

GRINGA

In the Clutches of a Ruthless Drug Lord

A Mexican drug lord picks on the wrong girl. Sparks fly. Fists too.

A contemporary romance and romantic crime thriller.

A free book.

Book 1

By

Eve Rabi

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Smashwords Edition

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## **Table of Contents**

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Where to find Eve Rabi online](#)

[Love Stories by Eve Rabi](#)

## CHAPTER ONE

If I knew an asshole was going to murder me that warm, summer's day in Mexico, I'd have done things differently that morning. I would have had pizza for breakfast, skipped the sun screen and written my family a farewell letter.

The letter would be poignant and heartrending. I would have thanked them for the precious memories, told them how much I loved them, wished them ... wait! Would I have done that? Nah. I would have told them to go fuck themselves!

Yep, my letter would read something like this:

*Dad or Father – Never had the guts to tell you this, but I always craved your love. Growing up, I felt unwanted, alone, fatherless. Because of you, I'm screwed up. I date older men, borderline fucking pedophiles, because I'm constantly searching for a father figure.*

*Elaine, you came into my life and said, "Call me Mommy". You should have added "Dearest". You eroded every bit of self-confidence I had with your constant belittling. You called me fat, unattractive, slow, and I am what I am today because of you – angry, aggressive, defensive.*

*You really are a Wicked Stepmother. In fact, you make Cinderella's stepmother look like the Tooth Fairy on fucking weed. I think God has issues with me. She must have, if she took away my wonderful mother when I was just six and sent me you.*

*Paris, my stepsister, or Miss Los Angeles Diva 1999, as you like to be called. So beautiful, so striking, so nasty. Meaner than a Nevada rattlesnake, meaner than a scorpion and meaner than, well, a mean girl in high school. Spent my childhood living in your shadow. You took everything – my Barbies, my books, my best friends, 'cause you could. Then we grew up and you took my boyfriend. You stole Austin and married him. Quickly. Then you had his baby. Very quickly.*

*You had so many fans, but you had to have him, because I had him. I told you I was cool with the two of you hooking up – I lied. I told you I was happy for you both – I was faking it. I hurt like hell. I still do.*

*So, Adiós family. Now, go fuck yourselves!*

## CHAPTER TWO

I stare into the murderous, bloodshot eyes of a monster and I shake with fear. He's huge, dark and hairy. With a snarl, he whips out a gun and points it at me.

'I gon kill you,' he growls. What do you know – evil keeps its word. Without the slightest hesitation, he raises his 9mm and fires into my chest.

I'm lucky though, I don't feel much. Hitting the pavement hurts more than the bullet.

Amazingly, I'm still aware of my surroundings. I hear distant voices, whimpering, a child crying, heavy, deliberate footsteps approaching. Someone roughly picks up my limp body and walks with it. Then I'm free-falling.

Suddenly, I'm wet and cold and it's dark.

'Mommy,' I call, 'my bathwater's cold again. It's too dark, mom. Turn on the light.'

'It's okay, Payton,' my mom soothes. 'Don't fight it. Just come with me, baby girl. It's gonna be okay, I promise.'

'Mom, why didn't you take me to this *better* place everyone says you've gone to? Why did you leave me behind?'

I get no answer, just a melancholy smile from my mom.

### CHAPTER THREE

I wake up in a dimly-lit room. The putrid stench of decaying flesh assaults my senses. I look down at my body – it's heavily bandaged and I'm lying on some sort of narrow stretcher.

My eyes scan the room. It resembles a large tepee – smoky, warm and crowded with all sorts of weird things – small dead animals in jars, bottled herbs, large leaves piled one on top of the other and various bizarre concoctions. Freaky, like I'm in a witchdoctor's room. I need to get the hell out of here. I try to move, but the pain in my chest is so intense, I stop. Where the fuck am I? How come I'm hurting so much?

Over the next couple of minutes, the fog in my brain clears and I start to remember. Payton Wagner – that's my name. Twenty-one – University of Los Angeles, on holiday in Mexico with my deadbeat father and bitch of a stepmother. I remember us leaving our five-star holiday resort and visiting my stepsister Paris and her husband Austin in Siempre, a village in remote and mountainous Mexico.

Austin's an engineer with a year-long contract with the Mexican government – something to do with building bridges in isolated areas of Mexico. At first, I had declined Paris's invitation to join her, but she badgered us with messages, complaining that she desperately needed company. Since I secretly wanted to see Austin, I went along and a psycho tried to murder me.

The psycho! My breathing is suddenly erratic, there's roaring in my ears and my mouth gets dry. Am I still in his clutches? Is he here? Why the hell did he shoot me?

I rack my brain. I did nothing wrong – I was just taking holiday photos when I heard a bloodcurdling scream. This swarthy, hairy, giant of a nut job on a black horse, screamed and thundered towards me, his dreadlocks flying all over his angry mug.

I didn't know what he was saying but it sounded like he was calling me a spy. Like most tourists, my Spanish is limited to vacation words from a traveler's guide. There were many people around - why me? Fuck, I was scared. Especially when some people around me cowered and whispered, '*Santa María, ¡es Diablo! ¡Es Diablo!*' while others fell over each other, trying to leg it out of there.

Diablo, as they called him, jumped off his horse, stormed up to me, snatched the camera out of my shaking hands and smashed it to the ground. Then, he grabbed me by the scruff of my shirt, lifted me off my trembling feet and slammed me against a wall. I lay dazed while he ranted in Spanish. Suddenly, he grabbed me by the throat and started to strangle me.

I fought back, like I always do when I'm attacked - dug my nails into his calloused hands. That made him angrier - he shoved me away, pointed his gun at me and fired.

But I'm alive. I survived my own murder. Wow!

My recollection is interrupted by the sound of footsteps. I tense up, expecting the hairy sicko. Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

To my surprise, it's an old woman.

I exhale. No need to panic just yet.

The woman's eyes are wide with surprise. She claps her hands. 'You're awake,' she says in English, then yells over her shoulder in Spanish.

Who's she calling - the crazy dude who tried to kill me? Oh Jesus!

She peers at me. '*Hola!*' Her smile is friendly and reaches her eyes.

'*H ... hola!*' I reply, my eyes scanning the tent for a back door, window – anything.

'W...who are ...?'

'Call me Enfermera,' she says. 'Everybody does.'

She speaks English. Considering the way she looks – zombie like, bent and bony, large, bulging, jaundiced eyes, greenish-brown teeth, hair sticking up in all directions like misplaced antennae, I'm

surprised. Her clothing is tattered and torn and she reminds me of a zombie from Michael Jackson's Thriller video.

But when she speaks, her weird looks recede and all you hear is a beautiful, melodious voice. Amazing – as if someone else is speaking inside her. Have I died and gone to hell?

An old Mexican man shuffles into the room, looks at me and frowns. He's short, wrinkled and bald and gives me a look that tells me I'm intruding. Still, at least it's him, not the whack job who tried to kill me.

'Where am I?' I ask in a timid voice. 'Who are you guys?' I'm already tired from the little interaction I'm having with them.

'Later,' Enfermera says, placing a cool, bony hand on my forehead. 'Rest now. When you wake up, we will talk.'

'No,' I protest. 'I wanna ... know ... where I ...' I drift into back into unconsciousness.

When I wake up, she force-feeds me gruel. It's revolting - smells like boiled, unseasoned chicken, but I'm not even sure it is as good as that. I gag but she just shoves it down my throat. 'You're going to need your strength,' she says in a singsong voice.

\* \* \*

A fortnight has passed, I'm propped up on my stretcher and we're finally having that talk.

'Enfermera means *nurse* in Spanish,' she explains as she puffs on a cigarette she rolled herself. 'My real name is Gaudelepe. Juan doesn't speak English, so I'll be your translator.'

At the mention of his name, Juan spits a disgusting glob of snuff or something like that on the ground.

Not the most sociable fucker, but hey, I'm cool with it considering he's sharing his gruel and vile smelling potions with me.

'My name is Payton,' I say. 'I'm an American ...'

'Yes, we know,' Enfermera says, reaching behind herself and removing a bag.

'My backpack,' I cry and snatch it from her.

'It was still on your back when we found you.'

'Awesome!' In the bag I find my purse, my student identification card, a picture of my secret crush, Austin, my cherry lip balm, a few dollars. Just what I need - something to connect me with my other life.

'What are you studying?' Enfermera asks, squinting at my student card.

Enfermera's English is amazing and I'm intrigued. I make a mental note to question her about it.

'Eh, Bachelor of Behavioural Science. Criminology, Psychology majors.' Wonder if she knows what's it all about?

'Aaah. Clever *and* tough?'

'Yep. Gonna head New York's FBI office one day. Gonna kick ass.'

She smiles. 'I believe you,' she says. 'You're obviously a survivor.'

Juan walks up to me and stabs my shoulder a couple of times with gnarled fingers. '*Milagro.*'

What the fuck did I do to piss him off now?

'That's *miracle* in Spanish,' Enfermera says quickly. 'Because you were shot and obviously thrown off the cliff into the sea and yet, you're still here. *Milagro.*'

I nod slowly. 'Wow. That's what happened? That dude *really* wanted me dead, huh? It's like overkill.'

She frowns. 'Do you know why? I mean, what exactly did you do to him?'

'Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I was just taking photos. Holiday shots of views ... nothing out of the ordinary. Don't know why he was so mad at *me*. I mean, *everyone* was taking photos, so why was he after me?' I exhale loudly. 'God, I wish I knew.'

She shakes her Don King-styled head. ‘Mmm ... doesn’t make sense.’

She’s right, it doesn’t make sense. The motherfucker failed his mission though, because in spite of the overkill, I’m alive and being christened by witchdoctors. Knowing someone wanted me dead so badly is a humbling experience though.

‘What?’

I slowly lift my head to look at Enfermera. ‘Shot, thrown off a cliff, almost drowned – that’s three lives down, Enfermera. I gotta take it real easy with my other six.’ My voice is grim even though I’m trying to make light of my murder.

She bursts out laughing. ‘You’re funny. You should write a book about your brush with death when you go back to LA. Maybe it’ll turn into a movie.’

‘If I get back to America. It will have to be an action movie, though.’

‘I know who’ll play you – that actress from *Friends*. What’s her name ...?’

‘*Friends*? The TV ...?’

‘The blonde ... ditsy ...’

‘Aniston?’

‘No, the one that married Troy. Rachel ...?’

‘Jennifer Aniston - she plays Rachel.’

She shrugs. ‘But younger ...’

‘Really? Wow! Thanks, I guess. She’s a babe, so I think you’re just being nice. Anyway, how the hell do you know about *Friends*? And how come your English is good, huh?’

‘Used to live in Kansas City many years ago. Taught Spanish to a bunch of racists kids – trailer trash. Then taught English to some immigrants. Had a nervous breakdown and landed in a mental institution. Locked up ...’

‘Wow.’ That explains the hair.

‘I got better, but they just wouldn’t let me out, so I attacked a nurse with a pen and escaped. Found my way to Mexico and roamed the mountains. Until I found Juan. Well, *he* found *me* and we retreated into a stress-free, solitary life. Now we heal. Lucky for you, eh?’

I look at the small, dead animals in jars. ‘Yep. Sure am lucky to be rescued by two psychos.’

‘Psychos?’ She throws her head back and guffaws.

She’s still nuts, but she’s warm and caring and she makes me think of my mom.

My mom was a gregarious person. Great sense of humour and pretty, so pretty. Everyone who knew her loved her. I still remember her smile, her tinkling laugh, her gentle voice.

‘Now what?’

I shake my head slowly, my eyes filling with tears. ‘My mom ... she spoke to me ... when I was like, in the water, drowning. She said ... she ... she asked me to ...’ I swallow hard, ‘go with her and I’m wondering ... is she my guardian angel now? I mean, she said everything was gonna be okay and it is. Like, I’m alive. Still. So I’m wondering ...?’

‘My dear, you must have a *team* of guardian angels if you can survive what *you* survived.’

‘Yeah?’

‘But yes, I think your mother *is* watching over you. Maybe she sent you my way.’

‘Yeah, maybe. But right now ... I really could do with my mom. Wish she hadn’t died. It’s just like, forced me to grow up. I don’t ... I wish ...’ I draw the tattered sheet over my head and weep, something I seldom do.

Enfermera takes my hand in hers and sings a Mexican lullaby, which makes me cry harder.

Juan spits on the floor and shuffles off, muttering under his breath.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The pain keeps me awake at night so they give me opium. Beautiful, wonderful, magnificent opium. I love it. I adore it, I worship it. I want to have it all the time. I want to live with my carers for the rest of my life just to be close to my beloved opium. I count the hours till my next fix.

My nurses are sharper than I think, and when they realize that I sometimes fake my pain to get opium, things change.

‘I want my opium!’ I cry.

