



Authors note:

Dear Reader: I was raised in Mexico, it is such a magical place with so many colorful characters that I simply had to share it with you! I hope you have fun with Anna, David, and their Saint Anthony. Saint Anthony helped me find my own husband of ten years, too! So you see, wishes do come true! Vallerie

CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

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CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR...

by Vallerie O'

CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

*Oh, Saint Anthony, benevolent saint,
find me a husband before I go faint . . .
Oh Saint Anthony, gentle and kind
Find me a husband before I lose my mind . . .
Oh Saint Anthony, listen to my plea
For if you do not find him, then a spinster I will be!
Amen.*

Anna Villafuerte eyed the image of her very special saint. He was standing on his head because that was how he should be placed when a woman wanted to let him know she was looking for a husband. But because he was carved out of wood and his little bald head was perfectly round, her Saint Anthony never could remain on his head for more than a few seconds. For this reason, Anna had improvised a few years back by gluing him to the polished wooden surface of her nightstand. It had been the only way she could think of to ensure he would remain on his head until a suitable husband had been found for her. Anna reached for the lamp and flicked off the lights. Her room went completely dark, except for the faint streak of light that stole through her partly-open bathroom door. She rested her head back on the pillow and pulled the covers up to her chin. She was positive that Saint Anthony hadn't been able to find her a husband yet because he had been falling off from his head, therefore getting mixed signals. But now there was no denying that Saint Anthony knew what the whole neighborhood and possibly the whole city of Monterrey and its five million inhabitants knew: Anna Villafuerte was looking for a husband.

Anna turned thirty-three next Monday, just four days away. In this city of Monterrey, Mexico, thirty-three was definitely, without a doubt,

already spinster age. And the fact of the matter was, Anna had already dated half the neighborhood (and the neighboring neighborhoods!) and then some, all to no avail. So now the gossipers called her a spinster, a phoney, and some even said that she was cursed. Anna did not blame them. She'd learned something horrible had happened to all the men she had dated, from broken noses to purple eyes to broken legs, and now not one, not a single man, in his right mind, wanted to be within a one-mile radius from her. She was running out of options so fast, that she was now considering using a pheromone potion to snag a date with someone - *anyone*. Really, there were so few marriagable men available – and worse, how could she ever expect to fall in love with one from the meager options that were left?

It was not that she was a troll. She was an okay looking girl. She was small and skinny, though her chest was a bit on the flat side. Her hair was natural brunette (not blonde like was all the rage around here), and her skin was a pearly sand (this was not too bad, but again, not the optimal fair skin that was so popular in her neighborhood). She was honest and straightforward, and well, unfortunately, she had zero girlish charms, not like other girls she'd gone to school with. Other girls fluttered their lashes prettily. Anna had tried that once and made such a ridiculous spectacle people were still laughing about it now. Plus Anna did not know, nor had much experience, in the girls favorite topic, which was money. So really she was a bit of a laughingstock, especially since she was so very poor, and yet living in a rich people's neighborhood. But money wasn't all that important to her. It didn't buy you happiness, or love, or good health. And Anna possessed a very cheery disposition. Truly she didn't think she was that bad a prospect.

Her mama – God rest her soul – had always said that first was marriage and then came love. Anna had not agreed. But after thirty-two years of waiting, waiting, waiting for love, Anna realized her mama was probably right – as mother's usually were. Now, she could not lose any more time unless she wanted to be a spinster forever. The good thing was that she was still a virgin – this was huge points in her favor. Everyone in this city thought that if a woman was not a virgin, she wasn't good marriage material. Anna was fortunately still a virgin – and only a precious few of these were left in this modern age. Truthfully, Anna hadn't had any trouble remaining a virgin because she'd had a life with no boyfriends, and no sexual temptations at all. In fact, at thirty-two, no one had even tried to kiss her. Except that time when she was standing beneath the mistletoe on Christmas Eve and Pedro Fernandez came near her (she still was not sure what intentions he'd had and whether he'd even planned to kiss her or not) but she never did find out since David punched his nose and face, told him bad things about his mama, and Pedro never spoke to her again.

David Casas had appointed himself as her guardian since her mother, who'd worked at David's household, died when Anna was only seven. And although Anna never knew her father and was practically an orphan, David's mom, who had been recently divorced from David's mean old papa, took her in, gave her food, a room, and a solid education. David had made sure of that, since he always worried very much about her. For all these years, David had been everything to her. She'd loved him – so dearly, so deeply – for so long now that it hurt. Recently, she had promised to herself that she would stop loving him so profoundly. Her little heart had been hurting so much that Anna decided she was not being fair to it at all. She would care

for David as a dear friend, the same way he did for her. No more fantasizing about *him* marrying *her*, of course!

Anna knew that as miraculous as Saint Anthony could be, this was such a hard feat that he could not possibly do it alone. So she had saved, and saved, and saved, and finally, tomorrow, it would be printed. In the Socials page, with a red outline to make it stand out, and a cupid striking a heart with it's arrow. Her ad. It was so romantic it was definitely going to get noticed. She wondered what David would do when he read it tomorrow. Sighing, she settled back against her pillows and dreamed about her future husband, and what he'd be like. *No, David, find yourself another dream*, she thought angrily when his face appeared over and over again in her dream.

* * *

"I hope you don't mind me bursting in like this."

David Casas looked up from the swatch of papers he'd been reviewing, only to find his long time friend, Sebastian Puentes, standing in the double-door entrance of his office on the twentieth floor.

"Not at all." David rose from his seat behind the desk. He looked every bit a lawyer with a black Hugo Boss suit, crisp white shirt, and classical Hermes tie. David's reputation as a lawyer was lethal: he hadn't lost a case in his whole career in law, nor had his firm: Casas, Valle & Co.

Sebastian's reputation was equally lethal, him being a newspaper magnate. Like his friend, he was handsomely dressed in a tailored Ermenegildo Zegna suit. As for a tie, he refused to wear one; Sebastian was a man who made his own laws and norms.

"Been able to go through the paper this morning?" Sebastian asked as he closed the heavy wooden doors behind him, then crossed the office to take a seat across the desk from him.

David shrugged. "Pemex case. The government's new tax. Same old, same old."

Sebastian slid a hand into the inner pocket of his coat. "I assume you didn't read the socials." He waved a folded newspaper in the air.

David smiled lazily. "I'm afraid not all of us have the time to browse around the socials, my friend."

"She took out an ad," Sebastian said, his eyes solemn.

David didn't need to ask who 'she' was. He knew. There was no other 'she' in the whole god dammed world that Sebastian would barge into his office at nine in the morning to talk about, other than 'she'. David could feel a knot of dread tighten in his stomach." An ad? And ad for what?"

"For a husband."

David remained very, very still. "A husband."

For a moment even time seemed to stop.

Sebastian cleared his throat. "Allow me." He extended out the newspaper with a flourish and began, "Wanted . . ."

"Give me that!" David jumped across the desk, yanked the paper from his grasp and fumbled with it. "Where is it?"

"Lower corner, beneath the JC Penney ad," Sebastian offered as he leaned back on the chair and crossed his arms behind his head. He was thoroughly enjoying himself.

David, on the other hand, glowered down at the paper, now sprawled over the top of his desk, his hands pinning it in place. His olive-green eyes scanned the page, then widened when they located the advertisement.

Her ad actually covered half a page. It was the sort of ad that a company would print to promote products, produce bigger sales. An ad that Anna couldn't possibly afford.

There was a big white heart in the background of the ad, outlined in red. Above, at the top right-hand corner, there was a small cupid with an arrow aiming for the center of the heart. And there, in the center of the heart, in bold and black print, read the following:

WANTED:

Love and commitment to marry. Husband. Must be 33 - 40 years old. Hard-working. Well-to-do. Honest. For a nice, mature single woman. Must be intelligent and fun. No alcoholics or drug-addicts, please. By appointment only. Please contact Anna Villafuerte at home 8233-55-71 or cel 98-9432-44. Home address: Flores #111 Monterrey. Easier to contact me in the afternoons. I hope to meet you soon. I've been waiting for you forever!

