

MARZACHY NIGHTS

Vallerie O'



Authors note:

Dear Reader: Here's wishing for a better Mexico, one with peaceful, happy, healthy people . . . and a fair government . . . and no bad guys . . . hope you enjoy!

MARIACHI NIGHTS

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MARIACHI NIGHTS**VALLERIE O'****one**

He was different than the rest of the mariachis.

He was younger than the others. Taller by at least a head. His shoulders were broader, and much more muscular. While the other mariachis had plump cheeks and sparkles in their eyes, this one had lean, chiseled features, and his eyes were dark as night. They were narrowed into slits and they seemed to miss nothing as they studied his surroundings. He had the face of a fugitive, the three day's growth of beard making his face look filthy and sufficiently menacing for the other mariachi to keep a small but very noticeable distance from him. The guitar seemed tiny and fragile in his lean, long arms—he could probably break it with so much as a flick of his wrists. The black embroidered mariachi bolero jacket he wore was almost breaking at the seams—it looked extremely tight on him. The matching mariachi pants appeared to be glued to his thighs and calves, and they made the big bulge between his legs look very prominent. The other mariachis wore black and gold hats while they merrily sung in their deep baritone voices. But this mariachi wasn't singing, and instead of a black and gold mariachi hat, he wore a red one, making him stand out among the mariachis even more.

The establishment was a seedy sort, crowded with many undesirables, most of them men in their middle ages, all of them drunk and groping the breasts of the many prostitutes available for their pleasures. The smoke made her eyes water, and the mariachi music added to the loud and numerous conversations around her made her head pound. This was not a place for Vilma McCarthy, not a place for a young, blonde, fair-skinned, blue-eyed waitress from Los Angeles, and yet if she'd understood in her extremely limited knowledge of Spanish what the man at the gasoline station had said, this was the only place where she could find help.

Help, in her very sorry situation, had a name, and his name was 'El Santo'. When she'd asked the man at the gasoline station what the name meant, he merely crossed himself several consecutive times, lifted his eyes at the sky, and mumbled a prayer. El Santo, she

supposed, meant Saint, so she envisioned a priest of sorts, and why they'd told her she'd find him here, was yet another unsolved mystery in this mole of a town.

So now here she was, and at this very moment, standing at the center of these noisy, filthy, drunken people, she wished she were anywhere – and she meant *anywhere* – except here. But as it was, Vilma had no choice, and if she ever wanted to get out of this stinking, rotten old Mexican town of *Juarecito*, she had to find this Santo guy.

“Excuse me,” she'd said as soon as she'd arrived at the sorry establishment, tapping the shoulder of an elderly man sitting by himself at the bar. He turned to look at her through one eye, the other eye firmly closed and wrinkled at the corner. He flashed her a crooked, yellow-teethed smile.

“*Hola, mamacita,*” he said in the raspy voice of a man who had smoked his whole life. It meant ‘*Hello, mama*’, and she pursed her lips in distaste.

“Can you please tell me where I can find *El Santo*?”

His single eye widened in horror, and he shook his head about ten times. “No, no, no,” he said, turning back towards the drink he'd been nursing and proceeding it to empty it all in one gulp.

“Please,” she'd insisted.

He clasped his hands and laced his fingers together and began to pray.

One by one, she asked each and every one of the men sitting at the bar, all to no avail. No one wanted to tell her where *El Santo* was. Finally, the bar tender said, “*Preguntele a el mariachi.*” So now she was standing patiently, waiting for the mariachi to finish what had to be the longest mariachi song of the decade.

She even thrust up her hands in the air when the song finally finished. “Bravo,” she clapped along with everyone else in the room, but since she sounded more effusive than the rest of the crowd, she became aware of many eyes settling on her. Many. Beady, hungry little eyes. They studied her appearance from bottom to top, starting with her tall stilettos, up her tight skinny jeans, and finishing with her pink short-sleeved sweater and the well-rounded breasts it covered. She could tell the people here were not much into fashion, nor would they appreciate a fashionable, very in-style outfit when they saw one. Oddly, at the blatantly starved look in their eyes, she felt like dinner. *Their* dinner.

She swallowed hard, turned back to stare at the mariachi just as they disappeared into a hallway at the far end of the room. Her heart raced as she realized she would lose them, and she cupped her mouth and shouted, “Wait! Please wait!” but they didn’t hear her, so she pressed her little purse into her armpit and followed them in determination. She had to get out of this town. Had to find ‘El Santo’.

The hallway was long and dark, and she stumbled twice with littered cans and empty bottles on the sticky floor. There was a crooked door at the far end. She had trouble opening it, since it seemed to be stuck. She pushed like a lady first, using only her fingers to shove. When it didn’t budge, then she pushed like a mad lady, using her hands to push and making an effort that began within her abs. When that didn’t work, she pushed like a desperate, crazed woman in the verge of a breakdown, using her shoulders, chest, stomach, and hips to do so. It shoved open and she stumbled past it, only to fall flat on her butt on a sticky, filthy puddle on the other side. The puddle smelled like sewer, and she gasped, outraged, feeling the unmentionable liquid stick to her skin, the cloth of her jeans and sweater damp and heavy on her body.

“Shit!” she cried to herself, her voice shaky. She stared down at the puddle, saw a hint of her reflection in it, noticed there was black eyelash paint smeared on her cheeks, her blonde hair clung to the sides of her face like sticky vaseline. “I hate this town,” she mumbled. “I hate this stupid—“

Before she could mutter any more demeaning words, her eyes settled on the tip of a long, shiny black crocodile boot beside her hip, and the matching pair besides it. She stared at them, noticed they seemed very expensive, then followed them up, past long, muscular legs, past a very well endowed male groin, past a broad chest, until she met the eyes of the tall, mean-looking mariachi with his red hat. He had to be the leader of the mariachi, for just the way he stood there with such authority made her feel pretty certain this was the man to talk to.

“Thank goodness,” she sighed as she struggled to rise. He watched her silently as she straightened and rose. When she did so, she was acutely aware of the disgusting slushing sounds of her dampened clothes, her nipples erect against the cold knit sweater.

“Sir, can you please tell me where I can find *El Santo*?” she asked. Before he could answer, her teeth began to chatter, and she wrapped her arms around herself.

He didn't cross himself like the others had, didn't begin to pray, but he looked at her in a way that made her extremely uncomfortable. He definitely had the appearance of a murderer. A mass murderer. It was good that he was a mariachi for if she hadn't seen him herself, she could have sworn he was a renegade on the run from the law.

"El Santo," she explained, speaking to him as if he were a child. "E – I – "

"I understood the first time," he said roughly. His voice was meaner than his looks, but she was so relieved that he spoke English, that she sighed.

"Thank god you speak English . . . So you can help me?" she asked breathlessly.

"Maybe." He looked down at her in blatant disgust. "Maybe I can take you to him."

"Will you, please? I would really appreciate it. It's a matter of urgency, actually," she explained.

He nodded and said, "Follow me."

She followed him down a thin littered back street. It was scattered with dumpsters, cats prowling around in search of food, and hundreds and hundreds of flies. The place felt humid, and it smelled foul and dirty. Vilma tried to hold her breath for as long as she could, but when she felt her lungs nearly explode, she let the air wheeze out, suddenly realizing much of the foul smell came from her own stinky clothing.

"So what's your name?" she asked casually, making a superior effort to keep up with his long, sure strides in her wobbly high-heels.

He turned to glower at her, a pair of sleek black eyebrows joining above his nose in a scowl. "If I'd wanted to talk, I'd have said so," he said bluntly. Her cheeks reddened at his lack of manners, but she zipped her lips closed and stared straight ahead, again making a supreme effort to keep up with him. He paused before an old truck, the red paint was peeled in some parts to reveal it had once been blue. He walked around it and opened the driver's door.

"Are we going somewhere?" she asked, her blue eyes widening in alarm.

"Yes," he said flatly, meeting her gaze across the dented hood of the truck. "You need to change if you want to see *El Santo*."

She pursed her lips in thought. "Well, that's precisely why I need to see him. You see my luggage was in my car, and my car was— "

“Do you want to see him or not?” he thundered. She jolted at the fury in his voice, and she briskly nodded her head.

“Yes, very much so,” she said.

“Then get in.”

She did so, her hands and legs shaking as she settled quietly in the passenger seat. The mariachi drove in silence, and when her nervousness abated somewhat, she noticed he was so big that he nearly took up all the space in the meager little truck. He could break her neck like a twig and no one would ever even know what happened. She fisted her hands at the thought, wondering if she had been foolish to get into a car with a man she hardly knew. And yet, her options were so limited at this time that her conservative thinking would hardly get her out of this mess in the first place.

She smiled at his profile and said, “I really appreciate you doing this for me. When I solve my little problem, I, ah, promise to compensate you for all this trouble, sir.”

He turned to her and smiled. It was a vicious smile, his white teeth gleaming against the stub of beard and making him look like a wolf. “I’m sure you will,” he said.

She ignored the sarcasm in his voice and instead turned her face around. She stared out the window at the small pueblo as he drove by in the rickety old truck. The streets were unpaved, and the land was so dry it was cracked and uneven, making the truck bounce uncomfortably as it slowly made its way around. The streets were littered with cans and plastics, and every now and then she could see little children dressed in torn, dirty rags while they eagerly played throwing little rocks at each other. It was evening and the sun was beginning to set, giving the town an orange glow to it, and even though Vilma knew firsthand that *Juarecito* was an old, dirty town, the fading sunlight made it look almost magical. She could envision a Hollywood big shot director coming to this very town to film an old western movie. The mariachi took off his red hat and set it down atop the break shaft between their two seats. Vilma stared down at it, then took it in her hands and studied the excellent craftsmanship of the embroidery, running the tip of her fingers along it.

“I love the hat,” she said with open admiration.

He grunted in disgust. “Tourists love everything.”

Now where did that come from? She frowned at his words. “What have you got against tourists, mister?” she asked, her pride stinging just a bit.

“Only that they have no business being here,” he said dryly.

She lifted her chin. “I was on my way to Los Cabos, if you must know. I have a reservation at a *very* popular resort there. Let me just make it clear to you that I had *no* intention of coming to *this* particular little town.”

He was silent, and she leaned back against the car door and arched a brow at him in question. “Where did you learn to speak English so well?”

“Texas University.”