‘No more opium,’ Enfermera says in a firm voice. ‘We have to wean u off it.’

“Wean””? What the hell does that mean? Give me my motherfucking opium! Hey! Hey, don’t ignore me. I want my opium!’

She turns and walks away.

‘Come back! One day ...one day I’ll grow my own. A whole fucking plantation. You hear me? Just wait and see!’

I share the tent with Juan and Enfermera so I keep waking them with my nightmares of Diablo. He’s strangling me with one of his dreadlocks, he’s watching me sleep, an axe in his hand, he’s shooting me, he’s holding my head under water. Each time my screams catch in my throat, but each time, I live. I always wake up shaking with terror. He isn’t a nightmare, he’s real and the villagers are right to fear him.

Enfermera slips stuff under my pillow. ‘Sage,’ she says. ‘Wards off evil spirits, bad dreams.’

But it doesn’t help - I have the dark rings around my eyes to prove it.

‘Diablo is evil,’ Enfermera says in a quivering voice. ‘Him, his family – they’re a bunch of cold-blooded killers. Cannibals, I hear.’

‘Cannibals?’

She nods slowly, her eyes wide. ‘Never met them but ... don’t want to mess with him, Milagro.

He’s the Bastard of Mexico. Diablo - means devil, in Spanish. People don’t see much of him, but some say he’s half-man half-beast. And strong, very strong.’

‘Yeah, he’s strong alright,’ I say, my lips curling with disgust. ‘Tried to strangle me with *one* hand. Don’t know ’bout the half-man-half-beast thing, though. He looked pretty normal to me. Hairy, fugly, but normal. Like a gigantic coconut with a fucked up wig.’

‘A coconut ...’

‘A big one. Jeez, he’s one ugly motherfucker, Enfermera. When I first heard about him, I just thought, well, Bermuda Triangle, Loch Ness Monster, Elvis is alive – you know ... until I came face-to-face with him. He’s real alright. Got scars in my chest and an opium habit to prove it.’

‘Juan says they live in caves round here. In the mountains.’

‘Round *here*?’ I get sudden shivers and my eyes dart around. ‘Maybe we should go inside, then?’ As if that flimsy tent is going to protect us from that Diablo.

She waves her hand, dismissing my suggestions. ‘Well, at least you got a good look at him.’

‘Oh yeah. I guess if someone tries to strangle you – you *will* remember his face. He was like, huge. King Kong huge. He didn’t need a weapon – he was a fucking weapon himself. Tattoos all over his slimy arms and neck. Blue, red, right down to his fingertips. Yuck! And dreadlocks – long, wild. Christ! I’ll never forget how he looked as he and his horse flew towards me. Like a lion. Yeah, he looked like a dark, angry lion on crack.’

We both laugh.

‘Three green lines ... like, tattoos lines ... across the forehead. And eyebrow rings - I’ve seen eyebrow rings before, but he had about *ten*.’

‘Ten?’



I hold out both my hands, fingers splayed. 'Per evil, bloodshot eye.'

Enfermera smiles.

'Yeah, really – the motherfucker's masochistic *and* sadistic.'

'I believe you, I believe you.'

'You should, I wasn't on opium then, so it's all real.'

She nods.

'Not that I'm on opium *now*.'

Silence.

'Cause you ... you took it away.' My voice is accusing, bitter.

Silence.

'Even though *some people* think you're being cruel and you should let me have some for at least another ...'

'We should be getting back,' she says and stands up. 'Enough exercise for you today.'

'Mfff.' Good move Witchdoctress. Change the subject and that'll shut me up, eh? Well, I'll sulk until you give me my goddamn opium.

'Siempre is beautiful,' she says as we walk back. 'Friendly bunch. I've been there.'

'Yeah,' I say. 'I love the villagers. They make great Tequila and whisky. And they share it with foreigners too, so that makes them really, really hospitable to me.'

She smiles.

'Even though the village lacked the five-star amenities we were used to – the resort, I mean - we didn't wanna leave. We wanted to stay and just enjoy the place, the unspoilt beauty.'

'Mm ...'

'Yeah. Except Elaine - she desperately wanted to get back. Said something about running out of wax strips. Needed to wax her upper lip. Among other places. Other *private* places.'

Enfermera bursts out laughing and slaps me on the shoulder. 'Payton you crack me up! You find funny in the most serious of things. Just don't know when to be serious and when to be flippant. I suppose you drove Elaine crazy when you were growing up.' For an old lady, she sure has a girlish laugh.

'You betcha. I lived to irritate the bitch. She frowned so much, she constantly needed Botox.'

'Love talking to you,' she says, wiping the corners of her eyes. 'Guaranteed a laugh when I do.'

Then her smile disappears. 'Your family ... do you think he may have ki ...'

'Don't say it!' I say holding up my hand. I shake my head and take several deep breaths. 'My dad ... he's alive. I know it. When he sees me, he's ... he's probably going to hold me and cry with relief, disbelief. He's gonna regret that he never gave me the attention I deserved as a child.'

'You think so?' Enfermera asks, a frown on her forehead.

'Sure. As for Austin ...' I place my hand on my heart when I remember him. 'They're all alive.'

'What if you're wro ...?'

'Don't!' I snap and storm off.

\* \* \*

Three months. Three months since my rebirth, since the asswipe tried to kill me. But now, I'm ready to go home, back to America.

Enfermera and I are crying. I wipe away her tears and hug her. She doesn't say much but I know she'll be lonely without me.

Juan is throwing impatient looks our way. He glares at us, frowns and then puffs vigorously on his pipe. Clearly he's irritated at our display of emotions.

But we don't care – we're both struggling with goodbye. I'm the only connection to a world she once lived in, and she's the closest to a mother figure I've had since my mom passed.

‘Remember, keep practising your Spanish,’ she whispers. ‘If you don’t, you’ll lose all that you’ve learnt. It’ll come in handy one day.’

‘Okay, I will.’

‘As for Austin – he’s made his choice a long time ago. Time for you to move on, let go.’

Fat chance of that. I’m never going to be able to let go of Austin. ‘Okay,’ I say and hug her again before I turn to hard-ass Juan, hoping he will accept my goodbye handshake.

I gingerly stick out my hand. Juan stares at my hand as if I am handing him a grenade without the pin. I’m just about to withdraw my hand when he bursts into tears and grabs me to him.

I’m speechless as he hangs onto me and sobs like a kid. Loud, noisy, wah! wah! sobs. I had no idea he was capable of crying. I had no idea he cared. I gape at Enfermera over his shoulder.

He’s shocked away her tears and she stares slack-jawed. Somehow I don’t think she expected this reaction from him, this display of emotion.

I mean, I really thought Juan found me loud, maybe a little exhausting, but he weeps so hard, I find myself comforting him. ‘I’ll come back one day to visit,’ I whisper in his ear and pat the hunch on his back.

‘B ...bring big b ... beer,’ he manages to say.

‘I promise I will.’

Christ! He better mean big *beer*, not big *bear*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The only way back to America is through the village of Siempre. I hate the thought of treading there – Diablo shot me there, remember? I really want to avoid the bastard at all costs.

The only way to Siempre, is through the mountain, Juan points out.

I have to climb it. ‘No cable car, Juan? Fuck!’

‘Language!’ Enfermera chides.

The mountain’s daunting, eerie and I’m scared. I’ve never climbed one before, so I guess I’ll have to learn as I go. But I don’t mind too much because ... I *can’t* mind. Hell, I’d move it if it meant getting out this place and back to clean drinking water, coffee, shampoo, my iPod, the internet and other such *essentials*.

Armed with just a map I sketched myself and two bottles of murky water, I start to climb the ominous mountain. Barefoot. My shoes didn’t survive my murder.

Throughout my climb, I worry about plunging to my death. Since I’m desperate to get back to the US, I heed the words of Deepak Chopra, ‘If you really want it, nothing will stop you.’ (Or was it Beyonce? Amy Winehouse? Whoever the fuck said it.)

*Don’t look down. Don’t look behind.*

*Just one more step, Payton.*

*One more step. One more step. One ... more ...motherfucking step!*

At night, the temperature in the mountain plummets and I’m freezing my ass off. I wrap my arms tightly around my wiry body and curse myself for venturing into Mexico. Why didn’t I go somewhere safe for a holiday? Like Iraq. Why didn’t I just stay in the warm, comfortable tepee with Juan and Enfermera and their pickled animal parts? Why didn’t I just stay and become a witchdoctor myself? That way I’d be the one dispensing opium. The thought of that gives me a warm and fuzzy feeling.

So what if they had sex (at their age) while I slept a few feet away? Why the fuck didn’t I steal a stash of opium for the *trip*?

Well, in spite of the precarious climb, I’m still alive. Maybe, it’s because I’m young, strong, an athlete. I can outrun and outswim just about everybody I know and I have medals to prove it.

Did my father nurture those talents in me? Nope. He was too busy diapering and burping the former soap actress he married.

It’s light, so I resume climbing and after a couple hours I see the top of the mountain. Tears spring to my eyes. If only I had a flag.

Now, all I gotta make sure is that I don’t run into Diablo or his hombres. I hide in the bushes and peer across the fields. When I see no signs of them, I venture out.

I limp all the way to the village and finally, I arrive emotional and exhausted, but extremely happy.

At first, the village kids scream in terror at the sight of me and back away.

‘Jesus Christ!’ one of the older kids say as they back away.

‘No! No!’ I cry. Damn! I shouldn’t have worn this long white dress.

*“¡Es un fantasma!”*

‘No, I’m not a ghost. Please!’ I hadn’t anticipated this. Now I worry they will drive a stake or something through my heart. ‘It’s really me,’ I explain. ‘I didn’t die.’

A *ghost* that talks – that ought to reassure them.

‘Where’s Austin?’ I ask. They stare with eyes popping out of their skulls. ‘Austin, tall ... um ... henpecked ...?’

‘*Payton?*’ A familiar voice whispers my name.

I spin around and look into Austin's beautiful face. 'Austin! Ohmigod Austin!' He's alive. My love is alive and living here. I fling myself into his arms.

'Payton ... am I dreaming?' he whispers and hugs me.

'No,' I blubber, 'it's me Austin, I'm alive. I made it. I made it.'

'I can't believe it,' he chants softly as he squeezes me to him. His arms around me feel wonderful and familiar and I want to stay in them forever. He holds me

away to look at me, then hugs me, then holds me away and finally, he just holds me to him while the villagers clutch their children and stare.

I briefly tell him about how I survived my murder.

'My family ...?'

'They're here,' he says as if in a trance.

'Oh thank God!'

'Come, let me take you to them.'

I see my dad first. 'Payton?' My dad slowly removes his glasses. 'Can't be,' he mutters as he rubs his eyes.

'Dad ... Dad ... It's me Dad,' I whisper and throw my arms around him.

Elaine and Paris are tearing. So is Austin. My dad isn't crying and that bothers me. Maybe he's in shock. I am so happy to see them all. I laugh and cry all at once.

'God, you're stick-insect thin,' Paris says, her lips curling with an admixture of envy and admiration.

'Vegetable gruel for three months,' I say, clutching the front of my dress and shaking it. 'Try it. You'll puke, but you'll be stick-insect too. Hey, that reminds me – got any steak?'

Jack, Austin's good friend and business partner, a former native of Siempre, divides his time between Los Angeles and Mexico these days. He immediately arranges a steak the size of Siempre for me.

'Thanks,' I say. 'Do you have any butter? I really need grease now.'

The steak drenched with homemade butter is delicious but almost immediately, it makes me gag. Disappointing.

With an enigmatic smile, Paris walks over and takes my hand. 'Got something to show you,' she says, her eyes gleaming.

'What? My steak ...?'

She ignores my protests and leads me to what appears to be a gravesite.

'This is a cemetery Paris. What the fuck?'

'Look,' she says and points to a wooden cross.

I peer at the name on the cross and balk.

*Payton Wagner*

*1977 -1999*

*RIP*

'Omigod! That's ... that's *me!*'

She nods slowly, wriggling both eyebrows. 'It sure is.'

'Fuck Paris! You look so goddamn happy showing me this. And you call *me* psycho?'

'*Schizo*,' she corrects. 'But sometimes, *psycho* too.'

'Mmm.' Same ol' Paris. 'My birth date is incorrect, you know. I was born in 1978.'

Paris squints at the cross. 'Really? That's funny, cos your dad wrote it.'

'Did he?'

'Yep. What a loser. You'd think he will remember the birth date of their only child, huh?'

I stare at her as her words sink in. She's right. What can I say?

Time to change the subject. 'So Diablo, he's like, taken over the village then?'

'Yep. We expected him to kill us too, but he didn't. Says he'll kill us all if we ever harbour a spy again.'

'A *spy*? *Again*? He's still going on about that shit?'

'Yeah.'

'I wasn't a spy.'

'*He* thinks you were.'