David fisted the paper with both hands, crumpled it. "How could you print this?" His eyes shot to Nicolas and the gleam in them was ruthless. "How could you let her humiliate herself this way?"

"Now, now, now," Sebastian soothed, waiving a hand in dismissal. "Not everyone thinks it's humiliating. Hell, I even overheard a few guys at the office who wanted to call in for an appointment."

"They're dead men," David said viciously. "And you, goddammit, you should have told me." He slammed his hands over the desk, toppling a few pencils. "You should have warned me!"

"It's always been a big puzzle to me how you can be such a hot shot lawyer in court, and yet whenever we touch the subject of Anna you behave like a-

"Like a what?" David dared.

Sebastian smiled. "Like a prick."

David clenched his teeth. "I am not the prick that printed this crap!"

"You know damned well I am too busy to know about every single detail that comes out in the paper," Sebastian retorted.

David shook his head. "You're the owner, president, and CEO, dammit. You control it!"

"Look, David, if my business told me every time someone moved a pencil in the office I'd be in therapy by now." Nicolas shook his head and strode determinedly towards the wet bar. David glowered at his back.

Pouring himself a shot of tequila, Sebastian said, "Look, why don't you just call in and make an appointment like everyone else and see if she-

"Just shut up, Sebastian," David said wearily. He sat back down, rested his elbows on his desk and covered his face with his palms. He drew in a deep audible breath.

"Fine. Just let me say that you gave her no choice. You've scared away all her suitors, no one even wants to get near her unless he wants your fist up his nose." Sebastian drained the shot-glass, set it down empty. His footsteps echoed through the room as he walked toward the doors. "Keep the paper. You might want to have her phone handy, in case you change your mind."

Without looking up, David spoke. "How much was it?"

Sebastian stopped, his hand on the doorknob. "The ad?"

"Yes, the ad."

"A few thousand."

"How in the world did she think she was going to pay for it?"

Sebastian grinned. "Layaway."

David dropped his hands and shot his friend a look that said he was non-too pleased about his tasteless jokes. "I'll cover it. Just make sure she doesn't know about it."

His friend nodded. "I'll have Clara call Yolanda for arrangements."

"Please do."

"As for Anna," Sebastian smiled wickedly as he opened the doors, "I'll just tell her the truth." He smiled that legendary wicked smile that had sent so many pure young virgins running to the confession stands. "I'll just tell her that a secret admirer took care of the bill."

David didn't reply, he was lost in thought. Sebastian laughed heartily before he slammed the doors shut behind him. For a minute David just sat there and stared at the crumpled newspaper on top of his desk. Then he reached for the intercom. "Yolanda, cancel all my appointments for today. And have my car brought out."

"Yes, sir."

As he drove towards the school where Anna worked, David could do nothing but think of her and curse her for her foolishness. Her obsession with marriage had been a permanent one, since a very early age. He remembered once, at his mother's ranch in Texas, as a nine-year-old Anna splashed water in a futile attempt to get to the riverbank ...

The water lapped against her chest. She took a step forward only to stumble back. She might be having a whole load of trouble coming out of it because she'd dipped into the river fully clothed with a Princess costume that weighed more than twice than she did. She sighed dramatically.

"Oh, my dear, dear prince!" Thrusting her hands up in the air, she shouted, "Save me!"

A smile played on his lips as he watched her, greatly entertained. "I'm the ogre this time, remember?"

"I said you'd be the prince, David. You always are. Now get me out! It is your duty to save me."

He crossed his arms and leaned back against the tree trunk. "You don't seem to be in any sort of danger."

"I am in danger of drowning. Now come here this instant!"

David laughed. She had such a sweet face no one would guess she had quite a sour temper. Oh, yes, this princess could be a thorn on the side.

"You're having fun at my expense," she accused with a scowl. "Well let me tell you if you don't play my games I won't play yours anymore. Let's see who goes fishing with you tomorrow."

"I just happen to love to go fishing alone."

"Well I really doubt you'll find talking to yourself equally entertaining."

"At least by being quiet I can actually fish!"

She waved a hand in dismissal. "Yeah, yeah, yeah." She sighed. "I can get out myself then. Frankly I don't need a stupid prince."

"Which I'm glad I'm not."

She made an attempt to get out only to slip back into the water. David chuckled. She was getting angrier by the second. She splashed water onto him. He didn't even flinch, since he already knew she'd do that. "You're impossible." Her winged eyebrows joined in a scowl. "I pity the woman who marries you!"

He grinned. "Luckily there will be no such unlucky soul."

He watched her as she began to undress under the water. Pieces of clothing landed at his feet on the grass. Two shoes. Two socks. He stiffened at the next undergarment that fell. "What are you doing?" he asked, glowering at her.

"I'm undressing, of course. How else will I be able to get out of this loathed water?"

He was in the water within seconds, his shorts dripping wet against his muscled thighs. She wrapped her arms around his neck and beamed up at him as he carried her through the water, past the damp soil, and slowly set her down when they reached the grass.

"I knew you'd save me. You always do."

"You need to stay out of trouble. What if I'm not always here, Anna? Who'll save you then?" he asked as they slowly walked along the tall oak trees and towards the house.

"Why, my husband, of course. I'll pick the perfect husband. One who will not let me drown and who won't laugh at my freckles."

"I laugh at them 'cause they're funny."

"Yes, but my husband will think they're adorable. He'll like them so much he'll want to kiss them every moment he can."

He wrinkled his nose at the thought. "Who'd want to kiss a freckle?"

"My husband will, you dork!"

He shrugged. "I guess you'll find an okay husband."

"Okay?" she shrieked. "I do not want an okay husband. I want the perfect husband. I will not settle for less."

She was only nine after all. He decided she'd realize what a child she sounded like once she grew up and was twelve like him. He cupped her

cheeks and smiled down at her. "And you will be the perfect wife I have no doubt."

"And you'll be a horrible husband," she said, gazing up at him with wide brown eyes. "You *are* planning to marry, aren't you?"

He made a face. "I sure hope not."

"You have to get married, David. It's the law!"

"Don't be silly, Anna, the law doesn't force you to get married."

"It's the law of nature and God!"

"A law that I don't feel inclined to follow."

"You have to!"

David was not in the mood for another discussion about marriage which was Anna's favorite topic in the world. Not after he'd seen her mother suffer so after a really bad one. "Fine, fine."

"Does this mean you'll get married then?" she asked hopefully.

"Yeah," he lied just to please her.

She frowned. Now she looked even more displeased. "What if she's so ugly you get nightmares just by looking at her?"

"I'll close my eyes."

"But what if she suddenly smells like a pig and you cannot even come close to her without vomiting?"

"I'll hold my breath."

"And what if - what if she's bald?"

"I'll buy her a wig."

"And what if she's so fat she crushes you with her weight?"

"I'll feed her less."

"She can't be perfect, you know," she said seriously.

David grinned. "I'll find the perfect wife," he said, imitating the way she said she'd find the perfect husband.

Anna stared down at her feet, forehead creased. "But I thought you didn't want to get married!" she wailed, thrusting her hands up in the air in desperation.

"I don't."

She stared at him then, her brown eyes darkening in fury as she pursed her lips tightly. "Does this mean you've been lying to me, David?"

He thought she was impossible, but he loved that about her. "I've told you a hundred times and you keep pushing me to change my mind. I don't want to get married. It's silly and stupid."

"That's because you're a boy and boys *are* silly and stupid."

"Then why get married to one?"

She gritted her teeth. "You're impossible to talk to."