Maybe Vilma was not very bright, and maybe she hadn't been able to finish college yet, but she didn't get it. Why would a mariachi study in Texas University? Maybe he was a mariachi as a hobby, she finally decided. Oh, well, she'd just have to live with the doubt, because she was certainly not going to ask him. He seemed angry enough without her prodding into his personal life. Weren't men from Mars and liked to hide in their little caves and weren't Venus women supposed to leave them dwell in their tiny, dark little caves for as long as they wanted to? She'd learned all this from the best-selling book she'd read 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus' and of course she'd only read this book recently after many, many failed relationships. After reading it, she'd realized a few of her previous relationships had failed because she'd been a typical Venutian woman taunting the Martian out of his cave before he was ready. Poor, poor Martian and silly, stupid Venus girl. So now it was all her fault, because she couldn't stand those losers sulking in their caves like wimps? Really!

The mariachi stared straight ahead and while he did so, she studied his mean-looking profile. He really did look like a convict. At one point a while ago, he had removed the embroidered bolero, and she had almost gasped out loud at the sight of the thin cotton shirt he wore underneath, plastered against his muscles by sweat. He was very muscular, but not big and disgusting muscles, but lean and taut and thoroughly pleasing muscles. This was not a man who sat at a desk hiding behind his computer. No, this was a man who roamed in nature, hung out with the apes, and probably hit his chest like an ape, too. There was a primitive look to him, a savage look, that she had to admit gave her a despicable private little thrill. It made the woman inside her tremble, made her remember her dreams as a teenager when she'd believed a dangerous, wild, untamed man was so very romantic.

In fact, she slightly recalled when she'd been a rebellious teenager, still privately fantasizing about life, love and relationships, she hadn't wanted to be rescued by the prince like the rest of her friends. Instead, Vilma had wanted to stay locked up in the dungeon by the mean bad man, and deep down she'd dreamed of the mean bad man forcing himself on her, and falling in love with her, and becoming a powerful but good man because of the grandness of his love for her. Of course she'd never shared this fantasy with anyone, and now that she rationalized (and after more than a dozen relationships with losers who were mean and abused her and left her crying and whimpering and *never* changed into a good man because of the grandness of their love for her *ever*) she knew for certain that what she needed was a safe man, one she could count on, one who would be good to her. A savage muscular macho man was not something she needed right now. She had enough problems on her hands already, like getting the hell out of here.

“What do you want with *El Santo*?” the mariachi asked in a dry voice.

“I need his help,” she said, frowning down at her nails, her French manicure completely vanished. Now her nails were dirty and some were even broken. Damn it.

“And why do you think *El Santo* can help you?”

She looked up at him, puzzled. “Well I was told that he was the only one who could help me. I asked if there was an American consulate around and they said there was no one here to help me but *El Santo*.”

His smile was ruthless, as if he were enjoying a private joke. “They're right. The governor was killed when the city was overtaken by the locals. There's no law, and no American consulate, and no anything around here.” His dark eyes darkened even more—something she'd thought was impossible. “Welcome to no man's land.”

“But . . . I don't understand. What about *El Santo*?”

He grunted and drove on in silence. Now Vilma was beginning to get worried.

How she regretted that moment she stopped in this filthy hole of a place . . . Why did she even have to stop to go the restroom in a stinking town like this anyway? It had taken her only a couple of minutes, but in those few cursed minutes her life had taken a turn for the worst. The bathroom was so gross . . . First she'd had to clean the dirty toilet seat with disinfectant Lysol wipes that she always carried in her purse, and when she'd accidentally touched the edge of the toilet seat with the back of her thighs, she'd had to

wash her thighs with anti-bacterial Purell. By the time she finished and strode outside, her car was gone, and of the twenty people blabbering Spanish and waiting around the empty space that had been before occupied by her car, no one saw a thing. Quite coincidentally they all seemed to be suffering from bad vision. Those poor souls. And at her desperate interrogation, all they said was 'El Santo'. Every single question she asked, they said 'El Santo', and crossed themselves repeatedly.

But then why did this mariachi say there was no law? It looked to her that around here 'El Santo' was the law, and either way, she had to find him, or how on earth was she going to recuperate her car, her luggage, her cell phone, and her passport? And how was she going to get out of this place without her car anyway? She could call her parents, of course, and they'd drive down to pick her up, but they were so old that the last time they'd taken a road trip her dad had fallen asleep behind the steering wheel, nearly causing a fatal accident. The only other option would be calling her friends in Los Angeles and begging them to come rescue her, but she'd feel really rotten if she had to do that. They'd have a field day with this when they knew, and she hated being their joke. She was an independent modern woman, after all, and she was perfectly capable of taking care of herself. How could a stinking town in Mexico get the best of her? Besides, her car couldn't have disappeared into thin air. It was a very noticeable, very striking, very new red convertible Mazda, and she was still painfully paying for it month by month, so no, she wasn't going to give up this easily.

"So how long have you known *El Santo*?" she asked casually.

"Forever."

"Oh, did you go to school together?"

He chuckled, the sound throaty and deep and rumbling. "We went to the school of life, and learned the hard way," he said, giving her a sinister look. His eyes were darker than dark, and there was something that happened whenever his eyes met hers that made her senses reel.

"Are you always this friendly, mister, or is it just me?" she asked, a little pissed at his attitude. He was about as friendly as a bull and his mood was starting to get to her already frazzled nerves.

“Honey, after you meet *El Santo* you’re going to think I’m the funniest, sweetest man in Mexico.” He grinned at her, a vicious grin, and she could only gape at him, because now his words worried her even more.

“Why?”

He was silent, still grinning at her with that despicable smile.

“Who is *El Santo*?” she prodded. “Everyone speaks says his name in reverence, and yet you’re telling me he’s a worse character than you are. Please, I need to know, it’s important.”

He sighed, his fingers curling tighter around the steering wheel, making his knuckles turn white. “He’s the owner of this town. People have to love him if they want to live here. He spreads wads of dollars at them just to feed them and keep them quiet and working for him. Yes, he can help you—for a price.”

She sighed in relief. “Oh, that’s perfectly all right, I can pay for his services.”

He stared at her face for an eternal minute, then his eyes deliberately dipped further down to assess her body and her stained, rumpled clothes. “Men like *El Santo* don’t want your money. They don’t want *dinero*. They want other things, if you know what I mean.” His gaze settled on her breasts, and she held her breath at the intensity of it.

“What do you mean?” she asked, inwardly not really wanting to know the answer.

He pulled the truck over to the side of the road and she jolted forward when he slammed on the breaks. He turned to her, his eyes dark and dangerous and gleaming in the darkening sky. She tensed when he ran a finger along her jaw, his touch burned her skin. “It means men like him want only one thing from a woman like you.” His voice was husky.

“And what could that be?” she croaked, pressing her head further back against the window.

“This.” He cupped her breast with his big hand, brutally so, his calloused palm burning her skin through the knit, damp fabric of her sweater. “Men like him only want to lick this, to suck this. Men like him only want to *cojer*—that means *fuck*.”

For a moment she imagined him doing all those things to her and she felt a pang of desire strike between her legs. She pressed her thighs together and swallowed. Her attraction to him didn’t surprise her, since she was always attracted to the worst kind of man, the one that would eventually wound and hurt her. What did surprise her, however,

was her body's reaction to him, for she felt the blood boil inside her veins, felt her nipples tense and pucker, and her sex clench against an unexpected flood of desire.

“Oh, God, I'm in trouble, aren't I?” she whispered. And part of her wanted to be.

“Yes, baby, you are,” he said hoarsely.

“But . . . you're still taking me to *El Santo*, right?” she asked in a shaky voice, brushing his hand aside and wrapping her arms across her chest in protection. She couldn't let him see how affected she was.

He shook his head and turned back to the wheel, his foot pressing on the accelerator as he guided the track back onto the road. “I'm taking you back to the States, where you belong.”

She shook her head wildly. “Oh, no, but I've got to get my car back. I can't just give up, I have my passport there, my Ipod, my cell phone, my – “

“You'll be happy you've got your body in one piece and your life intact when I drop you at the border, woman.”

She gritted her teeth. “Stop the car right now, I'm getting off,” she said with new determination.

He chuckled, his big chest heaving as he did so. “There's nothing here but land, where will you be going? You have no idea where to find *El Santo*.”

“Well I'm certain I can manage. Look, I know enough Spanish to know *santo* means saint. I'm sure he'll take pity on me, I'm sure he's a decent man, otherwise people wouldn't pray to him.”

“Baby, *El Santo* is a drug lord, and a very vicious one. They call him *El Santo* because he gives these poor, starved people food and drink, people whom the government doesn't even recognize with birth certificates, and people who know nothing except what he wants them to know. They pray because it's the only thing that keeps them alive, their faith in thinking someone will look after them.”

Her eyebrows arched at the same time she felt her lips tremble. “What about a lawyer?” she countered shakily. “I'm sure I can make a case, and I can get back my car, my stuff.”

The sarcastic expression on his face told her very clearly that he found her comments almost laughable. “A lawyer won’t help you a thing. Not here . . . this is *Mexico*.”

“Really? And what would a man like you know about lawyers?” she asked in a haughty voice that trembled slightly when she spoke. Things really didn’t look very optimistic, did they?

“Because I used to be one, *chiquitita*.” He eyed her solemnly, his face set. “Talking around here won’t solve anything.”

“Then what will?”

“This,” he said, jerking back his white cotton shirt and giving her ample view of a mean, big, black gun thrust into the waistband of his pants and pressed tightly against a very tanned, very muscular male waist. “This, *señorita*, is solving things the Mexican way.”

Her heart nearly spilled out of her chest as it rammed onto her breast, and her eyes widened in disbelief. Oh . . . my . . . god.

He chuckled and hid the gun behind his shirt again. Vilma bit her lip and sank back into her seat.

Why on earth did she decide to drive to Los Cabos? It had taken her days to get this far, and now, her car was gone, her things except what she’d been able to carry in her very chic but very useless excuse of a purse were gone, and she was driving with some sort of renegade Mexican macho towards the border—or at least that’s what he said. Now she didn’t even know if she should believe him or not. Why would he want to take her to the border, certainly not to save her? Not when he could do other things to her. Many, many other things. Her mind was havoc as it raced with thoughts, all of them increasingly gloomy.