I shake my head. 'Imagine, I was murdered because of a case of mistaken identity. Fuck!'

'We had the pleasure of meeting his family too. His psycho mother Christa and his slutty sister, Santana. Evil bitches from hell.'

## CHAPTER SIX

‘It’s too dangerous,’ my father says.

‘You’ll never make it,’ Austin says.

I purse my lips and continue packing my stuff that Paris inherited. ‘I’m determined to leave Mexico, Diablo or no Diablo. You guys can stay.’

‘Payton, it’s too dangerous,’ Austin says. ‘Maybe wait a while for ...’

I zip up a suitcase and pat it down.

‘Fine,’ Austin says in a resigned voice, ‘we’ll leave after midnight.’

To my disappointment, my father does not offer to go with me. But I understand - he’s old and scared I guess.

Austin appears thoughtful. ‘We’re gonna need the villagers help here. I’ll get Jack to organize that.’

I nod. ‘Thanks Austin.’

We’re all packed and ready and I can hardly wait for nightfall. I’m fighting to keep my eyes open, but I refuse to sleep. I’ll sleep when I get to America.

At 6 PM I step outside the house for some air and look straight into Diablo’s hideous face.

As in my nightmares my scream lodges in my throat and as in my nightmares he towers menacingly over me. Déjà vu all around.

He has a posse - about twenty hairy, tattooed men and two women, all on horseback all staring at me.

Diablo stares as if he’s seeing a ghost. ‘I thought I killed you,’ he says and grabs me by the neck.

Like someone lost in a trance, I can only gape at him. He jabs a gun under my chin and sticks his puce face in mine. Imagine, I cheated death only to be killed

again by the *same* monster. What are the odds of that? Could my life suck any more?

‘Listen fucker,’ I hear myself say, ‘you got the wrong chick. I’m no spy, okay?’

Okay, I’ve travelled for two days, I’m dehydrated, exhausted from the harsh mountain climb, my feet are shredded from the jagged rocks and I’ve probably got sunstroke – my mind is AWOL.

His grip on my neck tightens and his gun jabs harder into my neck.

‘You wanna kill me? Do it. Just make sure you do it right *this* time, huh?’

Okay, I having one of those out-of-body-experiences people talk about. This can’t be me asking this barbarian to kill me.

There is a collective gasp around us as surprise registers in his bloodshot eyes. I doubt anyone has ever spoken to the miserable, cranky bastard like this before.

‘Why? Huh? Tell me why? Why the fuck are you so desperate to kill me, huh? What are you scared of?’ To my surprise, my voice is low, controlled, impatient,

but not at all scared. ‘You that afraid of a chick, you actually have to kill her? Huh, you fucking shithead?’

The place is so quiet, I can hear a clock ticking. Or is it my heartbeat? I can’t tell right now.

‘Apologize!’ My father shouts.

‘Fuck him!’ I say. ‘I’m not apologizing to this asshole!’

Diablo’s bushy eyebrows shoot up and a wry smile appears on his repugnant face. He cocks his gun. What’s worse than being shot in the chest by Diablo? His 9mm – cocked and cold under my chin.

‘You think I’m scared to die, you bastard? I’m not. But you shot me three times and I’m still here. Back from the dead. How many times do you need to *try* before you give up, eh? Seriously Kong, you’re a lousy hitman. I mean, look at me - I’m still fucking alive.’ Did I just say those things? I’m possessed for sure.

I feel his hold on my neck slacken and I'm surprised I still have my remaining four lives.

Then to my absolute horror, I slap him across the face. This is me going nuts. Having a breakdown, meltdown – whatever the fuck you call it. If I survive this, I'm probably going to be institutionalized in the same mental hospital Enfermera escaped from.

The ticking of the clock – now sounds like a church gong now and I feel a prayer coming on.

*As I walk to the ...how do you say it? As I walk into the ...As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ...*

For seven long seconds nothing happens and I stare, mesmerized by his finger hovering over the trigger. One tap of his finger and I'm a *milagro* no more. Sobering thought - the kind that forces you to race to the nearest public restroom.

Then I hear the sound of guns being cocked behind him. I look past him at his men. They want to kill me themselves.

'You are going to get ripped to shreds, gringa,' one of his men says.

Oh, I believe him. I really do.

I look past Diablo and see my family's horrified faces. Elaine's hands are across her mouth, while my dad gapes with hands on top of his head. As for Austin - he looks the colour of fresh cement, while Paris chews furiously on her talons, her shoulders locked into a hunch.

From the corner of my eye I see Carvil, a village elder get on his knees and place his forehead to the ground, probably to pray for my soul that is heading for hell anytime now.

To my absolute astonishment, Diablo slowly lowers his gun, his eyes fixed on mine.

The older woman, Christa, who must be his mother, steps forward and shoves her gun in my cheek.

That hurts. Did she not see me slap him?

'I am going to turn you into a tea strainer,' she says, a sinister smile on her face.

They have tea strainers in Mexico?

Diablo snaps at her in Spanish. Reluctantly she lowers her gun, her eyes hard and blazing.

'Let me shoot her, Diablo,' she says. 'Please.'

'*Si*, shoot the gringa, Diablo,' the younger woman says. This must be the slutty sister, Santana. Slowly, she circles me and taps her riding crop on her palm. Her eyes are narrow, her nostrils flaring. 'She got no respect.'

Diablo shoves me away and steps back. A murmur ripples through the crowd. Diablo's behaviour seems to be confusing them. It confuses me more. He stares at me as if this is the first time he's seeing me.

Carvil is still on the floor, ear to the ground, probably waiting for the sound of gunshots. When nothing happens, he hops to his feet and looks questioningly at

Diablo, as if to say: 'What you waiting for?'

Don't really blame Carvil. Who wants a family of vengeful cannibals lurking around Siempre because of some insolent gringa?

To everyone's surprise, Diablo slowly backs away, his eyes still fixed on my face.

What does this mean? Am I out of danger? Does he plan to return with renewed vigor and rip me apart like his mother promised to?

Christa steps forward and smiles at me. A wave of relief washes over me. At least she's no longer mad at me. Maybe I'm out of danger after all.

Anyway, she looks far too young to be the Demon's mother. If I have to guess, I'd say she's 40ish, stylish, attractive. Her jet-black hair is slicked into a low chignon. Her skin is olive and smooth, her face caked with foundation. Her scarlet lips are full and pouting, her eyes, hard and black. Tight-fitting sweater with low-slung jeans tucked into brown, mid-calf boots. Large silver hoops dangle from her ears each time she moves.

Still smiling, she removes a large atomizer from her saddlebag and sprays me. Great – she’s sharing her favorite fragrance with me – maybe it’s her way of apologizing. I exhale and suddenly I’m feeling really hopeful.

She turns around and sprays everyone around her. The villagers smile and exchange see-we-were-worrying-for-nothing looks.

Laughing, Christa runs through the crowd and sprays everyone in sight. Really, she is so damn generous with her ... *Chanel No 5*? Well, it has to be something expensive. After all, she is a drug dealer - she must have dough.

I sniff the fragrance on my clothes and frown. Strange, it smells really familiar and not at all like *Chanel No 5* or any of the expensive perfumes I’ve stolen from Elaine from time-to-time.

To me, it smells more like ... gasoline. Holy cow, it *is* gasoline! What the hell ...?

Christa is talking to Diablo now. Her eyes are glistening and her face is flushed. She claps her hands to her chest as if she can barely contain her excitement.

Diablo’s hooded eyes shift around and settle on me again. His gaze is penetrating and I quickly avert my eyes. After a moment he nods at Christa and she lets out a whoop of delight. She spins around and points to one of her men carrying the strangest contraption I’ve ever seen. Some sort of mini gas pump. He steps forward and tips his cap at her.

Then I notice the cylinder strapped to his back – it’s a fucking flamethrower.

Christa closes her eyes, raises her hands to the skies and says, ‘Diablo has spoken, everyone.’

The villagers let out an anguished roar as the flamethrower takes three steps back.

Now, I have a fair understanding of Spanish, although I have trouble speaking it. But when people speak really fast, I tend to lose them. ‘What did she say?’ I ask to no one in particular.

All her men are moving backwards, except the flamethrower. He aims at the barn and fires. Flame shoots from his contraption and the barn ignites.

‘Ohmigod!’ I cry.

Some of the screaming villagers race to the barn and try to douse the flames but it’s no use - the barn is already an inferno.

‘Payton, what the fuck have you done?’ Paris shrieks.

Shocked, I stare at her and realise that with one slap, I sentenced the villagers to death. Fuck! What the hell was I thinking? How could I be so stupid, so dumb, so self-absorbed to do something like that?



## CHAPTER SEVEN

‘What the hell is wrong with you?’ I shout at Christa. ‘There are women and children ...’

I look around. ‘There are animals ...?’

Christa hangs her head for a moment, then looks up at me and says, ‘Burn them all.’

Stunned, I whirl around to look at my murderer. Even though I’m terrified of him, we enter into a staring contest.

I can’t back down now – the situation calls for drastic action. And besides my fear is slowly morphing into rage and I struggle to contain myself.

‘What do you want?’ I screech, my eyes flitting from Christa to Diablo. ‘Gold? Land? Tequila?’

His men scoff at my question, while Diablo just stares at me. One of his men places a lit cigarette between his fingers and he takes long drags on it. With all the gasoline around, this place could end up looking like a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration in no time.

Carvil and another village elder push me aside and totter up to Diablo. They bow before him. ‘Please Diablo, please.’

He ignores them, his eyes fixed on me.

They get on their hands and knees. ‘Diablo, please! Diablo ...’

Diablo sidesteps them and walks away. They follow him. He stops, they stop. He walks, they walk. Suddenly he frowns and curses under his breath.

‘Take our gold, Diablo. You can have anything you want, Senor,’ Carvil says.

Diablo turns and levels his gun at them but they just close their eyes and remain standing in front of him.

Diablo inhales deeply and lowers his gun. He strokes his chin slowly. If I thought the retard had a brain, I’d accuse him of thinking.

After a few moments, he raises his hand. A man rushes up to him. They whisper for a moment. The man shouts out to the flamethrower. The flamethrower sulkily lowers his trigger.

Diablo’s man turns to the elders and talks to them. The elders listen, hop to their feet and nod vigorously, their eyes gleaming.

‘What? What’s he saying? What’s going on?’ Nobody answers me. Some of the villagers rush to douse the burning barn with buckets of water.

Carvil scrambles over to Jack and talks to him in Spanish. Jack’s eyes light up as he listens. He glances at me, then quickly looks away.

My family and I exchange confused glances.

We’re feeling a little hopeful now that the flamethrower has stopped firing and we have this *stay*. All eyes are glued to Jack.

Jack nods several times at Carvil then slowly advances towards me and I’m now convinced that Diablo has instructed the villagers to kill me. Maybe he was negotiating: ‘I’ll spare your village if you burn that foulmouth bitch on a stake for disrespecting me in front of my *hombres*.’

Jack stands in front of us and scratches the back of his neck. ‘Um ... eh ...’ He looks at his feet then shuffles them.

‘Oh, for Christ’s sakes!’ Elaine snaps. ‘What is it, Jack?’

‘He wants your daughter!’ Jack blurts. ‘Then he’ll spare the village.’

With a hanging jaw, Elaine turns to look at her only begotten, whose face is the colour of alabaster right now.

‘I’m not going!’ Paris cries, clutching her chest with both hands.

'My baby!' Elaine shrieks, a trace of hysteria in her voice. 'Of course you're not going! He's crazy to think he can have you.' She shakes her head at Jack. 'The price we pay for beauty. I expected something like ...'

Jack draws back sharply. 'Not her. He wants Payton.'

'What!' Paris shrieks, her arms dropping to her side. 'Her? He doesn't want ... he wants *her*'?

'This one?' Elaine's face contorts into a sardonic smile. 'You sure?'

'Positive,' Jack says. 'We offered him *anything* he wants, but all he wants is Payton.'

'M ... me?' My mouth is dry, my hands clammy. 'What about the stake ... burning ...?'

'Steak?' Jack glares at me. 'You *still* talking about food?'

I wave the confusion away. 'What's he gonna do with me?'

Jack lifts and drops his shoulders. 'But Payton, he'll spare the entire village if you like, go with him and ... and ... live with him ... get it? *Everyone* gets to live.'

'Me, live with him? He's off his rocker.' My stomach starts to flutter.

Jack frowns at me. 'Eh ... sssshhhh!'

'I mean, I thought ... like ... fuck!' I don't have to look behind to know Diablo's staring at me. I'm so terrified of him that I don't even want to look at him, and now he wants me to *live* with him. God! I feel like a deer being eyed by a pride of starving lions.

More of Diablo's men arrived in Jeeps and the villagers huddle together.

'Where's the fire?' the men demand, visibly disappointed at the lack of a towering inferno.

They surround Diablo and appear to be badgering him.