"Then why talk at all, Anna banana?"

"Uuurgh!!!"

* * *

The aerobics lesson was simply too boring for words. So the two young females decided to sit on the padded purple vinyl seats to one side of the mirrored room and chat their way thinner.

"Frankly, I pity her," the blonde was saying in a low voice, running a long manicured nail along the contours of the advertisement. "I have to say that ever since her mother died, she lost it."

The red haired beauty at her side nodded her head. "She is just so weird. "

"I can't believe how David can actually stand her!" the blonde added worriedly. "He's too much a man for someone like her."

The redhead took her friend's hands in hers. "Claudia, we've always known she's just a charity case for him and his family. After all, she *was* the maid's daughter. Yuck."

Claudia sighed, removed her hands from hers and inspected her nails. "I know, I know. He couldn't possibly find anything attractive about *her*."

"She can't hold a candle to you," the redheaded Sandra reassured her. "Besides, I've seen how David looks at you..."

Claudia smiled sheepishly and glanced down at her bountiful breasts. "Well I do have my charms."

"And he seems to thoroughly notice!"

Claudia giggled. "Oh, I just wish..." Her eyes suddenly widened. "Sandra, wouldn't it be great if Anna did find a husband in that ad?"

"Oh, I don't think any man in his right mind will actually call!" Sandra said with a laugh.

Claudia grabbed her shoulders, gently shook her. "Don't you see? If she finally finds that poor old husband, David won't feel obligated to look out for her anymore, and he'd be free to pursue . . . *me*."

Sandra's eyes gleamed when the realization dawned on her. "Why, yes..."

"I have just the plan," Claudia added excitedly. "I know of a man who will do anything, anything, for a few thousand pesos. I'd bet he'd be more than willing to marry her for a handsome price."

"Well, I don't know," Sandra said. "Is he between 33 and 40, hard-working?" They stared at each other, and then they both burst out laughing.

* * *

The school was brimming with excitement during recess time. The children ran around the patio, frolicked in the sand box, and flew about in the swings. The sun was bright and shiny, peeking out from behind the looming mountains that surrounded the city of Monterrey. The sky this morning was a deep blue, and there wasn't a single cloud to mar its beauty.

Anna knew it was the perfect day to meet her future husband.

Sitting on the bench in center of the gardens, Anna took her time to study the two-story building that had become a second home to her. It was a building that her friend Maria Puentes had purchased four years ago and turned into a school for children with little to no financial resources. The formerly decadent building had been completely renovated, including the plumbing. The exterior was now Mediterranean, with a long, sweeping terrace framed by thick white columns, and a huge domed entrance that made it appear like a church. The front patio had been cleaned of all weeds and turned into a playground, scattered with Little Tikes toys, swings, a large sandbox, and other diversions for the children.

The *Casa de los Niños* had been Maria's idea. But Anna, being an orphan and less fortunate herself, had inspired it. Although Anna did not have money like Maria, she had a big desire to give, and therefore had dedicated herself to being the children's teacher, nurse, and perhaps, to some, like a mother. Anna's salary wasn't much, but she didn't care, she simply loved the job. She loved every single one of those thirty-eight children as if they were her own, and she welcomed every opportunity to give them a hug, and a kiss. Let them know they were not alone, and that somebody cared.

Their education would be the most important thing in their lives. Education, and of course, what could be more important than love.

For the first three years, Maria had been solely responsible for providing the money needed to purchase materials, equipment, and ensure an appropriate education for the children. However, a few months back, Maria's father had cut her off indefinitely, and the school was in desperate need of funds.

They'd had to fire some personnel, and each of them was putting in extra hours. There were also a few Hermanas, or Sisters, who, instead of remaining all day at the monastery a few blocks away with the rest of the Sisters, they would take turns in overseeing the children several times during the day, so that Anna and Maria could get their heads on straight and prepare, grade, and discuss their classes.

"Anna," a chubby three year old said as she rushed towards her. She had sprinkles of sand in both her hair and eyelashes, and a wide smile. "Tell me the story about the ugly princess!"

Anna gathered her onto her lap with a smile. "Which part?"

"All of it!"

"Okay," Anna said, wrapping her arms around her. "Once upon a time, there was an ugly little girl who wanted to be a Princess..."

"Anna," A husky voice said from behind. Her heart lurched at the sound. "We need to talk."

"David," she whispered as she set Lolita down and turned toward the wrought-iron gate to face him, her heart pounding wildly.

His fingers were curled around the bars, and she noticed he looked ruffled, as if he'd been in a fight. His light brown hair was in disarray, contrasting sharply with the perfect symmetry of his masculine features. He

was wearing black pants and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. The top two buttons of his shirt were open to reveal the taut, tanned skin of his chest, and Anna tried not to be distracted by it, and tried to focus her gaze on his eyes. His eyes were darker than usual this morning. They were a deep green color, almost olive, pensive, and burning.

"Davie," Lolita shrieked with enthusiasm, rushing towards him. But David had eyes only for Anna. "It's the ugly princess story, Davie," Lolita explained, reaching out through the bars to tug at David's arm. "Come listen."

David's beautiful green eyes did not leave Anna even for a second, and his gaze was intense. There was anger there, and something else. "Are you going to let me in, Anna?"

Anna fumbled with the keys in her pocket. "Oh, yes, of course."

Lolita skipped towards Anna and hauled her towards the door. "Anna, Anna, the gate!"

Anna got to the lock, trying futilely to control her shaky hands. "I'll get it, sweetheart. I'll continue with the story later, okay?"

"You promise?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Okay," Lolita said excitedly before she dashed away towards the sandbox.

Anna pulled the gate open and kept her gaze averted from his eyes. "Let's sit in the terrace," she said as casually as she could manage.

"Let's," was all he said.

He followed her to the terrace, took the steps two at a time with long, determined strides. Anna sat on a bench, and instead of sitting beside her, he leaned his elbows on the terrace balustrade, his back to her, and absently

watched the kids play. For a few seconds he said nothing and Anna was fidgeting like crazy. His profile was all hard angles, jaw set. He didn't look pleased at all.

"Why am I here, Anna. Do you know?" he said in such a low voice she barely heard him.

Anna swallowed. He was her best friend after all. And she hadn't told him about the ad. She stared at his broad back, not knowing what to say. She stood and walked towards him and slowly, hesitantly, touched his arm.

"To kill me?" she teased with a shaky smile.

He was silent.

"David, my future husband is out there, somewhere," she gently said. "I'm tired of waiting around for him to come along. I just felt so...helpless waiting and waiting and watching time fly by. I had to do something, David."

"And you did, didn't you, Anna?" Although his voice was low, she could tell he was furious. He was reigning it in, trying to control his anger, but it made his face seem tense, his whole body coiled as if ready to strike.

"He was taking too long," she whispered.

He whirled around, grabbed her shoulders in a vise-like grip, and shook her. "He'll come along, goddammit, just give him some time!"

She shoved his hands away, furiously so. "I don't have more time, David. I'm thirty-two years old and I will be thirty-three within days. I refuse to be an old maid. I want a husband and I want a family and I refuse to wait any longer!" She glowered at him. "I knew what you would say, that's why I didn't tell you. You're a divorce lawyer. You hand out your business cards at people's weddings! I happen to think marriage is *beautiful*, David."

He thrust his hands in the air. "Once I was asked for a business card at a wedding, Anna, and that was years ago. Jeez! If you only heard half of the stories I hear everyday you would forget that silly happily-ever-after notion of yours."

Anna dropped her gaze to her feet. David cupped her cheeks and forced her to look up at him. His tone was softer, his gaze concerned. "I swear I try to understand your eagerness for a husband. But I just can't, Anna. No matter how hard I try, I just can't."

"You have your mom, David, and your brothers. You have Christmas and Sundays and cakes and I don't. I want a family."