He did have a gun. A very real, very black gun, with a dark brown wood handle, the kind used in cowboy movies, and it nearly as gloomy as his mean face. Maybe he was worse than ‘El Santo’ and then she’d be in really, really deep shit—not that she wasn’t already. She didn’t say another word as he drove on a poor excuse of a one-way paved highway and past lonely, cracked, dry land. She had already spilled a few tears for herself by the time they took a turn from the main road and onto a bumpy side street. She was in

Mexico alone with a mean man that carried a gun. It sounded like a really bad Hollywood movie . . . and yet it wasn't. This was very real, and very frightening. Could it even get worse than this? she wondered. She knew it was not likely. This was worse than any nightmare she'd ever recalled dreaming in her whole lifetime.

After a few more minutes, he pulled over in front of a large old wood shack. Night time had fallen, but with the aid of an oil lamp hanging in the porch, Vilma could make out a short picket fence and a pair of chickens clucking in the front yard. The mariachi pushed on the truck door and got out, only to thrust his head inside the truck to growl at her.

“Get your skinny ass down here *now*.”

Skinny ass? If he'd thought he'd insulted her, then he was *way* wrong. Her ass was huge! It barely fit into a size 28 jean. She'd always thought her butt was bigger than she'd liked, for the ideal butt would probably be a 27, and she was constantly on a diet in her efforts to slim it down. Hearing her ass was skinny was actually the best news she'd had in this sorry, horrible day—the worst day of her life. Shakily, she thrust the car door open and followed him inside the house, her mind racing with thoughts. She had to escape. Drastic situations caused for drastic measures, and since she'd noticed he stuck the keys of the truck into the pocket of his embroidered mariachi pants, she knew what she had to do. And she had to do it as soon as possible. Oh, shit, this really was happening to her, wasn't it?

two

“*Mi hijito, mi amor,*” a chubby woman was saying as Vilma entered the house. It took her only seconds to register her surroundings. The home was cluttered and warm. A fan hung from the ceiling and circled the air slowly in a futile attempt to cool the place. A pot burned over a stove at the end of the room, making a soft bubbling sound and emitting the faint, inviting aroma of chicken soup. A wall to the right side of the house was cluttered with blazing candles and images of saints. Vilma supposed it was an altar of sorts, since there were pictures of relatives, too, and a few dry flowers scattered between the candles.

The woman who greeted them was short and meaty, with silver gray hair and a dirty apron, and Vilma instantly realized she was the mariachi's mother. She was all over him, mothering him, her hands wrapped around his shoulders, her expression worried as she asked him things in Spanish. He scowled at her, clearly not wanting her attentions, but it made her fuss over him even more. The man said something to her in Spanish, and Vilma could understand a few words of what he said; 'Estados Unidos' 'Frontera' 'Americana'. He was telling her he was taking her to the border.

It was good that his mama seemed to believe him, because Vilma did not. He'd already put his greasy hand on her breast, and there's no telling what else he planned to do to her—but he'd already given her a hint. Men like 'el Santo' wanted only to '*cojer*', and men like him . . . were probably the same. Yes, she'd felt turned on by his touch, but what did her body know about anything, really? Her body conveniently craved chocolates *only* when she was on a diet, so what did it *really* know about what was good for her? The reality was, Vilma had no intention nor desire to be associated with the likes of him.

"Follow me," the man told her in a terse voice. For an instant before she followed him, Vilma met his mother's gaze and smiled shakily at her. The woman had the face of a sweet cherub, though it was wrinkled due to age and possibly extreme sun-exposure, and a soft yet worried gaze as she looked back at her in silence.

The mariachi led her to a separate shack on the back of the house. It had a creaky wooden floor, a large bed and two chairs besides a small window. There was a bookshelf topped with books standing beside the chairs, and Vilma was slightly surprised, since he didn't seem like a reading person at all. In an instant she knew this was his room, for to her left was a wall full of mariachi hats in all colors and sizes, and beneath them stood a vast assortment of guitars leaning against the wall. He hung the red hat at the far end before he dropped the bolero jacket over the bed and came back to thrust a cotton fabric into her arms.

"Here, put this on," he said. She stared down at the floral-patterned cotton fabric and a pair of bed slippers.

"No, thank you," she said, trying to hand it back to him.

“I said put it on,” he barked furiously. “You stink.” He crossed the room, thrust a creaky door open and switched a light on of what seemed to be the bathroom. “And take a bath.”

She pressed her lips together just so he knew she was obeying but didn't *want* to, and went inside to change. Her jeans felt heavy and plastered to her skin and they did stink, so she opened the shower and waited until the water was moderately warm. She did want to take a bath, very much so, but she told herself as soon as she was finished, she would make her escape.

Vicente Sanchez changed while the ‘gringa’ took a shower.

He grabbed the truck keys from his mariachi pants, slid into a pair of jeans and a comfortable button checkered shirt, hid his revolver on the small of his back by sliding the barrel into the waistband of his jeans and leaving the handle exposed, and thrust the keys into his front pocket for safe-keeping. He had no idea why in the world the American Barbie-doll was around here in the first place, but his guess was that she'd taken a wrong turn somewhere on her way to Los Cabos, and ended up at the sorriest place in the whole northern part of Mexico.

Vicente was trying, very hard, not to be affected by her beauty. He was trying very hard not to notice her tall, slim body, the perfect, regal beauty of her face, and her small, curved rump. He was trying very hard not to think of kissing that delectable, over-worked mouth of hers into submission, into silence. She talked too much. She wore too much make-up. And she did smell like a sewer. But she was hot. And him . . . hell, *se le paró la verga* . . .his dick got hard. . . just by looking at her.

She was damned lucky that he'd seen her at the bar, for if he hadn't taken her with him, she'd have been gang-raped by now, or worse. He shook his head, thinking that the little lady had no idea of what she was up against. *El Santo*. He'd tie her to a bed and have his way with her, and then let his whole men do so. *El Santo's* men took pleasure in pain, and just thinking of the things they could do to her made his insides clench in fury. Most of the young women in *Juarecito* had already been taken by *El Santo's* men, most of them had

died from the abuses they'd been subjected to, and now the pueblo was dying from hunger, from desperation, and from despair.

Vicente had to scare away the American, he had to be rough, because as it was, the pretty lady thought she could get her car back, wheedle it away from 'El Santo'. Of course, she had no idea how things worked around here, so he couldn't blame her. Her car was probably on it's way to bribe a government official, or had already been used to transport drugs across the border, only to be left abandoned afterwards. If the lady knew what her car must be doing right now, she'd have no desire to see it ever again.

Vicente planned to head for the border first thing in the morning. He needed his passport and visa in order to pass her through, and if they left early in the morning, he guessed he could have her in US territory at least by noon. He couldn't get there soon enough to suit him, for every second he spent with her was testing his efforts in controlling the raging desire she stirred in his very male, very healthy body.

He jerked from his thoughts when she exited the bathroom. His mother's dress clung to the curves of her body like a bodysuit, and since she was so slim the dress reached down to her ankles. The green and wine floral pattern somehow softened her appearance, made her look more feminine and motherly. Her face was fresh without paint, and he was struck by the virginal beauty of it. She had beautiful blue eyes, tilted at the ends, and a lush, pouty mouth. Her nose was slim and elegant, and her cheekbones high and proud. She'd combed her damp blonde hair backwards and held it back with a sash. His mother had very small feet, so he'd given her a pair of bed slippers for shoes, and they displayed the beautiful curve of her naked ankles in a way that made him want to run his tongue along the skin there. He was usually a man of few words, and now, he was even more so. She was beautiful . . . and he was speechless.

"I look horrible," she said in disgust, looking down at herself with a frown.

"It's not a beauty contest." His voice sounded alien and rough, even to himself.

Her eyes fell to his mariachi pants which he'd thrown over the bed. She walked towards them, began inspecting them, touching the waist, the pockets. "What excellent workmanship," she said. He watched while she did so, distracted by the way her breasts heaved at each breath she took.

She looked up at him, suddenly nodding very effusively. “Thank you,” she said, her eyes steady on his as she walked towards him. “I really appreciate what you’re doing for me.”

He was very still as she approached, afraid to move. The way her hips swayed as she walked towards him, the way her lips parted and her eyes shimmered, robbed him of all breath. She paused only a foot away from him and lowered her voice to a sultry whisper. “How can I even thank you?” Her breath fanned his face, and shyly, she placed a little hand over his chest.

She wanted him, she wanted him as much as he wanted her. The realization made the blood simmer in his veins like lava. His gaze fell to her lips, and he groaned deep in his throat, wrapped his arms around her waist, and kissed her.

He was not a sweet kisser.

When he wanted something, it was with a fierce passion, and right now, he wanted nothing but her. His tongue pillaged her mouth. She kissed him back, meeting his strength and passion, and he was surprised at the fury in her kiss, and at how sweet she tasted. He pulled away, short of breath. “You don’t want to get involved with a man like me,” he warned her in a low voice. She batted her heavy eyelashes, her lips moist from his kiss.

“Oh, yes, I do,” she said, pulling him by the collar of his shirt so that their lips fused together once more. Her hands roamed his body greedily, wandered along his stomach, onto his hips. He groaned deep in his throat and claimed her mouth with a sure thrust of his tongue, until the stinging, wrenching, blinding pain in his balls made him double over in pain, the air tearing from his lungs. He heard her feet shuffle over the floor, heard a door open, and he cursed under his breath, cupping himself in his palm for a few more seconds before he stormed after her.

He grabbed her arm just as she reached his truck. He hauled her to him in a vicious yank, his face an inch from hers. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Let me go, please, please,” she begged, her eyes wild.

“Do you want to get yourself killed?” he demanded, jerking on her arm and dragging her through the side of the house towards his room, side-stepping a roaming chicken in the process.

“No, please, I beg you, let me go,” she said, trying to yank free of his hold.

His hold was brutal on her arm as he dragged her back into his shack and shoved her down on the bed. She bounced at the impact and scrambled backwards in an attempt to get away from him.

He planted his hands on his waist and looked down at her ominously. She was going to get it good, the little bitch.

She shook her head wildly and inched back in the bed.

“Please,” she whispered, shaking her head.

“Stop this whimpering, I’m not going to hurt you,” he said in a stern voice, barely being able to hold his anger in check. He would have enjoyed nothing more at this moment than to spank her, or fuck her, or both. His balls still ached from her knee-jerk, except now, now they also hurt with another kind of need. “Just listen to me, and listen well.”

