

Demasiado Calliente

I held my breath to keep from moving. I was too hot, sweating, skin burning everywhere his body touched mine. My left arm, my cheek, my left leg, the left side of my chest, my stomach. His nose pressed a point on my neck that made it hard to breathe even if I'd let myself. I couldn't move. I couldn't wake him.

The dark of the rented room pressed in on me. The wood floor, worn smooth by countless years of boots, made my back ache. The floor because the bed wasn't big enough for both of us and rather than fight over who took the bed, we both slept on the floor. I'd kicked off my blanket long ago, but the scratchy wool still itched my right foot.

Duncan was drunk last night. Past what he usually achieved. I'd all but carried him up here. And while I wouldn't have minded sharing the small bed, I couldn't prey on his stupor.

The oversweet smell of rum filtered up through his glossy dark curls. I ignored the way his hair tickled my cheek. I ignored the acute discomfort in the heat of skin on skin. I'd dreamed of this since I met him four years ago. Dreamed of him curled around me, sleeping. An innocent enough dream.

I exhaled slowly to draw another breath to hold. Of course there were less innocent dreams. Dreams where the rings on his fingers curled so innocently against my chest would pull my hair. Where the legs resting so carelessly next to mine would straddle my hips. Where the soft puff of breath on my neck became ragged and the lips resting over my collarbone sang my name.

Such dreams. But dreams only, I had to remind myself. In all the years I'd spent with Duncan at this same tavern every other month or so, he hadn't looked at me the way I looked at him.

He stirred. I exhaled and tried to regulate my breaths, my heartbeat, to pretend I was asleep.

"Carlos?" He groaned in a gravelly morning voice.

It was everything I could do not to pet his hair and tell him everything is fine, go back to sleep. Instead, I pretended to wake. "Buenos días." *Good morning.*

He shifted, sliding his hand down my chest to sit up halfway. "Sorry, I must've rolled over."

He did roll over. It woke me. And I hadn't slept since. His sleepy eyes blinked at me, color indistinguishable in the dark, but I knew it by heart. Cinnamon sticks with flecks of gold. A color I could look at for the rest of eternity.

Duncan slid back down to faceplant on my chest. "Will your father kill us?"

I shook my head. Father threatened me if he ever found me with someone on his land. And undoubtedly that threat doubled when the someone was Roland Sadek's son. But we weren't on his farm, and none of the implications of that threat had been fulfilled. "No. He doesn't know." And even if he did, I wouldn't let him kill Duncan.

Duncan turned his head to look at me, smiled sleepily, and patted my arm. His cheek pressed against my chest, the scratch of his stubble - I forced myself to breathe. Duncan reached up to run his fingers through his hair and smooth it back from his face. It fell right back over his forehead. "Sorry if I drooled."

I shrugged. "Quiero sentir tus manos en mi pelo." *I want to feel your hands in my hair.* I said it casually. Then to his raised eyebrows, "It happens." It was my only relief. To tell him exactly how I felt, what I wanted, in a language he couldn't understand and a tone that belied the words.

A huge sigh. "My head hurts too much to go back."

I fought to keep from touching him. “Besame hasta estoy sin sintido.” *Kiss me senseless.* My casual tone obscured the meaning.

Duncan lifted his head from my chest. “What’s that mean, besame? You say that a lot.”

How suddenly my little coping mechanism could backfire. I opened my mouth, then closed it, unable to come up with a good lie.

He waited, seeming to enjoy my discomfort. “And quiero. You say that a lot too.” He leaned closer, and in an admittedly good accent said, “Te quiero, Carlos.”

My heart fluttered and something inside me broke. To hear those words from him, but in the wrong context, “Don’t say things when you don’t know what they mean.”

“What’s it mean?” He asked. His hand, heavy with rings, curled on my chest.

“Doesn’t matter. You don’t mean it.” I took his hand to push it off my chest, but he locked his fingers through mine, a stubbornness in his eyes announcing that he wouldn’t let go until he had an answer. I shut my jaw with a snap. If I told him, he’d walk away and I’d never see him again. But wouldn’t that be better than this tortured in-between? And wouldn’t we both be safer for it? I raised a hand to his cheek. “Te quiero,” I said, “I love you.” And I meant it.

Duncan sat back, expression between shock and I don’t know what, but he didn’t withdraw his hand from mine. “And besame?”

I shook my head, at a loss. “Besame y besame, nunca voy a suficiente.” *Kiss me and kiss me, it will never be enough.* I couldn’t help it. He shook his curls and I squeezed his hand to keep from touching his hair.

Duncan moved closer, pressing my hand to the floor. “What does that mean?”

“It means you’re like a brother to me.” The lie tasted bitter in my mouth.

He frowned. “Bullshit.” He wrapped a hand around the back of my neck to force me to look at him. “What’s it mean?”

My gaze slipped to his lips, still more inclined to sing than to snarl. Half in a daze, I whispered, “Tienes una boca tan linda.” *You have such a pretty mouth.*

“Boca. That means mouth because ‘callate la boca’ means shut your mouth.” His fingers tensed at the base of my skull. “And lindo. That’s what your cousin calls you and you hate it. Pretty.” I couldn’t read his expression.

Helpless, I touched his lips with the tips of my fingers. “Besame. Porfavor.”

Realization washed over his face like a wave on the beach. And then like a wave on the beach, his mouth crashed into mine. It was over too fast. The imprint of his rings on my fingers hurt in the best way possible and I blinked rapidly.

“All this time,” He said a breath away from me. “You’ve been asking me to kiss you?”

I dropped my head onto his shoulder. “I thought…” I trailed off.

He lifted my head and kissed me again, still not long enough, not deep enough. “You thought I wouldn’t want to?”

“I was wrong?” I asked. My brain fizzled like a firecracker.

His thumb traced over my lips. “Why on earth wouldn’t I want to kiss you?”

I pressed my lips to the hollow of his throat and up under his chin to tug on his earlobe. His gasp sent lightning through my blood. I kissed him with everything inside me. My dreams shattered with every breath, because every detail, every slide of his tongue or scrape of his teeth surpassed my every expectation.

The chill of his rings sliding down my back made me shiver. He swung his leg over my hips to sit in my lap, and it still wasn't nearly close enough. Skin burned against skin, but even if he consumed me with fire, I wouldn't let go, I wouldn't stop, and I'd thank him as my body turned to ash.