"We're your family, goddammit!"

"Stop swearing!"

David turned and noticed couple of children glancing their way, their eyes turned to saucers, and he smiled apologetically. "It's fine kids," he said, waving at them to run along and play. He turned back at her and lowered his voice. "When have I not been there for you?"

"You've always been there, David."

"Then why didn't you tell me? This ad was a bad idea, Anna."

Anna thought he might be right. Four thousand dollars down the drain and still no phone calls. "Maybe."

"Have you any idea how many murderers, rapists, con-artists, and just plain wackos could have read your ad?"

Anna was silent. David's dark, sleek eyebrows were furrowed together in a scowl. "You're putting yourself in danger and I won't stand it."

She hadn't thought of that. Perhaps he was right and there could be few undesirables who might read her ad, but who would want to harm her? She'd never harmed anyone in her life!

"You could get robbed. You could get *raped*, Anna."

She laughed. "David, I have nothing worth robbing, and at this age I haven't even been kissed so who would want to *rape* me?"

"I would!" he thundered, clearly not even understanding the complexity of what he was saying. "Now, I'm hiring a private eye to check out each and any guy that calls. You got me?"

Anna scowled. "This is not one of your cases, David!"

"I am doing you a favor and checking them out before you come crying to me. Understand?"

For a moment they just stood there in silence, eyes clashing.

"Promise me you won't go out with anyone until I have him checked out."

Anna crossed her arms across her chest and lifted her chin up.

David glared at her. "Promise me, Anna."

She just looked at him, nose high in the air.

"Answer me, banana girl."

She pursed her lips, refusing to answer.

"I'll take that as a yes," he said cautiously.

"Anna!" they heard a soft feminine voice say. It was Maria. "Sorry I'm late. I read your ad!" She was looking all gorgeous in her tight blue jeans and pink tank top featuring a sparkly crystal crown that read 'Princess'. Anna tried not to notice that her poor oversized brown sundress seemed old-fashioned and dreary in comparison to Maria's flashy outfit.

"And David," Maria suddenly added, her voice dropping a notch, her smile cat-like. "You look yummy this morning." She approached him, fluttering her silky lashes. "Came all the way here just to see little old me?"

"I came to see Anna."

"Oh, really? Already called for an appointment?"

"Not yet."

"Oh, pooh, you should have called. Why, Anna's phone has been ringing all morning."

"Really?" David cocked an eyebrow at Anna.

"Not-" Anna began, but Maria cut her off.

"Her machine is saturated with all sorts of messages," Maria added.

"Why I'm just so jealous!"

David eyed Anna's profile.

"I'll tell you what," Maria said, taking David's hand between both of hers. "Since she already has a date for our charity luncheon tomorrow, why don't you take me instead?"

Anna saw David tense. "I didn't know Anna had a date already?" He turned to glower at her. Anna had no idea what Maria was talking about.

"Why, yes, she does! And now, so do you." Maria beamed at him. "You can pick me up at twelve." She kissed his cheek. "Now be a good boy and let us work. It's time we rounded up the children."

"Actually, I wanted to borrow Anna for the day."

Maria frowned thoughtfully, then tapped a long red nail to her cheekbone. Anna shook her head. "It's really not necessary, Maria. David and I can talk some other time."

Maria turned from one to the other, then fixed a smile on David. "The only way you get Anna for the day is if I get a kiss!" She placed her palms on his chest and pouted her lips as she bent forward.

Anna looked away, not bearing to see it. A few eternal, hellish seconds later, her heart already lying wounded on the floor, Maria came to

her side, beaming. "All right, Anna, you lucky girl, you've just been given a free pass."

Anna bent to whisper in her ear. "Why did you lie to him?" she hissed. "I've gotten no phone calls, and I certainly have no date for Saturday."

"Why, honey, didn't I tell you? Sebastian is taking you. He doesn't know it yet but don't worry, my cousin just loves surprises."

"Ready, Anna?"

Anna glowered at Maria then turned towards David, nodding slowly.

David drove his silver BMW in silence through the thin, paved city streets, and Anna couldn't bear to look at him, so she stared outside at the tall telephone posts, birds sitting comfortably over the looped cables. She tried to remind herself that he was her friend. Her friend. But why did she keep forgetting? Ever since she'd realized she was madly in love with him they couldn't even be friends anymore since they fought all the time, as if they hated each other. It was only a few minutes after he'd started the car that she said, "Maria looked very beautiful."

David smiled. "Yeah. I should come to visit more often," he quipped, quoting Maria's words.

Anna took a moment to realize he was joking, and she gave him a weak smile. "You're a devil."

David reached out for her hand, grabbed it, planted a kiss on the back of it. "And you're an angel."

Anna felt his kiss all the way to her stomach. She removed her hand from his, placed it on her lap again. "She seems to like you."

"And I like her," David said. He had no idea what Anna was thinking of, but whatever it was, he didn't like it. He looked at her suspiciously, suddenly wondering where this was heading.

"Maria has her Saint Anthony on his head, too," Anna added, glancing out the car window. "It's more than likely that Saint Anthony is pretty busy right now finding her a husband."

"Maria is only twenty-four."

Anna shrugged. "Well all my friends married at twenty-four. Except Maria, of course, but she'll have no trouble finding a husband. She's so beautiful. And sexy. And she kisses nicely, too, doesn't she?"

David sighed. "Okay, where are you heading with this?"

"Nowhere."

"I'm not interested in Maria, if that's what you wanted to know."

"I just wondered, since you always flirt with each other and...kiss."

"A kiss means nothing," David said.

"Well it has to mean something or you wouldn't do it so often," Anna countered.

He was silent, while Anna played with her hands above her lap. "I know, I know, you kiss every girl in town, so it's not a big deal," she said.

David pulled the car over, jerked on the breaks, then turned to Anna, his eyes dark and gleaming with a tinge of anger. "I do *not* kiss every girl in town, Anna."

She looked innocent, blinking at him. "You do, too! You've kissed every girl in town, I've seen you often!"

"I have not!"

"Have, too!"

"This is childish." He turned to stare at the road. "I haven't kissed *you*, now, have I?" Before she could even reply, he took Anna's face in his palms and pulled her over for a soft, dry kiss on the lips.

It was Anna's first kiss. At thirty-two. No one had ever placed his lips over hers before. And David's lips, those warm, beautiful, strong, full and perfect lips, triggered shock waves all through her body and made her insides shake like an earthquake.

"See?" David leaned back on the seat and stared out blankly at the road. "No big deal."

When Anna didn't reply, David pulled the car back onto the road and drove in silence.

No big deal. His words echoed in her mind like a slap on the face. Anna had dreamed about her first kiss for thirty-two years. She had fantasized about it being something so very special, from someone who dearly loved her, from the man she would share her life with. From someone who would actually enjoy kissing her, and from someone who would deep heartedly want the kiss, need it. She'd seen millions of romantic movies and imagined her first kiss to be like one of those special, romantic moments on TV. And yet, David had kissed her to prove a point, and brutally stolen the precious fantasy she'd harbored for years, and said it was no big deal.

For a moment she was thoroughly hating David and everything about him. The way he touched her, the way he looked at her, the way he talked and walked and the way he'd kissed her, too. If she weren't so religious she would be cursing right now, so angry she felt inside, and so hurt.

"What's his name, Anna?"

She didn't reply.

"Your date, I want to know his name."

"So you can check him out?"

"Yes!"

Anna glowered at him. "Then no." She crossed her arms across her chest in determination. "I don't feel like talking to you right now."

David gritted his teeth. "Anna, I've kissed her dozens of times, like dozens of other women I don't even care to remember. It means nothing."

"This has nothing to do with Maria!" Anna shouted.

"Then what in the hell is it?"

"You!" Anna suddenly raged. "You are my problem, you and your silly kiss."