She bit her lip, nodding.

“Tomorrow morning I’m taking you back to the States, where you belong. This is no place for a woman like you, no place for anyone. Your car is as good as gone, and so are your things, and I strongly suggest you leave it like that. *El Santo* is a dangerous man, you do *not* want to get involved with someone like him. Understand? *Me entiendes?*”

She nodded, trembling.

“Now about this little stunt of yours . . .” He took step forward, his jaw set tightly. “That was a very bad idea, teasing me like that. *Muy, muy mal, señorita.*”

Her chin trembled, and she looked at him with fear in her lovely blue eyes. “You said you weren’t going to hurt me . . .” she whispered.

He stared at her, her chest heaving. He wanted to show her she did not mess around with him unless she was prepared to handle the consequences, so he came forward and sat on the side of the bed. She tensed when he slowly slid a calloused palm up her knee, then upward along her inner thigh. She held her breath and watched, wide-eyed, as his hand disappeared beneath the dress. “I’m not. I’m just going to give you a little taste of your own brew. You don’t play with fire unless you’re ready for the burn. . .”

“Oh, God,” she whispered, her eyes misting with tears . . . and with desire. “You’re not even a mariachi, are you?”

“No, sweetheart, I’m not. But I can sing to you tonight.” His hand traveled further up her legs until he cupped her there, in the heart of her womanhood, her heat almost

scorching his hand. "I'll sing anything you want me to, as long as I get a taste of this." He squeezed her cunt gently and though she bit her lower lip in an attempt to hold it back, a moan tore from her chest. Dampness seeped from her underwear to his hand, and he realized she was wet, *very* wet for him. The realization made him feel extremely aroused, made his cock strain with pressure against his jeans. He felt powerful, knowing he could take her if he wanted to, and she'd be able to do nothing about it.

"You're wet for me," he said. "This excites you, doesn't it?"

She shook her head, denying it.

"Yes, it does," he whispered as his fingers slowly parted the elastic of her panties and he slid two fingers to graze her curls. She drew a quick intake of breath and when he noticed this, his smile was wicked. "You want me."

"No," she denied.

"You do," he whispered as he mercilessly pulled on her panties, tearing them open, then slid a finger inside her, deep into her vagina, making her moan. "I want you, too." He circled her clit with his thumb, looking down at her lovely face while he did so. She arched her hips to his touch, wanting it, silently begging for it. His cock was ready to explode. "I'll give it to you, baby, I'll give it to you if you want me to."

She bit back a moan as his finger continued to slide in and out of her cunt, past the slick, pink folds of her sex and between her tight, wet muscles.

"Do you want it, or should I stop?" he asked in a hot whisper.

She thrust her face from side to side, the pleasure of this forbidden moment nearly excruciating to her. "Please," she whispered.

He bent down so his lips grazed over hers. "Please what, *chiquita*? Please what?"

For a moment all he could hear were the shallow sounds of her breathing. And then he realized she wasn't going to answer him. She didn't want the responsibility of actually saying out loud that she wanted him, and he swiftly realized this. But Vicente had his own problems. He didn't want the responsibility of taking her, claiming her, without knowing for certain that she wanted him to. He had enough trouble sleeping at night.

"When you're ready for it, let me know," he said with a mean smile, discarding her torn panties to the floor when he withdrew his hand. As if he weren't even remotely

affected by her, which he was, but was trying hard to hide, he walked across the room and stared blankly out the window.

Vilma felt his fingers slip away and watched him silently walk across the room. She was feverish, panting, and ashamed. She sat up on the bed and futilely tried to compose herself. Her sex was tight and aching for his touch, and her whole body shook from the want. She shouldn't want him, she knew, but she did. She had never, ever been touched like this . . . and by someone like him. The men she'd dated were either men in business suits, or waiters lusting after Hollywood. If she even compared him to them, her past lovers seemed like toddlers now. His macho, domineering way appealed to her submissive womanly instincts like she could have never imagined. A part of her wanted him to take her, wanted to play coy and say no, but be taken nonetheless. But he said she'd have to let him know when she was ready. *Now*, she'd wanted to scream, but she'd bit back the word. Although her body responded to him with unrestrained mad-hot desire, her brain repelled against the idea, furiously reminding her that she had no desire to be involved with someone like him. He looked very dangerous, and even if he claimed he had her best interests at heart, she was still at risk. This might even be a kidnapping, or a million other bad things. And yet for some inexplicable reason, Vilma was not afraid of him anymore. He did have mean looks, but she'd already seen how his eyes shone when he looked at his mother, and there was something about his brusque manner that made her believe he was hiding a much tender, vulnerable side of him. A side that a macho man like him would never openly admit to, of course. Still, he could have forced himself on her, and the fact that he hadn't made her think he wasn't totally without scruples. He'd been a lawyer, he'd said.

“Why were you dressed as a mariachi tonight?” she asked, staring at his broad back for a moment, and then her eyes wandered over the dozens of mariachi hats hanging against the wall.

“I was looking for someone.”

The hats were all shapes and sizes in the most extravagant combination of colors.

“Do you collect all these hats?”

“You should mind your own business,” he said, though not very harshly.

After a moment’s silence, he spoke. “My father was a mariachi. He used to sing at that bar . . . they called him *El Musico*, because he loved music so much, and his mariachi was the famous Mariachi Original – mariachi have names, and his was legendary around these parts.” His big shoulders slumped, as if in defeat. “He wanted me to be a mariachi, just like he was, and he spent months saving to buy a mariachi outfit for me. The first night he took me to sing with him. . . “ He ran a restless hand through his hair. “There was a gun fight between the leaders of two cartels. He was killed, and although I was there, I couldn’t do anything about it. I was ten at the time, but I remember it so clearly . . . it could have been yesterday.”

After a long silence, she said, “I’m so sorry.”

“He wasn’t the only civilian that died. There were many more . . . there always are. After that, I swore to myself I would study law and put those bastards in jail, where they belong.”

“Did you?” she asked softly.

He shook his head. “I studied both here and in the states—I’ve got some relatives in Texas. I needed to be the best lawyer I could be, so I could lock up those bastards.” There was a long silence. “When I finally found enough evidence, I made a case that would bring them down, both of them, only the judge was bought, and they let the bastards go on insufficient grounds.” He snorted. “There were witnesses and they suddenly disappeared, there were dead bodies with bullet holes the size of Tijuana, who suddenly died of natural causes. It’s been a big lesson for me, realizing there is no way that in this country there can be any justice.”

“Was one of those men *El Santo*?”

“Yes.”

“What about the other one?”

“He’s dead. Now it’s just *El Santo*.”

“What happened to him?”

He didn’t answer her, and for a moment she realized that she might not want to know the answer to that.

“You were looking for him tonight, weren’t you?” she asked.

“No. I was waiting for him.”

And she'd stumbled by and ruined his opportunity to kill him? she wondered.

She rose from the bed and walked slowly towards him, her bare feet silent on the floor. “Have you ever thought of leaving here? I've seen other places in Mexico, peaceful, beautiful places, not like it is here.”

He was silent, staring out the window, as if lost. “I just can't let them get away with it. I owe that to my father.” He turned and looked at her with a dark, tortured gaze. “They call me *El Diablo*,” he said thickly. “They say I'm possessed by the devil, and maybe I am. The hatred burns me like poison. All I think of, all I want to do, is kill him. My mother has suffered deeply. After father died, she could barely find money to eat. I had to rob and steal to bring food to the table . . . there was nothing else a ten year old could do but that . . . or join them like everyone else, which I would *never* do.”

Vilma could only feel pain for him, and for the people of this country, who suffered so.

He shook his head in despair. “The government makes the cartels, it feeds the evil, compensates it, rewards it. All because of money, because of power. Evil rules here, and the good men, men who love their families, who sing and make people smile, die.”

“I don't presume to know what your father was like, but do you really think he'd want you to be like this? I'm sure he'd have wanted you to go on, be a good man like he was.” She lifted a hand to cup his jaw and pressed her palm against his flesh, the stub of beard grazing softly against her skin. Her thumb wandered over his lips and slowly traced their soft, plump flesh and form.

He seemed burned from her touch, and he quickly jerked away. “Go to sleep, it's late,” he said gruffly.

He walked towards a closet and pulled out a blanket, then carried it towards the corner of the room, a few feet away from the endless row of wooden guitars. Quietly, he lay down on the floor and covered himself, and when she realized he didn't want to talk anymore, she silently headed for the bed.

“What's your real name?” she asked as she rested her head back on the pillow and pulled up the covers.

He hesitated before he said, “Vicente. Vicente Sanchez.”

“Vicente, I’m Vilma.”

He didn’t reply.

“Again, I really appreciate your help,” she said.

His silence was ominous.

“Goodnight, Vicente.”

For hours she did nothing but toss and turn over the bed, until she finally drifted to sleep, only to have horrible nightmares. She dreamt about him. He had the face of the devil, deep red horns sticking out from the dark black hair in his head. He was making gory love to her in the middle of the desert, and she was crying out in both pleasure and pain. She was loving it. Then she heard gun shots, and when she turned her head sideways she saw her pretty car driving past the road. It looked older than she’d remembered, the shiny red paint looked dull now. On the hood, read the word ‘Fuck you’ in black spray paint. The man driving it was very ugly and filthy, and he was listening to her Ipod while he drove at neck-breaking speed, a cigarette in mouth, while a loose woman beside him tore away her passport in a wicked diversion, laughing a witch’s laugh.

“Wake up, you’re dreaming,” said an angry voice, and she jolted upright on the bed, breathless and sweaty. Vicente towered beside her, his face shadowed in the dark. She was shaking, could barely catch her breath, and she felt suffocated. She tried to speak but all that came out was a low, pitiful whimper.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and wrapped his arms around her. He pressed her face to his chest.

“It’ll be fine,” he said gruffly. “Tomorrow you’ll be safe home. I promise you.” She nodded against his chest and now she believed him, now she did believe him, with all her heart she did. He was the only bit of hope offered in this horrible situation, and she clung to it – to *him* – like a lifeline.

“I believe you, I do,” she whispered. He pulled away and looked down at her face in the dark, brushed aside a tendril of hair that clung to her sweaty forehead.