Diablo ignores them and stares at me.

I quickly look away.

Jack runs up to Diablo's man and has a word with him. Maybe he's pacifying the man - telling the man that I'm thinking about Diablo's indecent and fucked up proposal.

I look at the villagers, I see their expectant, pleading eyes and I feel overwhelmed with pressure.

Jack hurries back to me, his eyes bright and hopeful. 'Payton? What do ...?'

'You've got to be kidding! You taking this shit seriously? Jack?'

'Please Payton,' he whispers, 'I beg you, please.'

'You ... how can expect me to say "Yes" Jack? He shot me *three* times. He's a killer. He *eats* people like me. You saw his psycho mother? I wanna get the fuck out of here, back to LA and just get back to my normal, dull life. Please.'

Jack shifts about and drops his voice. 'Payton, he likes you, he wants you. Go with him and see all those people there, looking at you with pleading eyes? They get to live if you say "Yes".'

'Christ Jack!' I cover my ears with my hands. 'Don't!'

'Hey, you *slapped* him. It changed things.'

'I slapped him, yeah. He had a fucking gun to my face. Now I'm to blame, huh, Jack?' I know the answer to my question already, but I want him to say "No".'

He doesn't.

I look at my father for, well, support I guess. His face is flushed, his forehead has beads of sweat and he looks like he's going to have a heart attack. I quickly turn away.

Austin walks up to me. 'Payton, you don't have to do this,' he says, his voice gentle and full of concern.

My darling Austin, attempting to rescue me while risking the wrath of the villagers by uttering those magical words.

'Thanks Austin,' I croak, resisting the urge to rest my weary head on his loving shoulders.

'Of course she has to!' Paris snaps. 'She caused it; now we're all gonna toast. She didn't have to slap the devil, but nooo, Payton's gotta be the tough chick.'

Austin quickly shrinks back.

'Fuck you, Paris!' I hiss.

Paris turns to my father. 'See? For years I've been saying she's bipolar, needs anger management. Now look what she's done.'

'What do I tell him, Payton?' Jack presses.

'Jack, I don't get it - he can very well take me now, so why's he *asking* me to go with him? Huh?'

'Cos he wants you to go with him *willingly*, I 'spose.'

'Willingly, my ass.'

'Payton please!' Jack cries. 'Don't say that. He'll kill us.'

Carvil steps forward and starts begging me in Spanish.

'I don't understand what you're saying,' I say and cover my ears with my hands. 'But whatever you're saying - the answer is "No", okay? I've had my share of hell already. I had to live with Juan and ...'

Diablo drags a chair, lowers his bulk into it and lights up another cigarette.

The burden to save the village rests heavily on my stick-insect shoulders. I could really do with another *milagro* now.

I turn to my father. 'Dad, say something. Talk to them. Tell them ... tell them I can't help them. Tell them I shouldn't have to. Tell them it's too much for me.'

My father exhales loudly and looks even more pained.

'Daddy? Please ...' If ever I needed my father's help, it's now. 'This is huge, daddy, I can't do it. Tell him to take her,' I say, pointing to Paris. 'She pretty - *Miss LA Diva 1999*. Tell him, I'm plain and vulgar and shy and I almost got expelled ...' When I see my father's shoulders sag, I stop. Feeling ditched and resentful that he isn't able to help me again, I back off.

'He's giving us till seven,' Jack says quietly, fuelling my pressure.

I look at the clock. Six fifty-five. 'Seven!' I jump out of my chair and start pacing. 'Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!'

Austin turns to Carvil. 'Payton shouldn't have to ...'

'Austin!' Paris snarls. 'The Devil will kill you if you interfere. D'ya wanna die Austin? You have a baby. His name is Liam, remember?'

Austin clams up.

Elaine walks up to me and gives me a saccharine smile. 'Payton dear, it won't be forever. Just until things settle, dear. He might get bored of you after ...'

'After what Elaine - killing me? Eating my fleshy parts? Making a tea strainer out of me? One hundred years?'

Her smile vanishes. 'Payton! Now you listen to me,' she snarls. 'You can do it. You are tough, you're a fighter. You are ...'

'Elaine please, you're sounding like Mike Tyson's coach now. I'm not that tough. I'm scared, okay? I'm *twenty-one* for fucks sake!'

'Snap out of it. You're never scared. You've always been fearless.'

'You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong! You don't know me, Elaine.'

Diablo stands up, looks at me and starts to walk away.

The clock on the wall says 7 PM. 'Fuck!'

The flamethrower takes his position and aims directly at the villagers. Screams of terror fill the air. I too am terrified of burning to death, but right now I'm concerned about the villagers rather than myself.

'Wait!' I scream, running after my murderer. 'Just wait!'

He stops but does not turn around. The flamethrower mutters angrily when Diablo raises a calloused hand. Behind me, the villagers exhale loudly.

I stand before Diablo and squeeze my eyes shut, not wanting to see the metal rings over his eyes, the hairy face, the dreadlocks, the tattoos that run up to his chin, for fear they will prevent me from helping the villagers.

‘I’ll ... I’ll go ... with you.’

A mammoth decision on my part, yet he doesn’t acknowledge it – just turns and saunters on. Now what? Am I supposed to follow him? Has he changed his mind? Doesn’t he want me any ...?

He stops and looks at me, his eyebrows raised. I quickly start walking towards him. I want to say goodbye to my family and maybe collect some of my things, but I’m not sure if that’s okay with him so I walk out of Siempre with just the clothes I’m wearing.

I zone out – I don’t want to hear anything, don’t want to see anyone, don’t want to think about where I’m going, don’t want to think about what lies ahead. This is what it feels like when you’re walking to the gallows, I guess.

A man ushers me into the backseat of a Jeep. I see Diablo through the window riding his horse. Alongside him, Santana rides, a scowl on her pretty face. I’m confused at the angry looks she’s throwing my way.

Christa rides up to them and starts to argue with Diablo. The way she glances at the Jeep gives me the impression they’re arguing about me. Maybe they don’t want him to take me captive. Maybe they feel sorry for me after all. Maybe they’ll eventually be my friends. God, I *hope* they’ll be my friends.

The men in the front seat of the Jeep look at me and frown. I’m scrawny and plain - a ragamuffin. My long, blonde hair is greasy and stringy, my blue eyes are bloodshot and the dress I’m wearing is baggy and unflattering. I’m wearing not a stitch of make-up so I look pale and ... eleven so they’re probably wondering what the hell Diablo sees in me.

After a while, they lose interest in me and chat amongst themselves. I’m thankful for that - it gives me a chance to gather my thoughts. What the hell does the beast want with me? Why *me*, when I embarrassed him in front of his people? I’m so much trouble – hasn’t he figured that out as yet?

Am I supposed to fuck this freak - this scruffy, hairy aberration? The thought of that makes me want to hurl. The very thought of being in the same room with this murderous animal makes me want to jump off the cliff myself. I stare into the dark and wish I had died when he first shot me.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

We drive up to the hills and finally slow down at a ranch. The sign at the entrance says Tana-Mera. Like the song. The Jeep stops, everyone alights and I'm confused – I'm not expecting Diablo to live on a ranch, I'm expecting him to live in a large Bin Laden-styled cave.

They tell me to get out of the Jeep. I comply. The darkness doesn't help – everything looks sinister and creepy – so Addams's Family.

Diablo and Santana walk ahead of me.

A man they call Lorenzo walks up to me. 'Follow me, Señorita..'

I nod. We walk for a while and stop outside a door.

'This is your room,' he says and ushers me inside.

I have a room? Hesitating, I step into the room and look around. It's normal, thank God!

Lorenzo shuts the door and leaves, but does not lock it.

I was expecting to be thrown into some dark, damp, underground dungeon, littered with human skulls and coffins of all sizes, complete with a cauldron of foul smelling liquid, bubbling on an open flame. Instead, and to my surprise, my room is modern, comfortable with colour co-ordinated linen – different hues of apple-green and cream and bits of silver strewn around. Cannibals with a flair for décor? Bling?

I stand in the middle of the room and look around. Not a single skull in sight and way cleaner than my bedroom back home. The room has a king-size bed, dressing table, side tables and a fluffy, spearmint-coloured carpet. No pictures and no personal stuff. Pretty much like a hotel room.

Too afraid to touch anything, I perch on the edge of the bed and try to think. What now?

I keep glancing at the door, expecting Diablo to barge in any moment and start hacking at me, or drag me outside, tie me to a stake and perform a ritual, virgin-killing while his *hombres* dance around me.

Good God! Does he think I'm a virgin? Well, if he does, I'm not going to correct the fucker.

A burst of loud music startles me. I spring to my feet. Omigod! It's happening the way I imagined - loud music, the beating of the drums ...

Wait a minute – the music is modern, hip-hop – the kind I listen to on my iPod. Definitely not sacrificial music – however that sounds.

I tiptoe to the window and peep through the blinds. The place is now lit with strings of coloured lights and people are drinking and dancing - a carnival atmosphere prevails. The place no longer feels eerie.

An hour passes and from the looks of it, I'm not going to be sacrificed tonight. I relax and watch the partying through my blinds.

Christa dances with a young man – rotating her hips slowly, suggestively - her version of dirty dancing, I suppose. She uses a scarf to lasso him, then bumps and grinds against him. Eeeewww! Considering her age and the fact that her sons are present - I call that inappropriate.

Then I feel someone watching me. I look to my right - someone's in the shadows smoking a cigarette.

Diablo!

I see the whites of his eyes – has to be him.

I jerk back, lose my balance and land on my ass. Quickly, I get up, grab a chair and wedge it under the door handle. As if that's gonna keep the psycho out.

For a while, I stand and just stare at the door, waiting to see if the handle rattles, expecting someone to turn the handle anytime now. When nothing happens, I slowly back away - back to the edge of the bed where I sit and gnaw at my nails.

Weary from my eventful and exhausting day, I eventually crawl under the covers and lie in the dark and wait.

Around midnight, the music dies and place is ghostly-quiet again. People seem to have retired for the night. I toss around in the dark, desperately wanting to sleep but sleep evades me. Must be the adrenaline. I'm still on tenterhooks and jump each time I hear a sound.

The mountain climb was harsh and gruelling, so I should be sleeping soundly, but I'm not. I'm waiting for the Devil to come and claim me.

## CHAPTER NINE

I awaken to the sounds of birds chirping. Sunlight streams into my room through the blinds. I fight the cobwebs of sleep and peer around, events of the previous night flooding my fatigued brain – *Diablo!*

My fear returns and nestles in the pit of my stomach. The clock on the wall says 6 AM. I lie really still and listen for sounds, voices. Nothing.

Finally, I slide out of bed and poke around, opening drawers and looking for, well, *stuff*.

I tiptoe to the window and adjust the blinds. Sunlight floods the room. In the natural light, my room is nicer – light, airy with beautiful views of the valley. I look out of my window and listen to the sounds of the ocean and I think of Juan and Enfermera. A feeling of sadness washes over me - I miss Enfermera so much.

I hear a voice and look to my left. It's Santana on the balcony of another room, talking to someone. I drop out of sight but still peep through the blinds. She has a sheet draped around her and her hair looks dishevelled, like she just woke up. I can't see the other person's face as yet. When she moves, the sheet dislodges and I get a glimpse of her bare breasts. She laughs, picks up the sheet and drapes it around her again. Voyeuristic, yet I can't look away.

Then I hear Diablo's voice and I shrink back. It can't be – she's his sister.

But I know that voice - I've heard it a thousand times in my nightmares and I will never forget it.

I look at the clock again – 6:10AM. Why on earth would she be in her *brother's* room at this time of the morning? Naked.

Maybe I heard wrong. Maybe I'm still asleep and dreaming. Maybe ...

Then I catch a glimpse of his butt. He's naked too.

I don't believe it. This is so fucked up!

When I peep out of the window again, they've left the balcony.

Confused at what I just saw, I move away from the window. After a while I resume my poking around the room.

One of the closets open into a bathroom. A modern one at that. Great! After the facilities at Juan and Enfermera's, this feels like The Hilton. I step in and splash water on my face.

Suddenly, I hear a knock at the door and I jump. Slowly, I turn off the taps and tiptoe back into the room.

*Diablo?*

To my relief, a lady in her fifties opens my door and breezes in. Plump, with an infectious smile, she fills the room with her effervescence. She's dressed like a Mexican peasant – cream shirt, long, flowing, brown skirt, tan sandals and her long black hair is tied back with a cream scarf.

'*Hola, Señorita,*' she greets, smiling. Since her smile reaches her eyes, I reason she must be happy to see me.

'*Hola,*' I reply.

'*Señorita,* I'm Maria, my serrrvant. Ask me aaaaanything I want. Diablo – he go to work now but he want you to make me comfortable.'

'Um ...' I have to work this one out. She seems lovely but her English ...