David went very still at her words, pulled the car over to the side of the road again, and turned off the engine. When he looked at her there was a fury in his eyes that she'd never seen before. "I am sorry if my silly kiss offended you."

Anna took a deep breath. "It was unwelcome and disrespectful and . . ."

"And silly," David gritted through his teeth.

She wanted to cry. "Yes, it was. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like you to take me home."

David flicked his wrist and ignited the car, and Anna could see cords straining against his neck. He was, most clearly, furious at her. And she was, clearly, furious at him. When they finally arrived to her house, to her tiny but beautiful, one-bedroom pink and blue small rustic little house, neither of them had said a word. Anna got out of the car and ran towards it, closing the old, blue-color front door behind her. Only a few minutes after Anna heard David's car drive away did she jump when the phone rang. She answered it in a second. "Hello?"

"Is this Anna Villafuerte?" a male voice inquired.

"Yes?"

"I am calling about the ad."

It was her first phone call. Excitement bubbled through her veins at the thought. Perhaps it hadn't been such a bad investment after all. Thank you Saint Anthony!

* * *

"I can't believe we're driving by her house like a couple of nitwits," Sebastian said as he drove his Porsche past Anna's house that evening. It was already dark, the streets lit by tall, sleek lamp posts, and there was a bright, nearly blinding light coming from Anna's kitchen. "I like the pink and blue combination," Sebastian added dryly. Her house stuck out like a sore thumb. Small, old, and pink, unlike the grand white mansions in the rest of the neighborhood.

"Shut up," David growled. "And park here," he said, pointing at a tree that stood a few feet away from her front door.

Sebastian slowly swerved the car behind the tree, then turned off the lights. There was some movement inside the kitchen, and Sebastian was astonished to watch David take out a pair of binoculars.

"Man, you *are* sick," Sebastian said, shaking his head.

"Shut up," David said, lifting the binoculars to his eyes and focusing them on the kitchen window.

"See anything yet?" Sebastian asked boredly, lighting a cigarette.

"There she is," David said. "Shit, she's on the phone!"

"So what? It could be anyone, for chrissake."

"It could be about the ad," David said. "Dammit, I need to talk to her."

Sebastian grabbed his arm, making David lower the binoculars. His gaze was dead serious. "My friend, what you need is to talk to a doctor."

David yanked his arm free and lifted the binoculars to his eyes again, his forehead creased in worry. "She's still on the phone. What is she saying? She's laughing."

Sebastian chuckled. "David you are one sick wacko. Why don't you just burst in there like a man and take her?"

David was outraged at the suggestion. "I can't burst in there like a man and just take her, goddammit, she's a virgin. Unlike you, I am not completely without scruples," David said, glowering at him a full minute. There was a moment's silence before David confessed, almost to himself, "Although it *has* come to mind," in a low whisper.

"I know."

He narrowed his eyes into slits. "No, you don't. You have no idea, Sebastian. I can't sleep, can't work, can't think..."

"Then do something about it! And please behave like a frigging thirty-six year old and get rid of those binoculars, you're making me sick."

David hesitated, stared out at her window through the binoculars for a second, then lowered them. "She's hung up."

"Good." Sebastian smiled, ignited the car. "Can we go get some drinks now?"

David hesitated, then sighed. "Yeah, let's go."

* * *

Anna was getting ready for bed, plumping up the pillow behind her. At least she'd had one promising phone call. And the voice on the other end had sounded formal and masculine. Perhaps it had not been a bad idea after all, perhaps David had been wrong this time. David...It was as if she'd

invoked him, for suddenly, she heard a sound outside her bedroom and the next thing she knew he'd slammed her bedroom door open.

"You're coming with me." He stood in the doorway, all six feet of him, in jeans and a crewneck shirt (clearly he didn't come from work), and he made her room seem terribly small. He seemed a bit tipsy, too, for his voice had a slur to it.

"What are you doing here, David?"

He glowered at her. "Do you always sleep practically naked?" He signaled to her oversize t-shirt.

"This is my house I can sleep any way I want to. Now what are you doing here?"

He kept glowering. "Put something on, Anna."

"Excuse me?" she said, blinking.

"You're not staying here."

"Why in the world not?" she asked, pulling the sheets up to her chin.

"Because I say so, that's why."

She suddenly became furious. "And who are you to tell me what to do, David? This is my home and I can do whatever I want. I'm a grown woman!"

"The hell you are." He stormed towards her closet, grabbed a suitcase, and began to swiftly thrust any piece of clothing he could find into it.

She flew from the bed and grabbed the suitcase from him, began taking out the garments he was thrusting in. "I am staying right here where I belong," she countered.

"No, you are not. Now either you come willingly or I drag you out of here kicking and screaming. Take your pick, Anna."

“Drag me out if you dare, David Casas. I am not one to be ordered around and you know it!”

“It’s not safe for you to sleep here. You’re coming home with *me*. ”

“Give me one good reason!”

He rummaged through his brain for it. “Because there is a car outside watching your house and I don’t like it!”

Anna halted at that. “A car?” she screeched, her insides twisting in dread.

“Yes. A black car, and it looks very suspicious.”

Anna’s eyes widened in fear. “But why on earth would a car be parked outside my house spying on me?”

“Because your ad was an invitation to any bad boy around town, sugar pie. That’s why!”

“Oh my,” she breathed. “Could this person be dangerous?”

“I can tell you one thing. He’s a damned fool with a pair of binoculars,” he said seriously. “And there’s no telling what he could do. Come on, we’re leaving now.”

When they exited her house, she glanced around but didn’t see any car out on the street. Maybe it was well hidden, for she supposed professionals knew perfectly well how to go by unnoticed. Oh, dear, what had she gotten herself into? She was lucky to have the foresight to bring her Saint Anthony. It had glue stuck all over his head and she’d had a terrible time trying to unglue it from her nightstand. But she’d succeeded. And Lord knows how badly David had packed for her, but she’d have to find the dreadful news until tomorrow. He didn’t even let her change, and she was now being driven all around town in her flimsy oversized cotton t-shirt and a towel bathrobe she’d tied around her waist before leaving. David drove in silence,

but there was something unsteady about him; he tapped his thumb on the steering wheel and he seemed restless.

“You’re drunk, aren’t you?”

“No, I’m not.” He shook his head several times.

“You are!”

“I had a few drinks, is all.”

She opened her mouth, gaping at him. “You don’t even like to drink. Why would you do such a thing?”

“Because I’m a jerk. And maybe you just don’t know me too well, banana girl, maybe I drink all the time without you knowing it. You think you know all about me but you actually don’t!”

She was so surprised she didn’t even know what to say. “Should you be driving in this condition?” she suddenly said, beginning to worry.

He grunted. “I could drive this baby home with my eyes closed.” He was really drunk, and he was being really hot-headed.

“I think you should let me drive,” she said sternly.

“Sweetheart, you don’t even *know* how to drive,” he said pointedly.

“How difficult can it be? Besides, *you* are drunk!”

“You are *not* driving my BMW, thank you.”

“David, you’re being unreasonable.”

“Don’t contradict me, banana girl. Besides, we’ll be there in just a second so just zip it for once.”

They did arrive to his building in a few seconds.

His apartment was a lonely, spacious, cold place in the sixth floor, with few contemporary furniture and decorations. Anna had never liked his tastes in furniture. It was cold and unfeeling and not homey at all – which explained why he always liked to be in her house even if her whole house

was the size of his living room. She thought he should add flowers and Mexican pottery to his kitchen and living room. All of his furniture was either black or white, and if Anna had her way, she'd throw colorful throws on the sofas, add flowers in colorful vases, and a few bright artworks on the walls. When they walked inside they were both silent, and though this wasn't the first time she came to his apartment, it was the first time she came so late at night, and for some reason it felt awkward.