“I know this is the last place in the world you’d rather be,” he said in an attempt to comfort her. But his words didn’t comfort her. In fact, they made her feel greatly concerned, because she now realized that although she hated being in this sorry place, she actually liked being in his arms. Very much so. His hold was intimate, comforting, and

deliciously warm. She looked up at his shadowed face, and suddenly all she could see from his lean, masculine features were his lips.

“Don’t look at me like that,” he said in a deep voice. “Unless you mean it.”

Yes, she meant it. In her dream, he’d been the very devil himself, making love to her, and she’d been wet and aching for him. She still was . . . She inched closer so that her lips grazed his while she took his hand in hers and slowly guided it to her breast. She pressed his palm against her breast and whimpered softly when his fingers curled around it, squeezed it gently. She parted her legs and reached for his other hand and ever so slowly guided it downwards, past the skirt of the dress, and to her wet sex.

She met his gaze when his hand settled there, her eyelids feeling hot and heavy. His eyes were dark and stormy, brimming with heat and desire as he looked at her. He moved his thumb to circle her clitoris every so slowly. She whimpered, closed her eyes as his thumb stroked her clit, sent the blood rushing inside her, at the same time his other thumb circled her nipple, teasing it through the fabric of her dress.

“Lie down,” he said softly.

She lay down on the bed, engrossed as she watched him remove his shirt and jeans. Through the darkness, she could make out his magnificent, hard figure, and when he came closer to her, she bit her lower lip at the sight of his erection, aiming high and proud. It was huge, rising from a matt of dark black hair, sticking out into the air like a knight’s sword above a pair of round, prominent balls. His whole body towered above hers, over six feet of hard male body. He looked like a modern day He-man, strong and hard and gorgeous, and Vilma could never remember wanting anything more than the way she wanted him now.

“Don’t look at me like that,” he whispered. “I’m not your hero, Vilma.” As if he couldn’t stand the look in her eyes, he gently lifted the dress up to cover her face, and uncovered her whole naked body beneath, from her breasts to her ankles. She was completely naked, her skin felt cold and exposed to his gaze, and her nipples tingled. Again she felt a puddle of desire cascade within her when she felt his hands force her legs open like a scissor. She couldn’t see him, and yet this made her acutely aware of every touch, every sound, as she breathed harshly against the cotton cloth of the dress that completely covered her face. She could have been the body of anyone to him, a faceless, nameless female whom he could pleasure himself with. And he, he could be any lover of the night,

any man she'd wanted him to be. And she wanted it to be him, only him, her mean-looking mariachi lover.

His hands caressed her inner thighs slowly for several long, interminable minutes. Her breathing was harsh and rapid against the tent of the fabric over her face, and it made her own hussy sounds echo in her ears like a porn film. His hands moved to her sex—they took an eternity to get there. He placed a hand on either side of her pink, wet lips and spread them open. She eagerly waited for his touch, not knowing when it would come. He was watching her, she could feel his eyes stroke the glistening folds of her sex as if they were his hands. And then, while his hands forced her sex open and stretched her lips from side to side, he licked her, like a dog, with a quick flick of his tongue, and it brought out a scream from her, an agonized scream full of pleasure that was muffled by the fabric of the dress over her face. A long moment ensued, and she could hardly breathe in expectation, until she felt it again. The feel of his soft, sure, slick tongue tasting her cunt was sheer torture to her being. He licked her quickly, just one rapid flick of his tongue, one small taste, and she arched her hips wantonly, begging for more.

He moved, and she felt the mattress shift under his weight as he settled between her legs, his shoulders pressed against her inner thighs. He ran his tongue down the length of her pussy, only this time, he thrust it inside her while his hands continued to part her lips for the intrusion.

She felt vulnerable, and yet completely desirous of his touch, his lips. She groaned when his tongue speared inside her, each spear deeper than the last, until he dragged it upwards to circle the nub of her clit. She raked her nails into the bed sheets and rocked her hips against his mouth, moaning in pleasure.

His tongue left her and she closed her eyes as she fought for breath, acutely aware of the warm, stinging pain between her legs. Her own labored breaths ricocheted against the cotton of her dress, making the air she breathed hot and heady. She felt swollen for him, felt her entrance engorged and open, and she desperately wanted, needed him to touch here there. She heard rustling sounds, movements, until she felt him settle between her legs, only this time, she felt his hips brush against hers while a hand cupped her breast. She arched her hips in silent invitation, whimpered in need, desperately wanting him to enter

her. Instead, she felt the tip of his cock tease her. He rubbed it down from her clit down to her ass, and then back up.

She was dying with desire, and when she lifted her hands to the air in the search for something to hold on to, he manacled her wrists with one hand and forced them behind her head, pinning them there while he continued to rub the tip of his cock to and fro. When he slowly slid his dick inside her, she bucked beneath him, wanting him to dive deeper, to fill her completely. He thrust inside her fully, making her cry out in pleasure, while his hand still pinned her wrists behind her head, and his other hand brutally fondled her breast. The thick curls at the base of his shaft grazed against her own curls in hard, raspy tickles, and his cock stretched her cunt as it made it's way in, taking her completely. She felt tight and wet and ready to explode when he retrieved his cock from inside her.

She groaned in protest and whimpered when he left her. She could feel him now standing beside her, could envision him looking down at her with his cock high and mighty, his eyes roving over her sweaty naked body as it writhed over the bed, begging for his touch, her face covered by the floral dress.

Suddenly he bent down and brushed his lips over hers, their breaths mingling through the fabric of the dress.

“Do you want me to look at your face when I make you come?” he whispered hotly. “Or do you want to take your pleasures from an unknown stranger?”

What she wanted was for him to fuck her. Fuck her *now*. But she was sick from the want, the need, and she could hardly breathe, much less speak. When she didn't answer, he pulled the dress from her face and before she could open her eyes he thrust his tongue into her mouth for a brutal, possessive kiss. He tasted like her, and she kissed him back with all the hunger and desire she felt. His tongue sank into her mouth with long, decisive thrusts. She met his thrusts equally, moaning with pleasure and at the delicious way their tongues dueled.

He pulled away brusquely and stood at the edge of the bed, looked down at her with hot, black eyes. “*Mamame la verga*,” he ordered roughly. He grabbed fistfuls of her hair and thrust his big cock into her mouth. “It means suck my dick.” He urged her face to and fro as his hips moved in unison. She moved her tongue along his length, tasted every inch

of his hard male cock, and when it was all glistening and wet with her saliva, she drew it further into her mouth and sucked on it greedily. He groaned, pushed into her mouth again and again, until he pulled away with notable effort.

“I want to see your pretty angel face when you come,” he rasped as he moved and settled his big, sweaty male body over her soft pliant female one. “And I want you to look at my devil’s face when I come inside you.”

“Please, Vicente,” she whispered.

“*Callate, chiquita, y dejame quererte,*” he whispered, the words unintelligible to her, but nonetheless endearing in the way he said them. He pushed his cock inside her, and she gasped, wrapped her arms around his back, and pulled him to her. She was already on the brink, and it only took one more deep thrust to send her whirling into oblivion. He followed her, still pushing inside her while he shuddered for long, endless seconds.

Vilma fell asleep in his arms, and Vicente clutched her to him when she did so. He didn’t sleep at all.

three

“Get up, time to go.”

Vilma forced her eyes open, momentarily blinded by the sunlight that streamed through the small window. Vicente stood bathed and ready in a brown and gold mariachi suit, with matching hat. He thrust something into her arms.

“Here, put this on.”

Vilma stared down at the mariachi suit, white with silver, and she watched Vicente cross the room and fling her a white and silver hat as if it were a frisbee. “Hat, too.”

“Thank you, but I think I prefer the dress,” she said at last. She felt a bit stung that he hadn’t woken her up with kisses and caresses, especially after last night.

“Put the mariachi outfit on and let’s go, we’re losing time.”

“But I don’t *want* to put it on,” she insisted. “I’m not crossing the border looking like that.”

“We’re not crossing the border just yet, Vilma. We’re getting your car back, now move it, I’ll wait for you in the truck.” And with that he grabbed a pair of guitars from the floor and left her staring after him. For a moment her heart fluttered inside her chest in a whirlwind of emotions. He was getting her car for her! She was very excited, until she stared down at the outfit. Why would she need to dress as a mariachi?

She had no idea of what he was planning but she was going to find out. She dressed as quickly as she could, combed her hair back, and with no make-up except a lip gloss she carried in her small clutch purse, she tried to look as decent as possible. The mariachi outfit was loose on her body, but it sparkled and shone, and for some reason she could tell this white outfit was used for special mariachi occasions, because the embroidery was even more detailed than that of the other outfits she’d seen. When she set the hat on her head, she smiled and winked at herself in the mirror. She decided she would later ask him if he’d let her buy the outfit, for it would make a very original (and authentic!) Halloween costume. She was definitely tired of the French maid outfit she always wore. The truck was already humming its engine by the time she strolled outside, and she’d barely boarded when it screeched on reverse and pummeled ahead.

“Okay, what’s the plan?” she asked, all business.

He was silent, his gaze fixed on the road straight ahead as he drove. He looked gorgeous this morning. He’d placed his brown hat between their seats and his hair looked slightly rumpled. His features looked even more chiseled against the blazing sunlight. His nose was sleek and dominant, and his square jaw boasted a several day’s growth of beard that was darker than yesterday’s, making him look even more dangerous. She hadn’t noticed the cleft in his chin, and the way his chin thrust outwards in his face, possibly implying that he had a stubborn streak. His eyebrows were winged and elegant, and a shade darker than his eyes. Her eyes settled on his hands and her stomach clenched when she remembered the magic and havoc they’d caused in her body last night. It had been so surreal, that she wondered for only a moment if it had really happened. But of course it had, because she felt relaxed and happy, only he seemed to be tense and awkward.

“Just let me handle it,” he finally said.

“Can we at least stop to get breakfast?” she asked, clutching her stomach. He muttered something under his breath but nodded. They stopped at a cantina which she momentarily doubted would have breakfast, but as it was, this was apparently the only place for breakfast in town. The plates and glasses were chipped, there was no menu, and they had to sit at the bar since the tables were being cleaned and the floor mopped. Vicente ordered for both of them and within minutes she was eating a delicious taco with eggs and chorizo and fried beans on the side. This was, of course, not very dietetic, but she was starved, and it was delicious. Besides, the good news was that Vicente thought her ass was skinny. Cheers for that.