'Since my English is very good, *Señorita,* you will be taking care of me.'

Okay, I'm being Punk'd for sure, but I resist the urge to look around for cameras.

'Thanks,' I say, silently trying to work out what she just said.

'Rosa, she will bring me breakfast in a moment, *Señorita.*'

'Rosa...um, thanks Maria, but I ...like, I don't want any break fast.'

I dare not eat anything here until I know exactly what it is and where it came from. Human lasagne is not my thing.

‘Can I just have some coffee, please?’ My voice is humble, friendly. I’m really uncomfortable with the idea of having a servant.

‘N ... no breakfast?’ Her fizz evaporates. ‘No breakfast ...’ She studies the carpet. Then she looks up at me and the fizz is back with a vengeance. ‘Cerrrrtainly Señorita.,’ she says, her tone obsequious. ‘You will come only with coffee. No breakfast.’ She leaves, shutting the door behind her.

Back to my fretting - what plans does he have for me? Maria appears pleasant and wants to make me comfortable – why? What’s Diablo’s agenda? Is he trying to feed me and fatten me for some sinister reason? A Mexican version of Hansel and Gretel?

My morbid thoughts are interrupted by a knock at the door. Maria and a second lady enter the room with a tray containing food and coffee.

‘Diablo’s woman,’ Maria murmurs.

The second lady smiles. ‘*Hola* Señorita..’ Her dress is similar to Maria’s and her dark hair is tightly coiled on the top of her head. Her smile also reaches her eyes.

‘Eh, Rosa, Señorita. ... Rosa is my name. I bring coffee and bacon, eggs, toast ... Just like Diablo say.’ She places the tray on the table, steps back and stands slightly behind Maria. As she links and unlinks her pudgy fingers, her cheeks grow redder by the minute – the reddest I have ever seen.

I return her smile. ‘*Hola*, I’m Payt ...’

‘Rosa, she don’t speak English good,’ Maria interrupts, ‘so I helpa ...’

Rosa jerks her head to look at Maria, her eyes blazing. ‘I speak good English! Why you say that, Maria?’

Maria silently purses her lips and bestows Rosa a condescending look.

Rosa bares her teeth at Maria for a moment, then appears to remember me. She turns to me and her smile is back. She glances at the breakfast tray then at me.

‘No thanks, Rosa,’ I say. ‘I’m not ...’

‘No breakfast for Señorita?’ Her breathing becomes rapid.

‘Eh, no thanks. I’m not hungry.’ I was bloody starving.

Rosa flashes Maria a I-get-what-you-say look.

Maria nods and mutters, ‘Told you.’

I wish they wouldn’t take a breakfast refusal so personally.

Rosa suddenly grins again. ‘You from America, Señorita?’ she asks, handing me a cup of coffee.

‘Eh, yeah, thanks.’

‘I know someone in America, Señorita,’ she says, her voice mounting with excitement. ‘Her name is Syyylvia.’ She stops and waits for my response.

I look up when she doesn’t continue. ‘Eh ... um ...?’

‘You know her, Señorita? She got a black hair and she is eh ...’ She pauses and sticks out her elbows to her side, ‘but she is very nice lady. She is my sister’s...eh ... she is my *cousin*. My cousin, yes. She live in America and she got her own house. You know her, Señorita? You know her?’

‘Eh, well, America is ...’ I look at her cherubic, expectant face. ‘Actually Rosa, she sounds familiar.’ I just don’t have the heart to disappoint her.

She beams at my answer and shoots Maria a see-I-told-you-I-know-important-people-in-America look.

I smile at her naiveté.

Maria exhales loudly. ‘You know, Rosa,’ she snaps, ‘America is a big country and there are lots of Sylvia’s here ... eh, there. So is not possible for Señorita to know *all* the Sylvias in America, eh?’

Okay, Maria is definitely the brains in this operation.

She turns to me. ‘Do you know Enrique, Señorita? He is your ...your cousin.’

Scratch that – there is no brain in this operation. Let’s get that fact out of the way.



‘He has a big truck and he go to America all the time,’ Maria continues. ‘He make a lot of money.’ She drops her voice and leans towards me. ‘He make ... he make a lot of money when he take people from here to America but they have to hide in the back of the truck and must be very ...’ She puts her finger to her lip and winks.

Ah, a people smuggler – Immigration’s favorite person.

‘I think I do,’ I say. ‘Sounds familiar. Think I have seen him on TV. Border Patrol.’

She beams and even bows slightly then looks at Rosa. ‘You see? My family – they are famous people. They are on TV in America.’

Wow. She got the entire sentence right.

Rosa mutters under her breath then grins again.

At least they’re entertaining.

‘Um, Maria, do you have any clothes I can like, borrow? I need to shower and ...’ I gesture to my clothes. ‘I didn’t bring anything.’

‘Of course, Señorita!’ Maria says. ‘I’m now the Señorita of Tana-Mera and I can have anything I want.’

Oh Yeah? What about freedom for the people of Siempre? What about my freedom? How about I pull rank and demand that?

‘Señorita, we are so happy Diablo find you,’ Rosa gushes. This time her nose lights up – becomes red and shiny.

What does she mean? And after what I saw this morning – his perverted relationship with his sister, why the hell does he need me? For appearances?

I drink another cup of coffee while Maria squints at my frame.

‘Mmm ... I am very thin, Señorita, but I will see what you can do.’

She leaves the room and returns with dresses that hang on me. I assume they’re Santana’s and I don’t like the idea of wearing them, but I have no choice.

After a while, I leave the room to take a shower. When I re-enter my room, both ladies are lounging on my bed, eating my breakfast and arguing between themselves in Spanish.

I smile to myself. So much for being *my* servants.

After they finish every morsel of my breakfast, they fuss over me - help me dress, brush my hair then freshen my room and bathroom. I’m really happy we’re getting along, especially since I miss Enfermera.

At one point, during one of their many petty arguments about whether to leave the window open or not, reality hits me and I indulge in a silent pity-party for myself.

The ladies pause with their arguing and stare at me.

‘Santa Maria!’ Maria shrieks. ‘Why ... how ... what is wrong child?’

Both ladies flutter around me.

‘You upset her when you ask her so many questions,’ Rosa shouts at Maria. ‘Now Diablo, he kill us.’

‘NO! I open the window that’s why,’ Maria says and shuts the window. She spins around to face me. ‘Señorita, Rosa, she upset you ...’

‘No ... no ... no ...’ I wipe away tears with the back of my hand. ‘Nothing to do with the window ... you ... either one ...’

They exchange helpless looks.

‘I’m hungry, that’s why,’ Maria says and rubs my back.

‘Si,’ Rosa says, ‘you are hungry, Señorita. You must eat.’

Both ladies glance at the empty breakfast tray and then at each other. Rosa’s face turns fire-engine red. Maria strategically moves in front of the empty breakfast tray, blocking it from my view.

‘I’m okay, I’m okay.’ I sniff loudly then furiously dab my eyes.

They bring me another pot of coffee and enough chocolate biscuits to feed a small country. I nibble on a biscuit and drink another cup of lukewarm coffee, while they eat the rest of the biscuits and finish the coffee.

After that, Rosa massages my feet, while Maria massages my head and makes all sorts of clucking noises. I'm just not comfortable with their pampering.

'Please don't,' I say.

They ignore my protests and increase the intensity.

'You must sleep,' Rosa says.

'Eh, I'm okay. 'Sides, it's too bright ... too much coffee.'

They respond by drawing the sheets over me, tucking me in and closing the blinds. Big bullies.

To my surprise, I fall asleep immediately.

When I awake, it's 4 PM and I'm disoriented. After a while, I slide out of bed and make my way to my two new friends with benefits.

They welcome me warmly but peer at my face. I think they're worried that I will cry again. To put me at ease, they laugh and poke fun at each other. I really appreciate their niceness and I gravitate towards them.

I'm starving but I can't bring myself to eat. I just ask for more coffee as I surreptitiously take in my surroundings, looking for ... well, cadavers, mighty cleavers, tablecloths made out of human skins, lima beans...

Nothing. Everything here looks so confusingly normal. I open the refrigerator on the pretext of getting more milk. Nothing - just cheese, milk, soft drinks - all the stuff you'd find in Elaine's kitchen back home. (Not my fridge though - it's always filled with beer, flat Coke and moldy month-old pizza. I used to explain that I was planning to make penicillin for a third world country.)

Maybe the villagers are wrong about the cannibal bit. Please let them be wrong. I'm starving.

Rosa takes my hand. 'Come see your home.'

My *home*. Meekly, I go with her.

Tana Mera is perched on top of a hill with breathtaking views of the ocean and partial views of the valley. The lawns around the ranch are manicured and lush with luxuriant blooms of roses, dahlias and tulips - colourful and festive. A gardener pruning some rosebushes pauses and stares at me.

'*¡La mujer de Diablo!*' Rosa yells. (This is Diablo's woman!)

He breaks into a smile. 'AAAHHH! My name Sam,' he says, and bows slightly. 'Welcome, Señorita.'

I smile at him. 'Nice to meet you Sam.'

'*¡La mujer de Diablo!*' Sam suddenly yells to someone behind me.

Startled, I spin around and see an armed guard stationed in a tower overlooking the ranch.

'AAAHHH!' the guard says. 'Señorita!' He nods.

'Come,' Rosa says and we continue our tour. 'We gotta ten villas. You, Diablo, you stay in that villa.' She points to the one I slept in.

'Christa,' she says, pointing to the largest villa on the highest point of the ranch. 'She sleep there, that villa. The big one.'

So Christa has a bird's eye view of her five thuggish sons and the men that resided at the ranch - how controlling.

'Where is everyone right now?'

'They go work. Later, they come, we make a party.'

Work. Mfff! Bet they're out pillaging and stealing from other villages or shooting foreigners and throwing them into the ocean. But I'm happy they aren't around so I can relax a little. And I do, while Maria and Rosa busy themselves with dinner preparations for about thirty-five people and during which time, they argue every single minute, giving me a massive headache.

As the day fades, my stomach starts to churn. I become restless and wear out my spearmint carpet with my pacing. They're calling me Diablo's woman – scary. I'm twenty-one, not good wife material. I suck at most domestic chores and duties, so I'm bound to disappoint. Wonder if he knows my age? I doubt it. I doubt he knows anything about me. What about the half-man half-beast issue? What about the sexual aspect? The thought of fucking him makes me hurl. I dash to the bathroom and bend over the sink for a while.

There is nothing to throw up. I still haven't eaten, save for a few biscuits. My mind is a muddle, half-man half-beast ... sex ... cannibals ... prisoner.

## CHAPTER TEN

6 PM. The men arrive from *work* and the ranch bursts into life. There is drinking, loud laughter, profanity and music.

I'm in my room, peeping through the blinds, mainly on the lookout for Diablo. Every time I think about him, the knot in my stomach tightens.

Suddenly, my door is flung open! I suppress a scream. Diablo?

But it's Christa and Santana. Santana is smiling so I smile back, relieved it's them. Christa does not smile. Her eyes are hard, her lips a thin line.

'H ... Hi,' I say.

Maria and Rosa are so friendly towards me - maybe these two will come round, become my friends, maybe even take pity on me and ask Diablo to release me. I really could do with their help right now. They're women, they ought to be sympathetic.

They enter my room and to my surprise, immediately begin sniggering and mocking me in Spanish. Why the fuck?

Slowly, they circle me and laugh and I feel like I'm seven years old and being bullied by Laura Kimble and Justine McCready on the school playground. I can't understand everything they're saying, but bitchiness manifests itself as bitchiness in any language and I get the gist very quickly. Especially since they're pointing to my hair, my breasts, my hips, my dress, making me feel like a slave at a human auction.

'Ugly,' Santana says.

Yeah? Well, I got news for them - I know that already. Elaine pointed it out to me when I was six. But she was able to problem solve: I was to marry rich so that I could engage the services of a good plastic surgeon. A few visits to him and I'd look as good as Paris, she always said.

A man they're call Tongue, (I assume that's his nickname and that he still has his.) cradling a whisky bottle, swaggers in. 'Tell me, tell me,' he says.

Howling with laughter, the bitches fill him in and the humiliation sale continues.

He listens then turns to me. 'Bebe, I am pleased to make your acquaintance,' he says and bows dramatically. 'My name is Tongue and I have balls. Look.' He sticks out his tongue to reveal his piercings. Two silver metal balls on a long, greyish, spotted tongue. 'See? I knew you be impressed. Women are my weakness, bebe. Especially young women like you ... scared ... frightened. You are how old - thirteen? Fourteen?'

What an asswipe.

'Makes me hard,' he says as he runs his hand over my butt. 'Whachusay? Huh? Whachusay?'

Mortified that he would even touch me, I slap his hand away.

'Bebe, there is no reason to be afraid,' he says, his voice raspy. 'I can make you feel very good. My room is on the top over there,' he says and points to a villa at the top of the ranch. 'Whachusay?'