"You can sleep in my room, I'll sleep out in the couch," he said briskly.

"No, It's fine, I can sleep out here. Your couch is actually bigger than my bed," she added in a positive way.

He glowered. "Take my bed, Anna."

"I just don't want to impose."

"You're not imposing."

"Of course I am."

"Drop it, banana girl. You're sleeping in my bed and that's that."

His bed was huge and it smelled like him and for some reason it made her insides turn and twist in havoc. It made her want to hold her breath until she was red – it felt so painful to smell his musky, male scent. She noticed the sheets were soft and felt like sheer glory on her skin, but even then she lay awake for minutes and minutes and couldn't sleep. Her Saint Anthony rested against one of his modern nightstands. She'd set him on his head and rested his feet against a tall sleek acrylic lamp. She eyed her saint and gave him a wan smile before she rose and headed towards the living room.

David was lying on the couch, fully clothed and asleep. She studied him for a long, painful minute, her heart clenching. It was strange, the way she couldn't be around David now, without hurting all over. It was as if her

little heart was so wounded, and when she didn't think possible it could feel even more wounded, it did, just by the sight of him. She would sometimes watch his hands do silly little things, while he drove, or fidgeted with his car keys. He had long, lean fingers, and big, tanned hands. And his eyes, his gorgeous green eyes, those tortured her the most. The sight of them made her insides quake, her skin sweat, and the place between her legs sting. None of this was at all pleasurable. In fact she was having more and more trouble just looking at him. When she did it just made things worse. Her heart would race, her breathing would accelerate, and her stomach would churn in such a horrible way. She felt sick with these feelings for him. And all she wanted was her body to get accustomed to what her brain said, and that was that he was *only* her friend.

She brushed a dark, silky, wayward lock from his forehead and stared at his lips. Those lips that had touched hers just that morning. How easy it would be to touch them with her own lips again. He sighed deeply, stirred. She tensed, her eyes darting to his face and noting his thick eyelashes were still resting in sleep over his cheekbones. Slowly, she eased away and came back to settle in his big, lonely bed. She pulled the covers over her head and forced her eyes shut. Oh, dear, how on Earth was she supposed to sleep with him so near?

"Want some company?" came his voice from the doorway.

She jerked back the sheets and sat up to look at him, standing at the doorway. "I thought you were asleep," she said in surprise.

He smiled wickedly, flashing his perfect white teeth. "That's exactly what you were supposed to think."

To think Anna had been about to kiss him and would have been caught made her turn deep red. Gratefully, it was dark and he didn't seem to notice. "That wasn't very nice of you," she chided.

"I'm the ogre, remember?" He walked towards the bed and sat down besides her.

"You're the prince, David. You always have been."

He smiled, stretched out on the bed beside her, and put his arm around her waist. The mattress shifted under his weight, and suddenly it felt very warm. Anna tensed, his heavy arm around her, his chest pressed to her back.

"Relax, banana girl. I'm just going to cuddle you. See, it feels good, doesn't it?"

His front was glued to her back and well, she had to admit it was very nice. "Yes," she whispered.

"Get some sleep," he said.

She relaxed and closed her eyes. He nuzzled her neck, his breath warm against her skin. It was so good to be here, with him. Hearing his even breathing, she relaxed, pressed closer against him. She faintly remembered him saying something about wanting to rape her...and tensed at the thought. But then, it would hardly be a rape if it was David, now, was it? She was sure she would be more than cooperative with him. And because she loved him it wouldn't be a sin either, or would it? She might need to ask the priest about this on mass next Sunday. While she drifted asleep, Anna tried, really tried, not to dream of him, and their perfect little house together, with a dog, a fence, and little kids frolicking in the yard. But it was impossible. David always barged into her dreams, and wishes.

But this dream was different. This dream started in their little home, and then they were in their little room with the door closed, and next they

were lying naked in their big bed. And her body was hot with need. And she had gone crazy. And David had gone crazy, because he was kissing her like a madman. His tongue was licking everywhere, his mouth latching onto any body part or skin that came into view. He was breathing harshly, like a mad, wounded bull. He'd pulled her out of her t-shirt, urgently so. And when their skin touched, his chest to her breasts, the heat seeped into each other, as they felt their bodies unite, their skin rub. Anna felt feverish. She was not thinking anything, only feeling. Needing. A hunger so big and wide that possessed her body, ruled it. Her little hands were greedy for him, savoring the muscles on his back and clutching him against her as he kissed her mouth like a starved man. His tongue delved, stroked her own tongue, with so much hunger and passion that she felt herself melt. His scent, such a familiar scent to her, drugged her senses. His head bent and his greedy mouth latched onto her breast. First one, then the other, and he was licking, sucking her nipples. Then he palmed her breasts from the sides and pressed them firmly against each other, nipple to nipple. He moved, knelt over her waist, and slid his hardness between her breasts, rubbing there, between her soft breasts, slowly, deliciously.

Through the daze she could see David's face, darkened with desire as he pumped his hips and rubbed his erection against her, his hands pressing her breasts together to envelop his hardness, and his face contorted with need as he looked down and watched. She felt wild, like an animal, writhing beneath him, arching her back and moaning. His hips had a rhythm, a slow, dizzying rhythm at first, then a faster one, his hands pressing her breasts with more force, his movements forceful and urgent. She thrust her head side to side, not bearing the pain between her legs. His face was almost unrecognizable as he continued his thrusts, and suddenly he shuddered,

closed his eyes, and a sprinkle of semen erupted. Anna was starved, opened her mouth, let some of it fall at the tip of her tongue, making her moan at his taste.

The pain between her legs was excruciating, and as if he knew, David took her ankles with his hands and folded her legs so that her knees were pressed against her shoulders, and he buried his face between her legs. She cried out at the incredible feeling of his lips against her sex, his lips kissing that slick, forbidden place. His tongue slowly began to stroke. Anna writhed, thrusting her hips up, wanting more, more tongue, more kisses, more. He slid his tongue inside her then moved it to caress the little nub on top. She was sweaty, panting, when suddenly a sleek long finger invaded her completely. Her muscles sheathed it, took it in, greedily sucked it in with urgency, as David's tongue rapidly flicked on the nub. His finger slid in and out, in and out, while his tongue tortured the nub, and she was tense, tense, barely able to move, as her body climbed to a wild, culminating spot and suddenly spasms wrecked her whole body in a release unlike any she had imagined. Rocking, shuddering, overwhelming.

For moments she lay there, chest heaving, as she recovered her breath. David came up and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to his side. Anna took a few minutes to realize two itty bitty things. This was not a dream, and she was completely naked with David on the bed. Her heart, as if it weren't exhausted already, began to pump wildly. She lifted her eyes to his face. David's eyes were closed, but his breathing was still harsh.

"You *raped* me!" Anna accused, sitting up on the bed.

"I what?" His eyes popped open, his eyebrows joining in a scowl.

"You took advantage of me. You *raped* me!"

He chuckled, wrapped his hands around her arms and hauled her back to him. He looked sated and happy. “You were rubbing yourself all over my body while you slept, what was I supposed to do? You wanted this as much as I did.”

She pushed his hands away. “You know I was saving myself for my husband!” Her voice shook. “Now who’ll want to marry me?” She felt her chin tremble, her eyes sting, and she wanted to both hit David and cry.

He groaned. “Not the marriage thing again.”

“You did it on purpose because you don’t *want* me to marry!” She rose from the bed, her hands into fists, her chin shaking. “You did that on purpose so I’ll stay a spinster forever and ever!”

“I did not. And for your information, banana girl, you’re *still* a virgin. So there it goes. I was a real gentleman.” He sat back on the bed and put his palms behind his head, a lazy, satisfied grin on his lips. “Now come here, the last thing I want to do with you is fight.”

“I don’t think a real gentleman does what...what we...what you did to me!”