“Did you know I’m a waitress?” she said conversationally. He didn’t answer, but she took that as a no, so she continued. “It’s just a temp job while I save and finish college. I dropped out after I . . . well, there was this guy and I . . . never mind.”

“Tell me,” he said with a hint of a smile on his face.

She shrugged. “He was a real loser, and I was even worse for even listening. He brainwashed me and got me into waitressing at Jugs—it’s this restaurant where you get tips depending on the size of your, er, endowments. Anyway, he got me a job there, made me drop out of college, and for years I kept making money just so he could take it away from me . . . then I caught him in bed with that slut Bianca . . . anyway, I’m planning to go back to college but in the meantime I’m just a waitress. It’s a fun job, the salary is not much but if you do it with good humor and show enough of your endowments, you can get very good tips. Tips for tits, my friends always say.”

She giggled softly, then felt ridiculous and incredulous for having told him almost everything about her life in less than an hour. After saying it out loud, and in such a short summary (had she forgotten something maybe, or was it that short and uneventful?), she realized her life sounded boring and sad. She had never thought of that until now. Why did her life seem predictable, with little meaning, and so very pitiful now? Maybe this horrible situation turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Already she’d had the best orgasm of her life and just that simple but very important fact made things seem a little less gloomy. The way he’d looked at her last night . . . She gulped remembering. He’d looked as if he’d wanted to eat her alive, as if he were burning for her, desired her to no reason. She really had to stop thinking about that, because he sure didn’t look as if he remembered.

When they arrived at center of *Juarecito*, Vicente got busy asking questions. Every time he saw a 'suspect' as Vilma thought to herself, he would pull over, get down, and ask for information. Vilma watched from the truck, and she always knew when Vicente mentioned *El Santo* because everyone started praying and crossing themselves. Sometimes she wouldn't pay much attention to that, for she was too distracted appreciating Vicente's incredibly big, incredibly muscular, incredibly good-looking male body. He did have the hardest, cutest male butt she'd ever seen. She envisioned how tight and hard it must have looked when he was ramming his cock inside her and felt a rush of heat at the thought. Their last stop was at street corner where they found three mariachi playing their guitars. Vicente only exchanged a few words with them, but there was a hint of a smile when he came back to the truck.

"Anything yet?" she asked eagerly.

"*El Santo* has a party tonight, and he needs a mariachi band to sing for him," he said. Her eyes nearly popped out of their sockets, and her heart raced excitedly against her chest. Did this mean . . . ?

"Are we going, Vicente?" she asked eagerly.

"I am," he said as he took out his gun, clicked open the chamber to verify the contents—and yes, there were bullets there—closed the chamber, and slid it back into place.

She worried her lower lip with her teeth. "Is it dangerous?" she asked shakily.

"Yes," he said flatly.

She squared her shoulders. "Then I'm coming, too."

"No, you're not."

"It's my car!"

He stared at her ominously, his scowl deep. "You could get in trouble, Vilma."

"But you'll be there to save me. So I'm coming!"

"Fine."

She really didn't expect him to fold this quickly, but then he was from Mars, wasn't he? And he did say he'd save her, didn't he, or what kind of response was 'Fine'? she wondered worriedly.

“Maybe you’re right and I should forget the car?” she finally said, wide-eyed now. You never got to test your courage until a certain moment in life, and now that it was here, Vilma realized one itty bitty new thing about herself that she had never realized up until now: she was a real coward. And scared shitless.

He chucked her chin, his gaze solemn and serious. “I’ll get it for you. By the time you get out of here it’ll be as if nothing ever happened.”

“Nothing?” She stared at him blankly.

“Nothing.”

She scratched her temple pointedly, narrowing her eyes in thought. “Nothing except last night, you mean?”

He ignored her completely, staring straight ahead as he drove through town. “We need to stop somewhere for a few hours, the party is until nine.”

She nodded and let him guide the way, her thoughts racing in worried preoccupation.

Vicente rented a room at a small, cheap motel and once they were settled inside the room, he closed the sheer white curtains and removed his bolero jacket, exposing a thin white cotton shirt underneath. Vilma was sprawled with her stomach flat on the bed and resting on her elbows as she played with the TV remote control and complained about not being able to see any channels. For an inexplicable reason, Vicente wanted to give her what she wanted, and what she wanted was her car. He’d do anything to get it for her, and he would do so tonight.

Last night with her had been . . . there were no words to describe what he’d felt. He couldn’t even see her because of the sheer intensity of the emotions she made him feel. It was as if taking something so pure, so innocent and virginal, he’d been cleansed somehow. For this whole day he’d thought of nothing but her, of pleasing her, *not* of killing El Santo. Maybe he was not such a devil, maybe there was something in him still worth saving. But it was unfair of him to ask this of her, unfair to ask a beautiful, incredible woman to give up her life in order to try to save his. He had no desire to do this, for what he wanted was

bringing a smile to her face, and maybe, just maybe, for once in his life, by finding her car, he'd be a hero – at least in *her* eyes. But he wasn't a hero, was he? A man like him could never be.

He'd been thoughtful all day, and though he'd noticed she was talking in part because of the awkwardness between them, he didn't care, because he loved the way she talked, the nonsense and the intelligent things she said. Both.

She sighed in exasperation and folded her legs up on the bed as she sat up and glowered at him. "Vicente, are we even going to *talk* about last night?"

He stared at her grimly and crossed his arms across his chest as he leaned back against the window. "No."

"No?" she repeated, her golden eyebrows rising in disbelief.

"No." His face was set, the conversation being finished. Or so he thought . . .

"You're being a Martian." She pouted her lush, thick lips—lips he wanted to suck.

"¿*Perdon?*"

"You're being a Martian," she explained with the know-it-all look of a therapist.

"You're hiding."

He laughed, a low, cynical laugh. "I don't think so."

"Yes you are!" She rested her elbows on her knees and her chin on the back of her hands as she studied him, engrossed. "Can you at least tell me why we *can't* talk about it?"

He clenched his hands into fists. "Because I do not want to, Vilma. Now stop this."

"But *I* want to talk about it, does that even matter to you?" she prodded.

"What is it that you expect me to say to you?" His voice was low and threatening as he walked towards the bed. Her smile faded at his next words, and he knew what he said next was not what she'd wanted to hear. "That it was a mistake? That I shouldn't have touched you? That I'm trying to forget it?"

"Well," she said shakily. "That wasn't precisely what I had in mind, but—"

He silenced her with a kiss. His lips swooped down over hers and took possession of her mouth. He cupped the back of her head with his hands as he deepened the kiss, thrust his tongue into her sweet, yielding mouth. When he pulled away he was breathless and panting like a bull with a hard-on.

“Don’t stop,” she whispered, her eyes brimming with desire, her lips moist from his kiss. “How do you say ‘kiss me’ in Spanish?”

“Besame.”

“Vicente, *besame . . . porfavor*,” she breathed, smiling at the last word because it was one of the few words she knew in Spanish. It meant please.

He brushed his lips to hers while a low, deep growl tore from his lips. “You don’t mean it, Vilma, you don’t want to get involved with someone like me. I have no feelings. . . I can be vicious, worse than *El Santo*. . .”

She sank her fingers into his hair and clutched his face in desperation. “How do you say ‘shut up and fuck me’ in Spanish?”

He was hard as iron and burning for her. His voice was so dry it almost broke. “Callate y cojeme.”

“*Callate y cojeme*,” she said breathlessly. The words coming from her lips were suicidal, and he could feel his skin begin to perspire. He could handle many things, and his iron-will was almost legend around these parts, for Vicente was a hard man. But this . . . he couldn’t take it. Yes, he was shutting up and fucking her senseless. Right now.

His eyes were fixed on hers when he removed her white embroidered pants, then slowly unclasped her bolero jacket and slid it past her shoulders to expose her round, heavy breasts. She watched intently while he did so, with blue eyes heavy with desire. He removed his own mariachi outfit, peeled off his white cotton shirt, and when he was naked, he stood before the bed and studied her naked body with a burning gaze.

She was flat on her back and resting on her elbows as she watched him. Her breasts were round and the areoles were pink and erect, begging for his attention. Her limbs were lean and long and slightly spread apart so he could see the wet, shiny folds of her arousal. The hair between her legs was trim and a few shades darker than her hair. He ached to bury his face there, he ached to smell her, ached to slide his tongue inside and taste her.

“How do you say ‘pussy’ in Spanish?” she whispered hoarsely.

“Panocha.”

She smiled the slow smile of a seductress and spread her legs wider apart. “Do you like my *panocha*, Vicente?”

He swallowed. “Yes.”

Her eyes fell to his throbbing cock, pulsing with want. “And how do you say ‘dick’ in Spanish?”

“Verga.”

“Hmmm, I like your *verga*, Vicente. I want to eat it, lick it, feel it inside my *panocha*.”

Her words immobilized him. His dick has never been this hard, it felt like iron. His American angel, talking dirty in both languages, drove him senseless.

“Shit, I want you,” he muttered hoarsely, shaking his head and trying futilely to convince himself that he shouldn’t take her. His eyes followed her when she rose from the bed and came before him. She knelt, cupped his balls in her hands, and the starved look in her eyes caressed his throbbing erection like a tongue would.

“I’m eating your *verga* right now,” she whispered before she took him in her mouth. He groaned deep in his throat when her lips enveloped the head of his dick and she sucked it into her mouth forcefully. His hands burrowed into her hair as she tilted it sideways to gain better access, tasting him, sucking him.

“Hmmm,” she said, then pulled him out and looked up at him. “*Verga . . . mmm, deliciosa.*” Delicious dick. Damn her, this woman was driving him crazy. All he wanted was to bury himself inside her and forget about everything. He shouldn’t give a damn if she regretted this afterwards. He shouldn’t give a damn if he hurt her. All he should give a damn about now was fucking her and coming.

“Come here,” he whispered as he pulled on her hair and lifted her to her feet. His muscles shook from the need he felt and if he’d wanted to be gentle, he wouldn’t have been able to. He grabbed her shoulders and harshly pulled her against him. He paused, his eyes hot on her face. “*Chiquita,*” he whispered before he dropped a kiss on forehead. “*Bonita.*” Another on her nose. “*Preciosa.*” One on her chin. “*Hermosa.*” And a long one, deep one, on her mouth.