He inches closer and drops his voice. 'Do you know *why* they call me Tongue?'

The room erupts with laughter as my face flames.

Suddenly, everyone stiffens and I see fear in their eyes. They rush out of my room, stumbling over each other in the process.

What the hell ...?

Then I hear the thundering of hooves. Diablo. It has to be him. Only he rides like a madman.

Crushed by the humiliation I just suffered, I slowly sink to my bed and suppress the urge to bawl. How do I live like this? Clearly they hate me and they're going to make my life hell. That Tongue, he's such a loathsome toad. How do I cope with him?

Maria enters the room, looks at me and sighs. She shakes her head and gives a rueful smile.  
'Señorita ... Señorita ...'

Her sympathetic look brings tears to my eyes and I furiously wipe them away. I need to toughen up. I seem to be crying so much recently. It's really bad for my tough-chick image. She takes my hand in hers. 'I have to be strong, Señorita,' she says in a solemn voice. 'I have to stand up and fight back or they will make me *loco*, Señorita. They will take away my *brio*. I be scared of Diablo. Nobody else, Señorita. They do anything to me, Diablo, he kill them.'

I nod. It's comforting to know that I am somewhat safe from them.

A hurried hug and she scurries away.

Fight back. Mfff! I'm outnumbered.

The men and women are now sit around the huge dining table in the villa I'm in – Diablo's villa. It's spacious, two bedrooms, two bathrooms, the largest dining-room I have ever seen, a lounge and a gourmet kitchen.

Curious, I sneak out of my room and peep into the dining room. Everyone is there except Diablo. They're guzzling whisky, tequila and vodka. There's a lot of high-fives and backslapping. Productive day, no doubt.

Then, Diablo appears and conversation halts. At the sight of him, I dart back to my room and shut the door. Seeing him again leaves me unhinged. I sit on my bed and rock back and forth like a mental patient.

Then suddenly I hear, 'Gringaaa!' Diablo's voice.

I sit rigid, barely daring to breathe.

'Gringaaa!'

I scramble to the back of my king size bed and shove my knuckles into my mouth.

The doorknob rattles. Someone is entering my room. I scream into my hands. It's Maria.

'Please come, Señorita,' she says.

'M ... Maria why ...?'

'Don't be scared, child,' she says and squeezes my hand. 'Diablo, he just want me to join him for dinner. That's all.'

'I don't ... Oh God ... I can't ...'

'Hush,' she soothes, 'Diablo won't hurt me. Only if I hurt him. You his *Mujer*, you must sit at the dinner table.'

I take no comfort in her words. The bastard shot me three times and threw me over the cliff without any provocation. To me, he is just a cruel freak of nature holding me captive.

'Come eat,' she urges, taking my trembling hand in hers.

I absolutely do not want to eat with them. The thought of eating any kinds of meat with them nauseates me. Having no choice and terrified I may anger the malevolent Diablo, I stand up, fight for composure and slowly trail Maria to the dinner table.

Maria eyes my hunched shoulders and frowns. 'Strong, Señorita,' she whispers, jerking her shoulders upright and raising her chin. 'All the time, in front of everyone at Tana-Mera. Strong and I will be okay. I be weak, they kick me like a dog on the ground. Diablo like me, because I'm strong.'

Fake it? I can do that.

About thirty pairs of drunken eyes follow me as I amble in my oversized clothing towards the dinner table.

*Strong ... Strong ... Strong ... Shoulders straight ... chin up.*

The sniggers and the snide remarks begin the moment I enter the dining room, but I grit my teeth and ignore them. Diablo is seated at the head of the table and watches me with narrow eyes. When I get close to him, he growls in Spanish at Santana, who is seated at the opposite end of the table.

At first, Santana just gapes at him with slack jaws. Then her green eyes blaze as she argues with Diablo. 'No!' she finally says.

Christa jerks up, points to a vacant chair and argues with Diablo.

I don't want Santana's seat, I want to go back to my room, back into a wall and chew the last of my nails.

Diablo's fist crashes onto the table and I jump. Santana quickly shuts up and surrenders her seat to me. Christa's nostrils flare as she silently sits down.

Santana's shoulder brushes hard against me as she passes me. '*Putá!*'

'Sit,' Maria mouths.

Thanks to my Spanish lessons with Enfermera, I have a fair understanding of Spanish and if they speak slowly enough, I may get all that they're saying. Still haven't progressed to really speaking the language though.

We play musical chairs and eventually Santana is seated close to Diablo. You think she'd be happy with that? No. Her bottom lip sticks out.

'My clothes!' she hisses when she realizes I'm wearing her dress. 'You give 'em back.'

*Fuck off.*

As Maria said, they can't do anything to me because Diablo will not let them.

Frankly, after the way she treated me earlier on, I don't give a fuck what she thinks or feels. It is the hairy monster at the head of the table who is unnerving me. He is openly staring at me. Everyone is staring, nobody is eating. Daunted by the eyes on me, I look for a napkin to fidget with. None is available. The fuckers don't bother with napkins. I'm really self-conscious now and I sneak a glance at my chest to see how much cleavage I'm revealing. Too much. Want to be as asexual as possible right now. I surreptitiously hitch the top of my dress to cover up.

Bad move; Diablo notices my move and his gaze rests on my breasts.

Fuck!

*Strong ... Strong ... Strong ... Shoulders straight ... chin up.*

As Maria said, Diablo's fascination for me stems largely from the fact that I stood up to him, challenged him and did not appear intimidated by him. God! If only he knew.

Meanwhile, I will maintain a false bravado and never let him see my white knuckles gripping the edge of the table.

'What's her name again?' a man with a ruby in his tooth slurs.

'Payton,' someone answers.

'Satan?'

The house shakes with laughter and try as I may, I can't hide the colour that flushes my face. Diablo is not laughing. He's just staring at me.

A young man with long, dark hair and big muscles mutters in a surly voice, 'Leave her alone.'

I glance at him, wanting to give him a grateful smile. But he does not look at me. He's sullen and morose and focuses on his drink. He too has three tattoo lines across his forehead.

I feel like the new kid at school, minus the buddy system. Diablo's the school bully, Santana and Christa are the mean girls, Tongue is the class clown and the long-haired, surly guy is the cute, dark dude who smokes behind the school toilets.

After a while, conversation resumes and I'm left alone. The men are talking to Diablo – reporting, more like it. I release my grip on the table and sit back. I want to look at Diablo but I'm scared. I don't dare lock eyes with him.

It is safer to concentrate on the colourful conversation around the table. Almost every sentence the men speak is littered with profanity. Me, I'm skilled in the art of profanity and I'm tough. I have to be – I'm going to be an FBI Criminal Profiler someday. Besides, look who raised me – a she wolf called Elaine, remember?

But now, I cringe as I eavesdrop. I can't help it – they're talking in both English and Spanish over me. Conversation between two hairy men on either side of me goes like this:

'Where da fuck you been t'day, dickhead?'

‘Why you fucking questioning me, fuckhead?’

‘I fucking wanning to fucking know, cunt!’

‘Why you fucking wanna know where I fucking was, ma’ fucker?’

‘Because yo’ mother was sucking my dick and she ask me.’

‘Ma’ fucker, you should tol her I was beesy fucking yo mother in the *nalgas!*’ He stands up and thrusts his hips suggestively.

Diablo looks at me, then at him and the man shuts up.

Christa guffaws at his obscene gesture. What a cool mommy.

Maria and Rosa bring out dinner and a small riot ensues. The men wildly attack the food as if it is alive, stuffing their mouths and chewing loudly, trying to maintain their swearing and cursing while eating.

The change in Maria and Rosa during dinner intrigues me. Maria is quiet and seldom makes eye contact with anyone at the table. Rosa stays in the kitchen and when she does help out in the dining room, it’s obvious, she can’t wait to scurry back to the kitchen.

At first, I assume they’re terrified of Diablo, like I am. But after a while, I realise it’s not Diablo they’re afraid of, it’s Christa. In fact they always talk endearingly of Diablo and that adds to my confusion.

I quietly study the food. Chicken? Well, it looks like chicken and it smells like chicken, so I assume it’s chicken, but...

I notice Diablo and Maria talking, their heads together. Diablo nods slowly, his eyes never leaving my face.

‘Eat!’ he suddenly shouts. His voice sounds like it is being emitted from his gut, not his larynx. I tense at his address, the reef-knot in my stomach tightening.

Maria nods at his instructions.

I shake my head and mumble something about being a vegetarian, which I’m not. After my months of vegetable broth with Juan and Emfermera, I wanted steak and sausages and shavings of ham and ...

I would need forensic analysis on this food before I touch it.

‘Eat!’ he bellows so loudly, that conversation around the table halts and all eyes dart between Diablo and me.

In an endeavour to well, save face, I shrug, then dish myself some vegetables, which I mimic eating. But the vegetables taste so great that after a while I give in and find myself actually eating them.

I breathe an internal sigh of relief when Diablo focuses on his previous conversation. He doesn’t talk much to anyone, he just listens, his eyes darting around the table. The only person he gives his undivided attention to - the big muscle, cute guy who defended me earlier on. They call him Troy.

Troy. Nice name. He’s around twenty five and bearded, but no rings around his peepers. Reminds me of Zorro, but without the mask. No Catherine Zeta-Jones either. He seldom speaks and is morose.

Christa and Santana look like twins conjoined at the head. They’re looking at me and whispering. Then they burst out laughing. Christa’s drinking shot after shot of tequila and suddenly bursts out, “‘You think I’m scared to die, you bastard? I’m not. But you shot me three times and I’m still here. Back from the dead. How many times do you need to *try* before you give up, eh?’”

Everyone cracks up with laughter. Even Diablo grunts a chuckle and his eyes start to shine.

I remember those words – Bitchface is mimicking me. My face is burning now and I probably look the colour of the tomato in the salad. I glance thoughtfully at the carving knife.

When they finish eating, one of the guys brings out a bag of white powder. They start to snort it off the dining table.

Tongue whispers in my ear, his lips brushing against my earlobe like a slug, 'Bebe, I have Marijuanaaa, heroinaaa, amphetaminaaa, cocainaaa - anything you want. Whachusay, eh? Whachusay?'

I jerk away and shake my head.

'Why?'' He seems surprised. 'Come on, you party with me.'

I continue shaking my head, but I secretly wonder if he has opium there. Fuck! I'd give anything for opium right now.

I can't tell who's doing drugs and who's not, but I'm judgmental enough to assume they all are.

Tongue leads the pack on the snorting. I watch him whip out a credit card, cut up three plump lines on the glass table, block one nostril and snort a line. He leans back and wipes his nose. Some of the men use short straws while others use rolled bank notes.

Initially, I find it fascinating, almost entertaining. But after a while I'm bored and I'm longing to get back to my room. When I look up and see Diablo watching me, I quickly shelve any thought of asking to be excused. So I stay and ache through their loud, drunken laughter and foul language, wanting the earth to open up and just swallow me whole. An earthquake or a tsunami right now, is just what I need.

Suddenly there's shouting outside. The men race out the door, pistols in hand.

Christa and Santana follow the men.

Diablo doesn't appear very interested in what's happening outside and remains seated.

'Diablo!' Christa calls. 'Diablo!'

For a while, Diablo ignores her calls. Eventually, he reluctantly scrapes back his chair and saunters outside.

The moment he leaves the room, Maria, Rosa and I cram around the window and look outside.

I see a man on his knees. They're slapping and punching him.

The poor man – he appears terrified and sounds like he's begging for his life. I would be too if I saw about scumbags high on coke and booze muscling in on me. From experience, I learned that when these men say they are going to kill you, they do.

Christa walks over to the man and talks to him in hushed tones.

'Senora please,' the man says, 'is all a misunderstanding.'

'Si,' Christa says, nodding several times.

The man calms down obviously relieved to see Christa's lack of hostility.

She continues nodding, an affable smile on her scarlet lips.

Diablo stands on the side, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his jeans. He spends most of his time glancing back at our villa. It looks like everything is going to be okay.

Then, Christa turns to Diablo and says, 'Kill him Diablo.'

What the ...?

'Senora, please!' the man cries, his eyes filled with terror.

Slowly, Christa starts to circle the man. 'He must die, Diablo. He must die. He can't come here. He has no right. We never invite him. Nobody come here unless we ...'

'No!' the man shouts. 'No!'

'He *must* die,' she repeats, looking Diablo in the eye. 'You have to kill him, Diablo.'

Diablo doesn't move. He scratches the back of his head, rubs his chin and glances towards our villa.

Surely they're not going to kill him. Whatever he did, it just couldn't warrant this.

'Diablo, I am your mother,' Christa says. 'You must listen to me. You must respect me Diablo, because it is right. You must kill him and show your men how to rule. Show them you are in charge. Show them your pover or they will think you don't have no pover, eh? You show them you are strong. You must teach them. Please Diablo, please. That is how you be a good leader, Diablo.'