“Come here, Anna.”

“No! I hate you! I hate you! What am I supposed to tell the priest this Sunday?”

“Nothing! Anna, this was bound to happen. We’ve been at each other’s necks for years.”

“But, it’s a sin, it must be! You’re not even my husband!” She turned to Saint Anthony, mortified, and turned him around so that he couldn’t look at their naked bodies. “I’m so ashamed.”

He groaned as he stretched his legs and rose from the bed. He curled his fingers around her shoulders and steered her back to the bed. “We’ll talk about this tomorrow. Now let’s get some sleep, it’s three a.m.”

She shook her head but for some reason, she felt so tired and relaxed that she finally did as he said. Silently, she settled back on the bed, next to him, and thought of what had just happened. She’d loved it, and yet at the same time she knew it shouldn’t have happened. It wasn’t right.

David moved on top of her, his body big and warm, and ever so slowly, he kissed her face, one tiny kiss at a time. “Hmm, I just love your freckles,” he whispered. “I have one kiss for each, but stay still.” She smiled at this and relaxed, put her arms around his neck, sighing. And though he’d never imagined, his penis stirred as she began kissing him back. Every time he lowered his face to kiss a freckle, she pouted her lips to kiss any piece of skin that came near her lips; his ears, his nose, his cheek.

David would have to control himself if he didn’t want to get her into a worse fit. He pulled away and looked down at her. She looked dazed, and he didn’t want to think of that because he really wanted her again. Now. She was so damned beautiful.

“How do you do that?” Anna whispered in awe. “It’s like magic.”

He chuckled, ran a finger along her jaw. Anna. His Anna. He had always wanted her. Always loved her. He couldn’t ever stand anyone touching her, looking at her. She was his. And yet with her mind firmly set on marriage, it had always been impossible. But now, now that she was so desperate, perhaps David should reconsider. Marriage to Anna. They could make it work. Couldn’t they? They’d been inseparable for years, knew each other better than anyone else. David was *not* like his father!

“Kiss me, David,” she whispered brokenly. “I know it’s wrong but I want you so much to kiss me I feel weak.”

He needed nothing more. He kissed her long and hard, then whispered, “I’ll kiss you everywhere, Anna. I’ve wanted this forever. You.”

His mind raced as she looked up at him then, dewy-eyed, begging for his kisses. “You’re so beautiful,” he whispered. Anna. His Anna. Did she know? Could she tell what he felt? Could she read his mind right now, could she see what he was thinking, feeling? *I want you, I need you, I love you, my banana girl...*

He bent down to kiss her lips, to show her what he felt for her, if for some reason he couldn’t say the words out loud. She went pliant under him, soft, submissive, letting him do as he pleased. He wanted to please her, give her, take her. His lips trailed kisses down her cheeks, her neck, and towards her breasts, then latched onto a nipple. His hand sunk between her legs and began a slow torture with his fingers. She whimpered underneath him, a little girl in pain. He rose to look at her, her face was strained in effort as she moved her hips into the air, as if seeking something, and she twisted her head from side to side in need.

“David, please,” she gasped.

“What do you want, baby?” he whispered against her face.

“I want you, all of you, please, I beg you,” she clutched at his face and brought it to her lips, kissed him savagely. He took over the kiss, kissing her back with hot, fevered passion. He braced himself on his arms and moved his hips between her legs, looked down at her, his erection poised at her entrance. Her eyes were closed, and when he slid the tip of his cock inside her, they opened, stared at him in wonder.

“Do you want this?” he breathed. He could barely speak, and if she’d said ‘no’, he had no idea how he would have been able to stop.

“Yes, David,” she begged breathlessly, her hands entwining in his hair, pulling his face down for another kiss just as he thrust inside her, fully. She tensed, cried out, but he muffled the cry with his kiss, and remained still for a few seconds so that her muscles adapted to his intrusion. Slowly, he began to move, slipping in and out of her slick muscles.

Being inside her, enveloped in that excruciating tightness, wetness, David thought he would die from the pleasure, the joy, of claiming her, his woman, his love. His. They climaxed together, as one, reaching the farthest corners of the universe, together, then slowly came back. He dropped onto the bed beside her and gathered her into his arms, clutched her tightly to him. She placed her cheek on his chest, wrapped an arm around his waist, sighing. A few minutes passed by when David heard her voice, a mere croak, “I’m not a virgin anymore. Am I David?”

He kissed her forehead, something clenching tight at his throat. “No, you’re not.”

She was silent, but he felt her stiffen. God, what had he done to her? To the woman he loved. This had been so important to her. And he’d taken it, taken it from her, as if it were his right to do so, in the same way he’d taken away her suitors and her dreams of marriage.

“David, do you think the car will be gone by tomorrow? I’d like to go home tomorrow...I really want to go home.”

He ran his hands through her hair in a soothing motion. “Go to sleep, sweetheart.”

He didn't want to tell her right now, that he'd lied about the car, and did other despicable things, for he knew she'd hate him. And the only thing he'd ever wanted was her love.

* * *

He woke her up with kisses, on her neck, on her earlobe, sending tickles down her spine all the way to her toes. Anna sighed at first, at the delicious feel of those warm, luscious lips. Then she frowned, pushed at his shoulders.

"David, stop it," she said.

He groaned deep in his throat, perhaps thinking she was being coy. "Hmmm, you're the best breakfast I've had in years," he muttered as he lowered his head to nuzzle her breasts with his lips. She pushed at him harder, using her legs and arms this time, until he gave way.

"I said stop it, you've done enough."

He sat back, his expression puzzled. "What's wrong with you?"

"No, what is wrong with *you*? It's already eleven, I need to go, and you need to go too."

"It's Saturday, sweetheart."

She nodded pointedly. "Aha, and you have a date with Maria."

She rose from the bed furiously, oblivious to the fact that she was naked. "Where's my suitcase?"

"It's standing right behind you."

She glanced towards the door, noticed it was right beside it. "Oh." She opened it furiously, grabbed the first dress she saw, and slipped into it, not even bothering with underwear, so anxious was she to leave.

"Anna, let's talk," he said, rising from the bed and walking towards her.

She thrust up her hands to halt him. “No, David, let’s not talk.”

“Baby, I can’t let you leave like this. It wasn’t my fault. You begged me to take you yesterday. You said – “

“I know what I said, David!” she practically shouted. “I have no idea what I was thinking, because now I’m furious that if before I had few possibilities of finding a husband, now I have zero!”

“No thanks to me?”

“No thanks to you!”

“Okay, I admit it, I did take a little advantage of you. There, are you satisfied?”

She was red in fury, her freckles turning almost purple from the rage. She narrowed her eyes at him. “I won’t let this stop me. I’m getting married and I’ll do so even without my virginity! Tonight after the auction I have a date with an intelligent, hard-working man and I’m sure a fine man such as him will not even mind!”

“I thought I told you I was checking out your dates, Anna? He could be a murderer for all we know.”

“He’s not a murderer.” She paused for a moment. “He’s Claudia’s friend.”

“And who the hell is Claudia?”

“Claudia! You know Claudia, with the big...*things* glued to your chest and the eyelash thing and the whimpering and all that.”

“Oh, that Claudia,” he acknowledged with a nod.

“Yes, that Claudia, whom you’ve kissed more than you have Maria!”

“I’ve never kissed Claudia, she’s kissed me, it’s totally different, Anna.”

“I don’t think so.” She whirled on her heel and marched across his living room, leaving her suitcase behind. He followed her, not even bothering to get dressed, and reached her in three strides only to whirl her around to face him.

“The only woman I’ve ever wanted is you,” he said hotly, his face inches from her own. “So I don’t appreciate you accusing me of lusting after all the others because I *don’t*.”

“Well they sure lust after you! And you only want me for a diversion, just to...kiss me and touch me and...”