Her lips were moist and plush against his, and he parted them with his tongue, kissing her fiercely while he rubbed his cock against her stomach in a frenzied passion. She smashed her body to his, rocked her hips against his own while her hands cupped the back of his neck and her mouth met his fierce kiss in kind. He cupped the back of her legs and

lifted her. She wrapped her arms tightly around him, all the while kissing him back, her tongue fast and furious with his.

Slowly, he lowered her to his cock. She gasped and threw her head back when he entered her. He cursed under his breath, the feel of her slick, taut muscles around his penis excruciatingly sensual.

“Yes, Vicente,” she gasped against his face. “Please . . . *porfavor.*”

“Like this?” He asked, ramming faster inside her, his hands squeezing the back of her legs hard as he held her.

She looked deep into his eyes. “Do you feel this?” Her breath was hot against his face. “Do you feel me around you?”

“Yes.”

“See? You’ve got feelings after all,” she breathed and kissed him softly on the lips.

It infuriated him, the way she was trying to make him feel as if he were a good man, a decent man, a normal man. He gritted his teeth and pushed her down on the bed. The mattress shifted under her weight, and before she could react, he grabbed her hair, turned her around, and forced her face down on the bed.

“I’m not your hero, Vilma,” he said viciously against her ear while his cock rubbed up and down the crevice between her buttocks. “I’ll show you what I’m really like.”

Her breathing was fast and labored. She moaned and bit her lower lip when his cock pummeled into her ass with brutal force.

“Now this is the real me,” he gritted as he held her hips in place and pushed into her, making her yelp in both desire and pain. She splayed her palms over the bed and fisted her fingers over it, clutching the sheet.

“Is this what you wanted, *puta*?”

She moaned in answer, and he bent forward, his lips grazing her ear. “*Put*a means bitch.” He licked her earlobe with his tongue. “And that’s what you are, aren’t you? A hot, horny little bitch . . . *una putita caliente* . . .” He thrust his tongue into her ear, his hips smashing against hers in fury. “Do you like it up the ass, Vilma? Do you?”

“Yes.”

Her voice was barely audible through their labored breathing, but he heard her, and with that he buried himself deep inside her with one final thrust and lost himself completely.

four

Men like 'El Santo' certainly knew how to party. Vilma had to blink her eyes twice to make sure she was seeing correctly. It was 8:50 p.m. and Vicente had parked his truck outside the big, walled territory of what looked like 'El Santo's' Mexican hacienda. It was a one-story castle. Really. The adobe type hacienda swept sideways like a winged beast, encompassing the land as far as the eye could see. Past an open foyer was a central main garden the size of a city park. The land was dry, but nonetheless, it was now occupied by very happy, very merry, very loud men. Hundreds of them. Women, scarcely clad in anything, sauntered around them, and though they were fewer than the men, Vilma could tell the men wouldn't mind sharing. Most of them had one hand on a bottle, and another on an exposed breast. Their clothes looked filthy and as Vicente and Vilma made their way to the far end of the garden where the rest of the mariachis had gathered, she could smell their stench and the mixture of alcohol and tobacco in their breaths.

"Face down I said," Vicente said beside her, squeezing her hand tightly. She stared down at her feet and followed him silently. He had told her repeatedly on their way there to keep her face lowered, but with all the commotion she'd heard, she'd momentarily forgotten. She was grateful the men were too busy smoking, drinking, and fondling the prostitutes to even notice her.

When they reached the other mariachis, Vicente didn't even introduce her, and she meekly kept her face lowered. She forgot about that important thing again when 'El Santo' appeared. She knew it was him because the crowd hushed and parted for him. Everyone,

even the most drunken men, stopped what they were doing, and turn to look at him in both respect and awe.

Vicente had been right after all.

She had no desire to meet, or get involved with the likes of him. Even from afar, she felt a surreal vibe from him, and it reeked of the devil. He was short and slim, with a scruffy brown beard, and shaggy oily hair which he didn't seem to wash very often. His teeth were yellow and crooked, and the gold one glinted when he smiled at the men. He held a gun in each hand, and when he reached the center of the crowd, he shouted something in Spanish and aimed at the sky before he fired them in unison. The loud cracking sound reverberated in her ears, almost deafening her.

“Que empieze la fiesta! Mariachi, porfavor,” el Santo said, pointing the guns towards the mariachis.

Her knees were trembling so hard she thought they would knock against each other. She should have done what any other waitress in L.A. would have done and that is to remain at the motel while he took care of the rest. But oh, no, Vilma wouldn't *be* Vilma if she didn't constantly get into trouble. She drew it in like a magnet. If there was any trouble within a short distance from her, she would find it, or if she didn't, it would find her.

Vicente's fingers curled around her arm and he pressed his chest to her back, bending low to whisper, “Stop staring, Vilma.”

“Okay,” she conceded in a whisper, dropping her gaze to the floor.

His lips grazed her earlobe. “You're being very disobedient. I'm going to have to discipline you when we get back.”

His words sent jolts of awareness through her body in fast, burning shivers. Suddenly, she hoped they could get this over and done with as soon as possible.

“Now let's play.”

They formed a line with the other mariachis, who were dressed in brown and gold like Vicente, and began to play. As soon as the music erupted, the men resumed their marijuana smoking and fondling of the women and took long swags of their beers. The mariachis moved like a caterpillar, slowly winding their way through the crowd, singing and playing and smiling. Vilma was supposed to stay with the group and keep her head down while her fingers pretended to pull at the strings of her guitar, and Vicente would part

ways and speak to some of the drunken men—his intention being to find out where her car was being kept. Only Vilma made one mistake as soon as Vicente broke from the line. A deadly mistake. She looked up only to stare at the mean, gleaming brown eyes of ‘El Santo’. He frowned when he met her gaze, and she quickly forced her eyes to the ground again. She yelped when he grabbed her elbow and pulled her to him.

“*Una bonita mariachita,*” he said, his eyes roving her face appreciatively. Vilma’s heart could have exited through her throat, it was beating right there as fast as a race car and on the verge of spilling. El Santo ran a finger along her jaw, his eyes narrowed and vicious as he looked at her. “*Vienes a entretenerme?*” he asked, his breath foul on her face.

Vilma could only think of one thing, and that was *not* to debate whether it was a good or bad idea. She licked her lips and lowered her eyes. “*Verga . . . mmmmm,*” she said.

El Santo’s eyes widened at her words. “*Si, si . . . Ya estoy duro, mi chula.*” It was something about him being ‘hard’ but she didn’t care to understand anything other than that. He wrapped a filthy arm around her shoulders and guided her across the crowd. She glanced backwards and saw that Vicente was watching, his hands into fists at his sides. He looked like he wanted to kill not ‘El Santo’ but *her*.

She shook her head helplessly and allowed ‘El Santo’ to guide her towards the back of the huge house. She knew full well that what ‘El Santo’ intended was to give her a sampling of his dick—*verga*—and she could only pray that Vicente would come to her rescue. Otherwise, she’d probably have to bite El Santo’s *verga* and run for her life! She felt no thrill at his odious touch, only disgust and fear. His fingers on her arm felt like coiled, slithering snakes, and it repulsed her, made the hair on her nape rise. Vilma wanted Vicente. Desperately so. Oh, dear, what was she to do? And why did she even think saying *verga* to him would improve her situation? The only thing she’d accomplished was that he would actually ‘let’ her taste it and she’d rather die before she did something so gross. She could only hope that if Vicente still wanted to kill ‘El Santo’, he would do so *before* he raped her.

‘El Santo’ pushed her into a dark, tiny room at the back of the house. It was occupied solely by rectangular packages wrapped in brown paper and placed in tall stacks in the center of the room. It was mighty inconvenient that now—now when she had to think

fast!—her brain was blank, and her whole body seemed frozen as she watched ‘El Santo’ drop his pants.

“*Ahora si, mi chula, chupame la verga,*” he said, his yellow-teethed smile was both vicious and disgusting. He looked down at his penis, small but hard, and wiggled it before her, as if it were a candy he wanted to taunt her with. Vilma felt the bile rise up to her throat, and wondered if she ran right now, if he had his guns hidden somewhere and would shoot her? Oh, God.

“Please,” she whispered, shaking her head. He looked baffled at her words, spoken in English.

“*A gringa?*” He chuckled, the sound like a nail file scraping. “I should have known there was no blonde woman in this stinking pueblo.”

“Please,” she said again, her eyes meeting his.

He laughed again, clutched his stomach as he did so. “You are at the wrong party, *gringa.*”

Vilma’s heart sank to her toes and tears welled in her eyes. What a sorry, sorry end it would be for Vilma McCarthy. The friendly, chatty waitress from L.A. For a fleeting instant she envisioned her parents, standing besides her grave, shaking their heads in disappointment. She envisioned her friends, shaking their heads, saying, “Vilma did always go looking for trouble.” Another might retort, “She asked for it, really. We told her driving to Los Cabos was a bad idea, but she insisted in getting miles on her Mazda.” And Vicente, damn him, where was that stupid, no-good—

“She’s with me.”

The voice came from behind her, and it was now as familiar to her as her own. She felt faint, dizzy by the sound of it, and for a moment she closed her eyes in relief.

“I know you,” El Santo said with a smile. “You’re *El Diablo.*”

“I am.” Vicente coiled an arm around her waist and pulled her back against him.

“People here are so stupid, eh? They call you *El Diablo*. You! A man who still thinks he can save the world . . . and me, *El Santo.*” He crossed himself solemnly, then laughed for a whole minute. Vilma thought he had a rotten sense of humor.

“The woman can go now,” Vicente said dryly.

“Oh, no, I don't think so, *compadre*,” El Santo said, shaking his head and clucking as he did so. “Not until I'm through with her.”

“She has no business with you.” Vicente shoved her behind him, blocking her with his chest, his big body providing shelter to her smaller one. “But I do.”

Vilma held her breath when she watched Vicente's hand move to the small of his back. His fingers curled around the brown-wood handle of his revolver.

“The only business I have with you, is saying *gracias, amigo*,” El Santo said. “You killed my sworn enemy, and thanks to you now the whole plaza is mine.” He laughed again, the odious sound echoing in the humid, hot room like a curse.