I don't believe what I'm hearing. Fucked up in the head, she is.

Diablo glances at the expectant faces around him but does nothing.



It looks like he's not eager to kill.

Christa claps her hands over her head and chants, 'Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!' She looks at the men around her and they immediately join her and chant.

'Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!'

Diablo glances at our villa again and I get the impression he just wants to return to the dining room and continue staring at me, like people do when they buy goldfish for the first time.

'Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!'

Diablo shakes his head hard. Then, to my absolute horror, he unsheathes his knife, jerks the man's head back and slits his throat.

At the sight of the blood, Christa throws her hands in the air and starts jumping and dancing like a woman possessed. 'You are a good son,' she says, slapping her breasts. 'You listen to your mother. You are a good leader. Everybody clap. Come, everybody. Come clap for your leader. For your boss, for your Diablo. He is great. He is *Diablo!*'

'Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!' she chants.

Then men join her and shout, 'Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!'

Diablo looks at the blood all over him, frowns, then walks away.

'You are a real man,' Christa yells after him. 'You are our master. Diablo! Diablo! Diablo!'

I slide to the ground and collapse in a heap. 'Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!' All that blood, the man's body jerking around – I fight the urge to vomit.

I've never seen a man die before and I'm shaking. My head feels light, my body is suddenly clammy and I think I'm going to faint.

Maria quickly hands me some water. 'Sugar water,' Señorita,' she says, kneeling in front of me. 'I must drink it. Now.'

Rosa fans me with a magazine.

My hands are shaking so much; I spill most of the water.

A few minutes later, I'm sitting on a chair and rocking. 'What the hell is wrong with these people?' I burst out loud.

Maria shrugs, while Rosa mumbles something inaudible and starts clearing the table.

'How ... they're so cold-blooded! How could Christa ... she's so ruthless, so ... so evil? What an evil woman!'

Both women purse their lips tightly and nod.

'You guys ... how can you be so like, unaffected by what you just saw, eh?' My voice is shaky but reproachful.

They look at each other and shrug.

So this killing is no big deal to them. What have I let myself into? The villagers were right, Diablo and his family are ruthless, cold-blooded killers and I have walked into a venomous snake pit.

Rosa looks at me and puts her finger to her lip as Christa and her men re-enter the villa. I shut up and straighten up.

By the time Diablo returns, I'm fairly composed and sitting at the table. He's changed his clothes and plonks himself back on his throne. Everyone follows suit and lingers around the table.

I can hardly stand being in the same room as him. My mind drifts back to the man they killed – is his body still outside?

It takes great courage on my part but I finally say, 'May I be excused?'

I do my best to avoid eye contact with him as I fear I will lose what little confidence I have.

My good manners are entertaining to some people, like Bitchface and her daughter they're at it again - sniggering at me.

He nods and I hurry out of the room, resisting the urge to break into a sprint.

I reach my room and collapse on my bed. I cannot shake the picture of Diablo slicing at the man's throat, the ease with which he did it, how the blood gushed over his hands, how he casually wiped his knife on the grass as if he messed it cutting an apple or something.

Christ, what a monster. What a savage.

Elaine said I was fearless. Bullshit. What does she know? I acted brave around them because it was my survival technique. If I didn't, I would have been crushed by Elaine and Paris. It worked - they backed off, labelling me difficult and rebellious. That suited me and gave me a sort of license to be bad, act bad.

The only emotion I displayed: anger. A case of one emotion fits all. I cling to it, sometimes unleashing it before it is due. I get *them* before *they* get me. It's just ... safer this way, I guess. *I feel safer this way.*

Although, I'm uncomfortable with this delving into my soul - makes me feel exposed, vulnerable and, I hate this word, *sad*. I preferred to be called angry. It's fashionable, yet shielding. Like the new bulletproof vests worn by bad-ass rap artists, 50cent and Decapitator.

But my anger that shielded me in the past, drove me into the clutches of a madman? How could I fuck up so badly? If tonight was bad, what would tomorrow be like in this quagmire? What about next week, next month? I need to get away.

Maybe I could kill Diablo. Yes, somehow use a knife – whatever, just kill him. That would solve my problem. Then I would be free. Free. Brilliant idea.

Hang on ...but then I would have to contend with his brutal family if he is dead – Christa, Santana and Tongue, especially. Fuck! Never thought of that. There's no lesser or greater evil here; all are equally evil.

Christa is psycho.

Diablo is a rabid animal.

I am trapped.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

It's past midnight and I'm awakened from my sleep when my door creaks open.

*Diablo!*

Fear grips me and balloons in my throat.

A figure, black and ominous looms towards me in the dark.

The shadow reaches my bed and falls across my body and my heart clangs in my chest, deafening me. Wide-eyed, I look up into Diablo's face, looking every bit the demon, the beast, the monster I've seen and fled from in my nightmares.

I know why he's here. The thought of him touching me repulses me. In the dark I frantically scramble for the light switch on my bedside lamp, but in my haste I knock it to the ground and we remain in the dark.

He inches closer. I turn my face away unable to look at him, hoping that by some miracle he takes offense at my rejection and leaves. Or even kills me. I don't mind dying right now. Please, let me die.

He lowers himself onto my bed and I'm forced to look directly at him. I clamp both my hands over my mouth to suppress my scream. All I can really see is the whites of his eyes, but even though it's dark, in my mind I see every detail about him. It's burned in my memory. I conjured him – he was the bogeyman coming to get me when I was bad, when I didn't listen to mommy and daddy. Somehow I managed to breathe him to life and here he is.

'S ... stay away from me!' I cry, but my voice lodges in my throat, just like it did in my nightmares.

He hesitates, then unsheathes his knife and brings it slowly towards my face and I feel I'm going to pass out from fear. Earlier on, he used that same knife to kill a man and now, he's about to use it on me. I know the man's blood might still be on it.

Transfixed by the gleaming knife, I can only watch as it inches closer and closer to my alabaster face, then my breasts. Is he going to stab me in the heart? Cut my throat? Slice my face?

But he does nothing of that sort. Instead, he slices at the straps of my nightdress, nipping my skin and exposing my breasts. For a few moments he stares at my breasts. Suddenly, he stabs the knife downwards and I scream in terror.

Strangely, I feel no pain.

Gasping, I look down and see the knife plunged inches away from my abdomen, into the mattress. He has not stabbed me. By now, I'm hysterical and gasping. To silence me, he clamps his huge hand over my mouth.

Using his knee, he shoves aside my thighs and rips off my panties.

I scream into his bare shoulder as he plunges into me.

I suffer the stench of stale tobacco and sour whisky breath while he thrusts sadistically into me, hurting me, tearing my core. He's super strong and I don't even *try* to fight him.

The knife next is enough to terrorize me into submission.

As he plunges again and again into me, I feel myself slipping away and it feels really good to slip away. I'm in the ocean ... deep ... scuba diving. Everything is in slow motion. I close my eyes, see nothing, hear nothing, my mind is deserting me. Just what I need.

After what feels like an eternity, he rolls off me and staggers out of my room. I lie frozen, helpless, shell-shocked.

For a long time I stare silently in the dark, trying to keep my mind from functioning, a trick I'm becoming a master at. Finally, I drag myself into the shower and scrub my skin till it bleeds, wanting to rid myself of his flotsam - scour away the stench, the feel, the weight of the beast that assaulted me and invaded my fragile body. I only leave the shower when my hands turn blue from the cold water.

My mind betrays me, refuses to stay empty and forces me to fret over practical concerns - AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases or worse, an unwanted pregnancy.

Then I remember that although he did not use a condom, he ejaculated outside me. That will lessen my chances of falling pregnant. I'm relieved, one less thing to dread in my fucked up life.

As I lie in the dark, I plot his death. It will be horrific, gruesome, painful.

I do not cry. I'm beyond crying. Besides, tears are for sad people. I'm angry.

Actually, I'm beyond anger too.

I want to maim, mutilate, disfigure.

I'm raging.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

It's morning. I open my eyes and stare at the ceiling. Maybe I just dreamt it all. When I touch my hair, it's still damp from last night's shower. Angry bruises on my arms tell me it wasn't a dream.

It really happened.

I was raped.

As the minutes tick by, I fight to put things in perspective. I can't call it rape. How can it be rape when I agreed to be his woman? What did it matter that I said 'No'?

I squeeze my eyes shut and tunnel under my bedcovers.

At 10:30AM, Maria and Rosa enter my room and throw open the blinds. 'You must not sleep all day, Señorita,' Rosa says.

'Yes,' Maria says. 'It's not good for me.'

'I want to sleep a little longer,' I whisper then turn to face the wall. I'm not tired but thankfully, sleep comes easily to me.

They shake me vigorously around 5 PM. 'Diablo, he come Señorita. You must dress up.'

Diablo. The name alone makes me want to puke.

Eventually, I drag myself out of bed and go through the motions of getting ready for dinner.

*Don't think. Don't think. Don't think.*

6 PM. I'm dressed and sitting on my bed when suddenly, I hear, 'Gringaaa!' Diablo's trademark shout.

Today, I'm ready for him and slowly I walk to the dinner table. Forcing myself to hold my head high, I sit down and eat with the dregs of society - murderers, thieves, rapists.

Christa vies for Diablo's attention which suits me. I can't wait to retreat to my bedroom. In the meantime, I slip away, back into the vast ocean in my mind where everything is muted and serene and sans Diablo.

Finally, dinner is over and I'm excused. I make my way back to my room dreading tonight. Midnight ... that's when he'll visit. I shiver and wrap my arms around my body.

As I walk down the passage, Santana appears and blocks my path. 'Gringa,' she scoffs. 'You still here, eh? So tooough. Just how old are you, li'l girl?'

'Leave me alone,' I mutter and sidestep her.

She matches my steps and blocks my way.

*Not now, please. Please! Please!*

I feel so drained, so broken and tears are already stinging my eyes. But I know I can't afford the luxury of tears now. Don't want to be seen as low hanging fruit - easy target, soft.

'Get the fuck out of my way!' I yell.

She looks at me with wide eyes - not the reaction she was expecting from me.

*I'm momentarily taken aback at my anger. I'm a fucking bubbling volcano right now.*

Santana quickly regains her composure. 'Ah! Gringa is a very brave,' she says, as two perfect eyebrows disappear behind a blunt fringe. 'Is a good move, acting so daring, so *valiente*. Diablo is eh, how do you say it - fascinate with you? But the question is *puta*, for how long?'

'Wha ...?'

'You spent last night with him? That don't mean nothing. I'm his wiiimon, his wife. I share his bed. He will never invite you to his bed. That means something, no?'

His "wiiimon" his "wife"? What the fuck is this bitch rambling on about? I want nothing to do with that scumbag and here she is, actually trying to *dissuade* me from being with him? Claiming him as her own?

‘Are you fucking crazy?’ I shriek. ‘First of all, you are his *sister*. That means you don’t get to fuck your brother no matter how ... how *handsome* he is. *Putá*.’

She waves away my chastising with a flick of her hand.

‘And ... and this is a big *AND*; I don’t wanna share his bed or *have* him in my bed for that matter. I wanna go home. I hate him, I hate this place, I hate *you*. Get it?’

For a brief moment I see confusion in her eyes. ‘He will tire of you soon, you know,’ she says, arms akimbo. ‘Then he will ...’ She runs her finger slowly across her neck, then winks.

‘Gee, golly, I can’t wait.’

‘Neither can I,’ she says in all earnest. ‘Neither can I. *Satan!*’

‘Good. We’ve cleared the air. Now get the fuck out of my way!’

She chuckles mirthlessly and steps aside, gesturing dramatically for me to pass.

I shake my head. Santana is striking – tall, slim, long brown hair that curls at her waist, burnished skin that’s probably the envy of every gringa in the world, almond-shaped, green, liquid eyes - a cross between Sheena queen of the jungle and a young Salma Hayek. Really exotic.

Next to her, I feel pasty, dull and frankly, I can’t understand Diablo’s fascination with me. Could be cataracts. There’s no way he could have 20/20 vision. I mean, I’m okay in the looks department - medium height, long dark blonde hair, medium build, cloudy blue eyes – nothing special, really. So as I said – summon an eye doctor to Tana-Mera. Pronto.

I spend the next couple of hours in my room tensing up each time I hear a sound.

Around midnight, Diablo enters my room, whips off his shirt and fucks me again in the dark.

This time to cope, I work on a murder plot - his. I fantasize about slicing his neck while he fucks me. There is blood all over his chest, but not a single drop on me for some reason. I hate blood. It makes me queasy.

Back to Bastido and my fantasy - he clutches his severed jugular with both hands and gurgles. The look in his eye is an admixture of disbelief and admiration. How could someone as fragile as Gringa be so strong? How could someone as astute and insightful as him have missed the knife hidden under my pillow?

