at the park at two-thirty tonight. Raul will be asleep by then. He always dismisses the guests at two.”

He looked at her with eyes shining against the darkened room, eyes full of promise and love, and all she could do was hold her breath in anticipation of the beautiful future they offered. “I will see you there, my love,” he whispered. She kissed him, a soft, loving peck on the lips, before she pulled the door open and left.

When she reentered the living room she noticed Raul glancing her way, and she did her best to act as casual as she could. It was hard to tell what Raul was thinking, since he always had such a solemn expression on his face. Calmly, she made her way through the guests and towards the ladies, who were still conversing in the same place she’d left them. She could feel Raul’s eyes follow her every move.

She sat down and pretended to follow the conversation, not really listening to anything at all. She was lost in thought, wondering if Franco would come back inside the house, or if he would leave now and perhaps gather his belongings to meet with her later. She ached to see him.

For the rest of the night she felt dizzy, as if he'd drugged her with his lovemaking, with his searing kisses. Gratefully, she'd hosted so many parties and gatherings, that she performed the motions by memory. She smiled and thanked the guests who left the party early, meekly allowed her hand be kissed, sipped the bubbly champagne, nodded politely at people's antics, and giggled when she heard others giggle. In truth, she was not here anymore, as she was already someplace else. In the arms of a dark Italian, drowning in his kisses, gasping for air as he made love to her again.

As she faced the decorated pink birthday cake, and while the people gathered around her to sing 'Happy Birthday', she was replaying in her mind what she'd lived just moments ago. Franco taking her from behind, kissing her neck, his hands greedy on her body.

His lips burned her neck, his erection tightly sheathed in her ass, as she bent down to blow the forty-three flickering candles. And when Raul pulled her to his side and kissed her possessively in front of the guests, it was Franco who kissed her.

Even as she made her way across the dark gardens of the house, with her suitcase in one hand, she continued to be assaulted by Franco. His lips were moist and hot as he spread her legs apart and bent down to taste her. She shuddered with need as she headed towards the park. Franco, Franco, Franco.

When she'd left the house, Raul had already been asleep, and she'd changed into a pair of white capri pants and a cashmere twin set that was

comfortable for travel. She carried her passports and very little money inside her suitcase. But she wouldn't worry about how little money she brought. Money was not important to her now. Money didn't buy love, happiness, freedom.

The streets were empty, and as she slowly headed down the dimly lit sidewalks towards the park, she noticed it was almost eerie; the silence. She arrived at the park one minute after their meeting time. She slowly sat down on an old wood bench, beneath the canopy of a tree, facing the children's playground. The colorful children's games scattered throughout a wide bed of sand slightly depressed her. She had always wanted children of her own. Would she and Franco be able to have a family together? She wished they would. She imagined a tiny version of Franco running around the playground then, chasing a green ball, locks of dark black hair bouncing in the air at his efforts.

She smiled at the image, and waited. Patiently. Nervously. She had waited a lifetime for this moment. And yet now as she waited, the minutes felt endless, eternal. She waited for over an hour. Suddenly, she jumped to her feet at the voice behind her.

“Waiting for someone?”

Her heart caught in her throat as she recognized the owner of it. She froze in place, terror taking hold of her insides like a spider.

“I'm afraid your friend isn't going to be able to make it,” Raul said, his hand snaking her arms from behind, his fingers digging into her flesh like knives. She had trouble breathing. Her mind reeled in a whirlwind of thoughts. *What did you do to him? Where is Franco?* She wanted to shout, but when she opened her mouth, the only audible sound that came out was a soft, pitiful whimper, like the cry of a dying animal.

“Now what did I tell you, doll?” he said, but she barely heard him.
“What did I say I’d do to anyone that touched you?”

No please! Not Franco. No.