“Now that's something that can be easily remedied,” Vicente said in a steady voice before she heard the loud, booming gunshot.

The silence that ensued afterwards was as bad or worse than the gunshot itself.

Vilma clutched at Vicente's arm and cocked her head sideways to peek at 'El Santo'. He was on the floor, clutching his bleeding leg, a pained expression on his face. He was breathing hard and deep, and there was fresh blood sputtering from his knee and forming a puddle on the floor.

“*Hijo de puta!*” the drug-lord shouted.

Vicente took two steps forward and kicked his wounded knee, making El Santo cry out in pain just as he bent over him and retrieved both of his guns. He slid them effortlessly into his waistband of his jeans, took one step back, and aimed his revolver straight at his forehead. Vilma heard a low click. “No one calls my mother that.”

“Wait!” Vilma cried, her wide-eyes on Vicente's profile. “Vicente, do you really want to do this?”

He pursed his lips tightly. “Stay out of this, Vilma.”

“You don't have to do this, Vicente,” she pleaded. “What happened with your father was a long time ago. I know you don't want to do this.”

“Oh, yes, I do.”

“Vicente, don't you see? If you kill him it'll make you no worse than he is,” she pleaded. His expression was shadowed, but she could see the conflict in his gaze as her words sank in. A small tight muscle worked on his jaw. When he turned to look at her, he seemed lost.

“I already am, Vilma, can't you see that?”

“No, you are not!” she said vehemently. “You're a man, a wonderful man, while he . . . he's just . . .” She looked down at him in pity. “A cockroach.”

“Vilma . . .” Vicente began.

“Please, Vicente.”

He finally shook his head and lowered the gun. “Let's go.”

Vilma let out the breath she'd been holding and nodded briskly.

“*Hijo de puta!* Come and finish what you started, you son of a bitch!” *El Santo* cried after them.

But Vicente had made his decision. Vilma started to run for the front of the house but he pulled her back. “This way,” was all he said. They ran, ran as fast as they could, for in only moments one of the men would find ‘El Santo’ and if they came after them, they were dead. Vicente led her to a huge garage, and there, among dozens of cars, was her shiny red Mazda convertible MX-5.

Vilma saw it and surprisingly felt . . . nothing.

Her voice was just a whisper. “I don't think I want it anymore.”

Vicente glowered at her, panting fiercely. “Why in the hell not?”

“I don't want anything that man has ever touched. It looks dirty now . . .”

Vicente came forward and cupped her face with his hands. His eyes when he looked at her were deep and piercing. “I'm ten times dirtier than that car, Vilma, and you still had me.”

“I'd *still* have you,” she said brokenly.

“Then let's get your car and let's get out of here.”

He was right, of course. Vilma realized maybe she was just being childish. So that's just what they did. They got her car, and got out of there.

five

Vilma stared at the dark night sky and the numerous stars above, her head resting against the passenger seat of her Mazda. Meanwhile, Vicente moaned deep in his throat while his tongue flicked her puckered nipple in a slow, tantalizing motion.

After their close call with *El Santo*, he'd driven down a lonely stretch of highway for over two hours non-stop, and Vilma had been so shocked and rattled by what had just happened that she hadn't said a word since. He'd been quiet the whole time, until he sighed, pulled over, turned off the engine, and with a dark, tormented gaze said, "I'm not angry that you intervened, Vilma, if that's what worries you."

When she realized he was not going to beat around the bush, she said in all sincerity, "I'm sorry, Vicente. I know how you wanted to kill him." She did feel a little ashamed, that she'd taken his life's mission from him, but witnessing a murder, no matter how much the other party deserved to die, was something she hadn't been prepared for.

He gently reached to her lap, took her hand in his, and kissed the back of it. "On the contrary," he said, brushing the raspy stub of beard on his cheek against the softness of her hand. "You did me a favor. You probably did Mexico a favor . . . Cartels are more than just one man, Vilma," he explained. His expression looked softer under the moonlight, and as she gazed at his handsome face and simmering black eyes, her heart clenched. "You kill the head and ten other heads pop up. And then the killing gets worse because the ten heads fight for power . . . they *all* want to be the head, and things get nasty."

"I'm sorry," she breathed, spreading her fingers so that her palm cupped his strong, square jaw.

He nodded in understanding. "I know you are, *chiquita*. The only way to really fight a cartel without bloodshed is to stop taking their products. If there were no consumers, these assholes wouldn't even exist."

"I know."

He pursed his lips. "Problem is, a lot of Mexican officials get money from this shit, and the government does nothing to fight it, so it keeps getting worse."

"Oh, Vicente," she breathed softly, shaking her head ruefully.

His eyes fell to her lips, and a fire burned in his gaze. "I need to kiss you, Vilma."

It was all Vilma needed. All she wanted. “Oh, yes, I’d like that very much,” she breathed.

He kissed her slowly, pressed his lips to hers with the utmost gentleness. His teeth tugged at her lower lip, pulled it playfully, until finally his tongue entered the warm cavern of her mouth in a slow lover’s kiss that made her ache with need. With painstaking tenderness, he removed her bolero and moaned when he revealed her ample chest to his starving eyes.

He’d been sucking her tits for over ten minutes now, here, in the middle of nothing but desert land and beneath the starry night sky, and every time he suckled one of her swollen nipples, she felt a sting between her legs, each sting less intense than the one that followed. Now, every single stinging pain between her legs was extremely painful, and she clutched his head and moaned as she writhed in her seat.

“Vicente, please,” she begged.

He slid a hand through the waistband of her pants and, having torn her panties merely one night before, found her pussy waiting for his touch immediately underneath. She was flooded with hot, slick juices, and her entrance was already engorged and ready for his touch. His middle finger toyed with the nub of her clit when he found it, mimicking the slow, circular motions of his tongue on her puckered nipple.

Vilma felt like she was about to burst, so she splayed a hand over his chest and dragged it lower, lower, until she cupped his male hardness in her palm. His heat burned her through the material of his pants, and he was so full that his huge, throbbing manhood didn’t fit in her small hand. She squeezed his fullness and yelped, the sound muffled by his lips, when he thrust a finger deep inside her. His finger rubbed the walls of her muscles and the move was so painstakingly slow that she could burst any second now.

She briskly pulled on the button of his pants and zipper, then dove her hand into the elastic of his crisp cotton underwear. She shuddered when she felt the soft skin of his cock in her palm, it was burning in heat, and the tip of his cock was already damp with his own arousal—almost spilling before she’d even touched him.

They groaned in unison against each other’s lips when their hands began to move in a slow, endless rhythm, his finger sliding in and out of her wet cunt, and her hand moving up and down the length of his straining cock. They moved in perfect accord, their tongues

mimicking the moves of their hands, their breathing labored and echoing in the deathly silence of the night.

He came in her hand, spilling his warm semen over her skin, and she came in his palm, the dampness of her want flooding his hand in a small, soft wave. Their mouths remained locked together as tremors rocked their bodies until they fell back on their seats, limp, sated and panting.

Vicente swallowed hard as he stared up blindly at the sky. Vilma closed her eyes as she tried to regain her breath, but it took a few long minutes for her to do so. She had never felt the way she did now, for although her body was relaxed and sated, her heart was pounding hard against her chest because she knew, she knew as well as he did, that this had been their goodbye.

“I’m going to miss you, Vicente,” she said softly, her eyes on his profile as he started the car.

He nodded solemnly, steering the car onto the lonely dark highway.

Vilma feared she would break down and cry. There was something big caught in her throat and as much as she swallowed she couldn’t pass it down. “You should consider coming to California with me,” she said hesitantly.

“I’m sorry, I can’t.”

She *was* going to cry. “Why not? Is there something in particular you need to stay here for?” she asked, her voice shaking horribly now.

He had no answer for that. And she couldn’t speak anymore, for she had to turn to stare out at the road so he wouldn’t see her tears. Martians hated tears, didn’t they? Oh, but he wasn’t a Martian. He was a Mariachi . . . and that was a whole other breed of man. A breed in extinction. A breed worth saving. Worth fighting for.

Vilma scrubbed the top of the linoleum table with the damp cloth and felt her eyes sting again at the memory. How she wished she’d begged him to come with her when he’d left her at the border. He was hitching a ride back, or taking a bus, and yet she’d stood there for what seemed like an eternity, staring into his dark black eyes, waiting for him to change his mind. Instead he’d ruffled her hair, smiled wanly at her, and said, “Keep the outfit, you look good in it,” and then he walked away in his brown and gold mariachi outfit, his hat in his hand, and no guitar. They’d forgotten their guitars at *El Santo’s* party.

And after that day, Vilma forgot to smile.

She was no longer the funny, charming, talkative waitress at 'Jugs'. In fact, she'd probably be fired soon, for during the past two weeks she'd noticed the customers rarely appreciated her scowl, and she was daydreaming more than she wasn't, so her orders were getting mixed up, and everyone from the cooks to the customers were complaining. She heard one particular regular customer of hers speak to the manager and say, "Now, don't get me wrong, she's got real nice jugs, but you know, she seems like a bit *crazy* with that sudden crying of hers. Do you think she's on drugs?"

Vilma placed the dirty plates and glasses over the tray and carried them over to the kitchen counter. When she was crossing the restaurant towards a table that had just been occupied by a couple, she halted on her tracks when the glass doors swung open to reveal a vision. A dream. Her wildest dream.

A gorgeous, drop-dead mariachi, and his face was so familiar that her eyes nearly popped out of their sockets, and her heart couldn't have beat any faster than this.

He was dressed in a white mariachi outfit like the one she'd worn that day . . . except somehow he looked as if he were going to a wedding rather than having a showdown with 'El Santo'. His face was all hard angles, and perfectly shaven. He was, in fact, perfectly groomed, and just . . . perfect. Perfect for her.

His gaze settled on her and for a moment all she could do was hold her breath and meet his intense gaze with her heart in her eyes.

Vicente smiled, a slow sure smile that made her stomach constrict. "I heard someone is looking for a mariachi around here," he said in his beloved voice, low and husky. "Any idea who it might be?"

Vilma almost melted at his words. She crossed the space between them in a second, flung her arms around him and kissed him on the lips, oblivious to everyone in the room watching. He circled her waist with his arms and held her close against him, his lips both firm and tender on hers.

Vilma broke the kiss and smiled against his lips. "You just found her."

THE END