“To make love to you,” he supplied in a low, husky voice.

Her eyes fell to his lips, they were just a breath away from kissing her. She forgot to breathe as she slowly watched him cock his head to one side and meet his lips to hers. It was with unabated passion, the way they both wrapped their arms around each other, and kissed like crazy people. He tasted like man, like water and spice, and the taste was intoxicating. She moaned at the feel of his erection pressing against her stomach, it was hard and throbbing for her. He put his arms on the back of her knees and lifted her, not even bothering to remove her flimsy short dress, since he’d probably seen she wore no underwear. She wrapped her legs around his waist, her arms tightly clinging to his neck, as he slowly lowered her onto his member. She gasped at the feel of him, sliding inside her. He muffled her gasp, his mouth possessive on hers as he thrust his hips, again and again, pounding against hers. Her nails dug into his flesh, her sex clenched against his penis, tightened around him, making him groan. Within seconds they shattered, together, clinging to each other as their bodies loosened afterwards. He buried his face in her neck, breathing her in.

“I’ve got to go,” she said, wiggling away from his arms. Slowly he let go of her, his eyes glued to her face. She didn’t meet his gaze. “I’ve got a date, David, and so do you.”

He pursed his lips as she closed the door behind her.

Damn it all to hell. This was only going to get worse, unless...

* * *

La Casa de los Niños’ charity event was a grand success, or at least, David thought so when he arrived, Maria clinging to his arms, brushing her breasts against his arms and fairly purring in delight. The event was held in the gardens of the school, but instead of toys, the gardens were scattered with large round tables, draped with white linen cloths, and silver place settings that glinted against the bright sun. To the far end of the gardens was a wooden platform holding a tall, lone wooden podium, where the auction was to be held shortly. Within minutes the place was already crowded with guests, and David scanned the crowds viciously for Anna, but to no success. He had no idea who Anna’s date for this event was, and yet he was going to beat the shit out of him when he got the chance. Hadn’t he told just about the goddamned whole city that Anna was off limits?

And then she arrived.

In a black Porsche. And David got a look at the son of a bitch. Sebastian Puentes. His ex-best friend, because now David was going to kill him. Sebastian smiled to his fans, almost waived as if he were the president of Mexico, and escorted Anna towards the tables. She looked beautiful. Her dress was a beige color, and it looked beautiful against her pearly skin and her dark brown hair. David tensed just watching her, and when he met Sebastian’s gaze, he sent him a look that said he was a dead man. Sebastian

smiled wickedly, clearly the bastard was enjoying every second of this. They sat a few tables away from him, and David's eyes were all but pasted on Anna. Claudia came to him to say "Hello" in her soft little voice, flutter her eyelashes, and bend down so he could see her breasts. David was not interested, and instead his gaze followed Maria as she proceeded to the stand, hips swaying as she took the steps and took a microphone in her hands.

"Well, hello everyone, on behalf of *Casa de los Niños*, I would like to thank you all for coming to this event." There was a loud applause. "Now, as you all now, we need funds for the little children in our home, who most of them have only one parent and little resources to get a good education. And we all know our government officials help no one but themselves..." There was loud laughter and hooting. "But we at *Casa de los Niños* care about children, and their education, and for this reason, we are holding an auction. This year we have nothing to sell, unfortunately..." There was a silence, and she smiled seductively, her eyes darting from one pair of dazed eyes to another and then another, "but a date." Oooohs and aaahs were exchanged. "The winner will have a date with one of ten ladies who have graciously volunteered for this noble cause. And we'll start with little ole me." An auctioneer approached the tall wooden podium, hammer in hand while he straightened his bowtie with the other. And then the auction began.

"One thousand dollars, do I hear one thousand one hundred?"

"Two thousand to the man on the back. Do I hear three thousand?"

"Five thousand," someone shouted. Maria was eager and excited, jumping up and down, clapping her hands, momentarily distracting the auctioneer. Suddenly a voice on the back said, "Ten thousand."

“Ten thousand dollars!” the auctioneer said, “do I hear more? Anyone?” A long silence. “Sold, a date with the lady, for ten thousand dollars.” The people were amazed, some even red cheeked from both the excitement and the sunlight, and clapped. Maria waited patiently for the winner, a fifty year old bald man whom David had recently divorced, walked up to claim her.

“Next up is Miss Anna Villafuerte. Miss Anna.”

David watched in horror as *his* Anna walked to the stand. He felt his heart pound in his chest and he all but shook from the effort it took him to stay seated and not grab her and bring her little butt back here. Over his dead body would he allow anyone on a date with her.

The bidding began in one hundred dollars. Climbed to five hundred. There was a silence. Then it climbed to a whopping two thousand. Then Sebastian bid for three thousand. That asshole. David sent him another look before he turned his attention back to Anna. A man, a stranger, who was escorting the bountiful Claudia, bid four thousand. David glowered at him, too. Perhaps he was Anna’s date for tonight. Sebastian retorted five thousand. The stranger besides Claudia six thousand. Sebastian seven thousand. The stranger eight thousand. David had had just about enough of this bullshit. He placed his hands on the table and rose from his seat, looking Anna in the eye.

“One hundred thousand dollars, and marriage to the lady,” he said in a clear, loud voice.

There was a long silence, and the auctioneer seemed frozen in place, his eyes wide. “Anyone else?” he croaked.

When Sebastian and the stranger shook their heads, the auctioneer lowered the hammer.

“Sold, for one hundred thousand dollars, and marriage.”

Anna’s hand fluttered to her chest as she watched, open-mouthed, as David headed towards her. It took him an eternity to get to her, as he walked with slow, sure footsteps. When he reached her, he knelt on his knees and took her hand, looked up at her, there in front of the whole attendees. Anna’s eyes brimmed with tears.

“I’m a liar,” he said softly, so only she could hear. “I lied about the car, and I scared away all your admirers. I’m not even worthy of you, but I want to marry you, you and only you.”

She caught her breath, looking down at him, her eyebrows joining in confusion at his confession.

He clutched her hand tightly with both of his. “I know I’m probably not the best option around, not everything you’d wished for, not what you deserve...but I love you. I love you more than the air I breathe, and I will love you always. I’ll do anything to make you happy, and I’ll do whatever it takes to make our marriage work. This I promise you.”

She nodded, tears streaming down her face. “David you’re everything I’d wished for, and more. Yes! I love you, you silly wonderful man!!”

David rose to his feet and enfolded her in his arms, kissing her lightly on the lips as he whirled her around. People clapped, some even wiped tears from their eyes, and they all looked ecstatic except Claudia, who yanked at her paid escort’s sleeves and hauled him away from the party, saying, “I want a refund!”

Anna looked at David in the eye. “You’re still going to get it good for lying to me,” she said seriously. “And what do you mean that you scared away all my suitors?”

He nodded solemnly. “I smacked their faces in,” he confessed.

“You didn’t!”

“I did, and I am sorry. I just couldn’t stand seeing you with anyone.”

“David, you really are an ogre!”

“I’ll spend my whole life making it up to you. I’ll be your prince, the one you’ve always wanted. I promise.” And he kissed her, long and hard, making people clap with even more effort.

“I’ve always loved you, David, always. And deep down, I always prayed it was you.”

“Well your Saint has certainly made a believer out of me. ‘Cause there was no way in hell I planned to get married, this really *was* an act of God!”

She slapped his shoulders, scowling. “Well I think it was! Even if you want to make fun of it.”

“I’m not making fun of it.” He pulled her closer, his face inches from her own. “If it weren’t for your prayers and your wonderful saint maybe I’d never realized the truth.”

“What?”

“That I love you, need you. That even though I didn’t believe in marriage, I believe in *you and I*, and we can make it work. You’re my every wish come true, Anna.”

“And you’re mine, David. Now be quiet and just kiss me.”

And he did.

THE END