As his thrusting intensifies, so does my imagination.

In my mind, blood seeps slowly down his bare tattooed chest. I shove him off me and then slice off his nuts and he cries out in pain, but there is no sound. Then I grab his gun, barricade the door and start shooting anyone that ...

He rolls off before I can conclude my fantasy. Again, I shower till the water runs cold and again, I do not cry. Tears simmer but I refuse to.

Anyway, it was a little less terrifying tonight as there was no razor sharp blade next to my stomach threatening me with a caesarean section each time his thrusts shook my unyielding body. (Except for the blade in my imagination – it was under my pillow and dangerously sharp.)

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Diablo's unwanted midnight visits take their toll. I barely eat and I no longer leave my room. Maria and Rosa are concerned with my failing spirits and attempt to entice me out of my bed with goodies they bake especially for me and all sorts of other stuff.

'You must take a walk, Señorita,' Rosa pleads. 'Walk is good for you. It is good for the ... exercise.'

I nod but continue sleeping. Later, she brings me a pile of out-dated magazines to read, but they're in Spanish. However, I find an unused notebook between them and I start to journal my thoughts.

14 July 2002

Diablo is a monster. Wait; make that an ugly, hideous, disgusting, revolting mother of a freak. Totally repulsive. Loathe him. Hate his stupid, barbaric, ruthless family. Especially his miserable alcoholic mother. Want to slash off his dick and let him die. Hate this place. It's evil and dark. Want to burn it down with Diablo in it.

Austin, my first love. My Ken doll. Handsome, loving and kind. I forgive him for dumping me and marrying Paris. I forgive him for falling under her spell. He's human – he did what most men do when they see Paris. The relationship we had was too good to be true. Beautiful people like him don't happen to girls like me, but I hanker after him. Still. That's cos I'm a dumb fuck. Here's another confession: I love his baby and whenever I hold him, I pretend he's mine. Mine and Austin's. I'm obsessed with Austin, I know that. I need therapy big time, I know that, but thinking about him and how much I love him gives me the energy to continue.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A week passes and Maria and Rosa, fed up with my blue mood, kick me out of my room.

‘Go look at the pretty flowers,’ Maria says.

Having little choice, I drag myself around the hillside. Despite my mood, it’s hard not to notice the lush scenery, the rolling hills, the crimson poinsettias, the sunshiny marigold and the delightful Dahlias punctuating the lush greenery – stunning, like one of the postcards I posted a couple of months ago to Madison and Kelly, my roommates in Los Angeles.

There’s a strange smell emanating from the land. Harsh, but familiar – reminds me of a rock concert. Inhaling deeply, I take a closer look. It’s no shrub, its bloody weed! I can’t believe it. I’m surrounded by acres of Cannabis.

Madison will die of envy when I tell her about my stint in a cannabis plantation. She’s a pot addict.

My *stint*. I quickly shake my head dispelling the tiny voice inside my head telling me that this is no stint; this is permanent.

Men tending the crops pause for a moment and stare curiously at the stranger wandering in their midst, then resume working, leaving me to my exploring.

At night, I lie in bed and dread Diablo’s nocturnal visits. What the hell happened to him and Santana and their balcony romps?

Anyway, its two weeks since Diablo first came calling and my fantasies are getting a little stale. So tonight, I’m changing my fantasy slightly.

Tonight I roofie the bastard – slip GHB into his whisky, then kill him. Might as well use the drug for something useful other than date rape - like killing a reclusive monster and freeing hundreds of innocent people. Imagine if all abused women were supplied with GHB (as part of their therapy) to use strictly on their abusers. At least two packs to aid with healing.

They’ll save a fortune on shrinks and heal themselves by performing barbaric but cathartic acts against their abusers. As I said: the drug should be prescribed for something more useful.

Back to my fantasy – by the time Diablo realises he’s drugged, it’s too late and he’s at my mercy and...

Today, he’s taking longer than usual and I’m running out of fantasy. Why the hell doesn’t he hurry up?

Maybe I should think about Austin. If only *he* was on top of me. I would hold him and kiss him and...

Diablo rolls off me, grabs his pants and leaves the room and once again, Austin is shoved into the attic of my mind.

\* \* \*

Weeks go by. Rosa and Maria kick me out of my bed again and again, I venture beyond the hills around Tana-Mera. I discover a babbling brook. Great! A little more wandering and I find a natural rock pool, almost the size of an Olympic swimming pool. I swam almost every day in LA, so I’m thrilled. Swimming energizes me.

I walk on and arrive at the top of a cliff. More breathtaking views, this time of the ocean. Under normal circumstances, the ranch coupled with these beautiful views and picturesque surroundings would have been a private haven for me.

But right now, it’s a cage - a beautiful, comfortable, 22 karat cage.



I sit on the grass, hug my knees and think about my family. Actually I think of them a lot these days. Even though they're fucked up and dysfunctional, I still want to see them. See if they're okay and tell them I'm still alive. I'm sure my dad worries.

I want to visit them but I know I have to ask Diablo's permission first. How do I do that when I never speak to him? I suppose if he's going to give me permission, I need to talk to him.

Damn! I shudder at the thought of looking at him, let alone talking to him. After mulling over it for a while, I pluck up the courage.

After grunting for one minute and forty-eight seconds, he rolls off me, scoops up his clothes and walks towards the door.

I make my move. 'I wanna see my family,' I say. I don't say *please* or address him in any way.

His head jerks to look at me. Of course he's surprised – I've never spoken to him in three weeks.

He stares at me in the dark, then flips the switch on the bedside lamp and peers at me. The light blinds us both. I hate this close-up – it's unnerving. Especially since I see his bare, tattooed chest up close and personal. Yuck!

'Haven't seen them for a while,' I mumble as I draw the sheet around my naked body.

He nods and appears to be considering it. 'No,' he finally says and turns to leave.

'But ... but ... I want my clothes and my stuff,' I protest, prepared to argue.

He stops and slowly turns around to face me.

Another close up. I cower inside but fight to maintain eye contact. 'I left with just the clothes on my back, remember?'

He doesn't answer.

I hop out of bed, planning to take my usual shower to rid myself of his jetsam.

His eyes sweep slowly over my naked body and I balk – it's the first time he's seeing me naked with the lights on. Now I remember I too have scars – scars on my chest from his bullets and scars from the injuries I sustained when I was thrown off the cliff.

Feeling terribly self-conscious, I drape a towel around myself. 'I don't have clothes of my own. Everything's at Siembre. All these belong to your sister,' I complain, jerking my head towards the clothes in the closet.

His eyes drop to my thighs and linger there. Then he shakes his head from side to side. 'No.'

Fuck this shit! What exactly did he mean by "No"? Never again? Not now?

He strides out of the room.

'But ... but ...'

He leaves. Cunt!

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

We're at dinner and he's staring at my breasts. Feeling self-conscious, I surreptitiously hitch up my top. Fucking pervert! After he refused to let me to see my family last night, I don't know how to react to him. I'll see how it goes later tonight.

Later comes quicker than I want it to.

When he rolls off me and I nag him again. 'I wanna see my family.'

'I say no!' he roars.

I shut up and sulk.

My desire to see my family is overwhelming and I find myself complaining to Maria and Rosa. They listen and exchange knowing glances.

'Señorita Payton,' Maria says with no trace of malice in her voice. 'I'm an attractive young woman now that I have put on a li'l weight.'

I suck in my tummy and lay down my fork. Bitch. But it's true – I've started using food as a tranquilizer these days and have piled on the tacos. (And the enchiladas, refried beans in chili, garlic nachos and the ...) I don't taste what I'm eating, I just swallow. I want to put on a lot of weight and become grossly overweight. Maybe then he would find me unattractive and let me go.

'And Diablo - he like what he see and that is why he bring me here,' she continues. 'I give him what he want and he give me what I want.' She winks at me. 'That is how women all over the world get what they want, Señorita. *Si?*'

'Maria,' I correct, 'it's – "you give him what he wants and he'll give you what you wants". That's how you say it.' I've been teaching her the correct use of pronouns but our progress is slow.

'That is what I say, Señorita,' she says, eyeing my food. 'You going to finish that?'

Bitch always wants my food. I shut up and mull over her words while I finish my Tex-Mex pasta with extra mozzarella and a double portion of ground beef.

I mean, maybe she's right, but I shouldn't have to resort to this. And anyway, what the fuck can I give him that he hasn't taken from me as yet? Stolen from me? The bastard took everything including my spirit.

I finish my food and decide to pass on their advice. I continue my sulking in silence.

The urge to escape from this suffocating place even for a couple hours persists.

By the end of the evening, I acquiesce - I will resort to feminine wiles to get what I want from Diablo. Maybe I'll try being a little friendly, instead of corpse-like?

Usually, I try to be anything but sexy and alluring, in the hopes that he finds me a boring fuck and pisses off and just leaves me alone. What would happen if I suddenly turned coquettish and alluring and even sexy? I knew how to be all those things. Hell, I was brought up with Paris, remember? She was the queen of coquettish.

I really don't want to have to resort to that because well, he's revolting, period. How I long for the day when I pass my amuse-by date and he moves on to some other gringa, like Austin did.

I also notice something else - each time I talk or interact with him, I'm less scared of him and he becomes more humane to me. Consumed by my desire to see my family and escape this suffocating place for a while, I get proactive.

When he enters my room that night, I'm sitting at my dressing table, brushing my hair. His eyes are wide with surprise and he quickly glances back at the door. Looks like he's considering backtracking. Too confrontational for him, too much light, I think. Wow! I can't believe his reaction.

I put down the hairbrush and stand in front of him. We know why he's here, so I get straight to the point. Slowly, I unzip my skirt and let it drop to my ankles. He stares as I kick them aside.

I'm not looking directly at him, but from the corner of my eye I see his Adam's apple bobbing. Then, as if it is the most natural thing in the world, I slowly lift up my top and draw it over my head and fling it behind me - another Paris move.

He stares mesmerized by the sight of me in just my panties and bra. He's never seen me this way before.

'I want to see my family,' I say, slowly unhooking my bra and freeing my breasts.

He continues swallowing, his eyes popping out of his skull, and I nurse a tiny bit of hope.

'I want my clothes, my books, my iPod ...' I'm looking directly at him now.

He stands transfixed, his eyes glued to my breasts but I'm still scared he's going to say *no*.

'Diablo?' This is the first time I say his name.

His eyes fly to mine.

'Is that a *yes*? *Si* ...?'

'*Si*.'

Bingo! 'Tomorrow. I wanna see them tomorrow morning, okay?'

'*Si! Si!*' he snarls and lunges at me.

I allow myself a smirk. It wasn't that hard to get him to say yes. Then what happens next, wipes the smirk off my face.

He spins me around, rips off my panties and drives his erection into my ass. I scream so loudly, he has to force my face into a pillow to shut me up. Never in my life have I experienced such intense and searing pain and I want to die.

I can't stop screaming with the pain and the shame.

I feel humiliated, degraded, sullied and all the fight in me dissipates.

Finally, I'm crying – sobbing, the way most rape victims do because no matter what I call it or how I play around with words, I have been raped. Repeatedly.

When he's done, he stands up and looks at me lying in the fetal position, crying. I refuse to look at him.

*Leave! Leave! Don't see me so crushed, so shattered. Please...please...please...*

Finally, he has succeeded in breaking me. I surrender. He wins.

As he gets dressed he stares at me sobbing. After a while, he begins to walk out. At the door, he stops and turns to look at me again. He scratches his head and leaves.

My hatred for him soars and coils around my heart and threatens to squeeze the life out of me.

*21 July 2002 7 AM*

*Don't want to see my family anymore.*

*Don't want to get dressed.*

*Want to sleep and sleep and sleep and never wake up.*

*It hurts like hell – emotionally, physically. Want to take his knife and plunge it into his neck over and over again and watch his pathetic life ooze out of his scarred and unsightly body. Want to hack at him until he lies in a pool of blood at my feet. Want to castrate him and let him bleed to death for violating me. Want to use the flamethrower on him.*

*Previous tears were from emotional pain; today, it's physical and emotional – helplessness. Hopelessness. Pained and shamed. Somehow I have to kill him.*

*Diablo must die!*

*Diablo must die!*

*Diablo must die!*

*End of*  
GRINGA  
Book 1

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### **Eve Rabi Bio:**

Eve Rabi is the author of 26 romantic crime novels. She lives in Sydney Australia, but was born in South Africa. If you enjoy contemporary romance laced with crime, nail-biting high dramas with exciting twists and turns, angsty stories that leave you speechless, then you will enjoy Eve Rabi's books. When you pick up an Eve Rabi book, be prepared to gasp with shock, laugh out loud and to cry your eyes out while falling in love. To quote an Amazon reviewer, "Eve Rabi is not afraid to go there. I like that in an author."

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