“He sent you this, with his apologies.” His smile was vicious as he grabbed her hand and thrust something to her palm. Her fingers enveloped it, clutched it like a lifesaver. For a few seconds her heart thumped loudly against her ears and she couldn’t even move. Finally she looked downwards and slowly forced her fingers to unfold. Franco’s simple gold cross lay on her palm, cold, yet searing her flesh. There was fresh blood on the suede cord. She felt dizzy, the world spinning around her. He’d killed him, by God he had.

The earth shook beneath her. Her knees toppled, and she fell forward, panting. She could not breathe. She gasped for air. But she could not breathe. Hands jerked her hair back, a foul breath in her face. “Now what am I supposed to do with you, you fucking slut?”

Wet tears streamed down her face as she stood, eyes wild, and clawed at anything near, kicking, screaming. “Kill me! Kill me, you bastard!” They became monsters, all of them did. Everywhere she looked they were there, hurting her, their green faces contorted, their teeth bared. They jerked her body, smashed her to the ground.

“Put her in the back of the trunk,” a voice said.

Blackness enveloped her. Hot, and suffocating. She felt numb. Numb. Then hands and hands were on her. Trashing her. Something pumping into her. Pain. Slicing pain. Her face on fire. Burning pain between her legs. Her body limp. Then voices. Shouting, arguing. Then, quiet. Cold.

Days of quiet. Silence. Lonely days. Nights. White walls. White floors. White. Days. Months. An eternity. A female with a white cap. Speaking. Soothing. Low.

“Mrs. Letty, you’re drooling again, let me wipe that off you.” Hands wiping at her lips, a watch near her ear. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. “Here, time for your medicine.”

Hands forcing her mouth open. Water. Cold. Hands on her cheeks. “Good girl, it’ll be all right. Those scars on your face are much better now. You must have been a real looker in your days. Now let me put just a bit more cream on you.” Cream. Soft. Cold. “There we go. Now be a good girl, I’ll be back to feed you later.” Lonely.

Silence. White walls. Hands shaking. Body shaking. More silence. Then a lady’s voice. Afar. Some words muffled, others clear: “ill” “depression” “mind”. Another voice. Deeper. That voice. A man’s voice. Her heart thumped. Thump. Thump. Thump.

“I’m taking her now.”

A woman’s voice. Angry. Words “die” “unwell” “sick” clinging to the air. Angry man’s voice. “You cannot stop me.” Then sounds. Doors. Crashing.

“My God, what have they done to you?”

A silence, eternal. A man. Dark. Big. His hands. Warm, strong, familiar. Near her. So near. A tear on her forehead. A man’s tear. Sad, sad voice. “I’m here my love. I’m here. God, I’ve missed you. I came to take you with me. Do you want to? Do you want to leave this place?”

Another voice, a woman. “Mr. Franco I don’t really think that’s—“

“You’ve said enough, nurse. Now bring me a wheelchair. She’s coming with me.”

Hands holding against a chest, against a thumping heart. Hands on her hair, soothing. And she. Shaking. Shaking. Tears falling. Her tears. Wet. Wet. Sobs.

Hands on her cheeks, caressing. “Look at me, Leticia. Look at me.” Silence. “My love. I’ve been looking for you for years—”

“She cannot really see you,” a female voice from away. Creaking wheelchair. “She’s lost, far away somewhere.”

Silence. Arms, strong, around her. Enveloping. Soothing. Breath on her face.

“She’ll come back to me. Won’t you, Leticia?” Leticia. A name. Familiar. Then, lips on lips. Warm. From a memory. Lips on lips. Then, lips on skin. On face. Lips warm. Lips strong. Forgiving. Loving. Lips of love. Hope. And his voice. So near. “Leticia, *please*, fight for us. Fight this. For the love I feel for you, for the love you felt for me once...don’t let them win. Fight!”

“You need to sign some release papers, Mr. Franco. She’ll be your responsibility from now on.”

Sounds. Papers. And then him. Close. So close. His voice in her ear. “Come with me, my love. Our life together awaits. No one will separate us now.”

His words. Familiar. My love. Our life. Together. Now. Echo inside her. Again and again.

And again.