

### Chapter 16: Safe.

I stood in place staring at Alvaro. He walked up the porch skipping the broken step and coming over to me. He put an arm around my waist drawing me in and placing a chaste kiss on my forehead.

"You must be Jane's husband," Brady said coming over to us. He eyed Alvaro up and down.

Alvaro grinned and it was wicked. "So she mentioned me."

"Jane," my grandmother came outside. "I heard something break." She paused upon seeing Alvaro. He kept his arm around my waist. "Oh hello," she said looking him over.

"Abuela," he turned and looked at me, "your grandmother?" I nodded and he walked over to her.

I swallowed hard not knowing how to deal with the situation. I was so careful. I thought I would have time before he could even find me.

"Are you my Jane's boyfriend?" My grandmother asked and Alvaro turned back to look at me.

"Boyfriend?" He questioned. "I always thought it was more than that," he smiled and my grandmother blushed.

"Oh well come in," she said, "I've been wanting to meet you ever since Jane told me about you."

Brady looked at me and I looked at him. He made eye implications that I should go inside. "That's your husband?" He questioned in disbelief.

"Yeah," I tried to smile. But I was terrified. My goose wasn't just cooked.

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It was stuffed, fried and baked. He was going to force me to go back with him and he would never let me out of his sight now.

"Darling?" Alvaro called and I walked into the house again to see him seated at the kitchen table while my grandmother fussed over him.

"You know I feel honoured to at least meet one of my grandbaby's partners." She babbled on not knowing the fact that this man was crazy.

"It's a pleasure to meet you too, Ms Walker."

"Oh no," my grandmother said, "please call me nana or grammy."

Alvaro chuckled. "How does abuela sound?" He asked her.

"Sounds exotic," my grandmother dramatised, "I love it," she said placing a muffin in front of him and some iced tea.

He sipped the iced tea his eyes landing on me. "This is good." His claim behaviour always got me clammy. He could turn on a dime.

"Nana if you don't mind. I would like to speak with him for a minute," I said.

"Sure you kids go on," she said.

Alvaro stood and followed me upstairs to my room. I walked into my room and he came in after me shutting the door.

"This was not what I expected," he began. "Are you enjoying your time playing house with old MacDonald out there?" He seemed amused. "Bringing him iced tea," he snorted.

I reeled in my nerves. "Just give me a few minutes to say goodbye and I'll leave with you. Just don't hurt them."

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His face fell and he walked over to me. I took a step back and he reached out his hand to touch me. I flinched and he dropped his hand. "You think I'm going to hurt you?" His voice broke. "I'm not going to hurt anyone," he said and there was that vulnerability in his eyes again.

He placed a hand on my stomach and he looked into my eyes. I watched as his hand gently rubbed my tummy. "Why didn't you tell me?" He asked. "I found the pregnancy test." He didn't sound mad at me he sounded more concerned.

Tears welled in my eyes and he looked at me again, placing both his hands on either side of my face. "I messed up. I made you a promise and I couldn't keep it." My tears fell and he wiped them away with the pads of his thumbs. "Give me a chance to make it up to you and our child."

I took a step back. "You're not mad that I left?" I asked.

"I was furious. But then I knew why you did it. I'm just glad you're safe. Jane, I'm not a monster and I hate it that you're looking at me like that."

He moved away from me putting some space between us. I knew he wasn't a monster. He just did monstrous things and that scared me. He looked at me from across the room.

"Alvaro I can't raise a child in a home where things like that go on."

"I'll stop," he said.

I sighed. "You said that before and here we are."

"I didn't realize how serious you were before."

There was silence between us and yet I knew even though it sounded like

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he was giving me a choice he wasn't. He would expect me to return home with him.

"How's Mateo?" I asked instead. I was more worried about him.

"He told me he wasn't going to talk to me until you came home," he laughed, moving to sit on my bed.

I moved to sit next to him and he smiled weakly at me. "I've never lived with a woman before nor have I had girlfriends. I don't know how to do this but I want to try. I don't want you to be afraid of me. I will never hurt you."

I placed a hand on his shoulder. It was hard and I rubbed my palm over it just feeling him. He was flesh and bone even though he could act invincible and being flesh and bone meant he'd make mistakes.

But he didn't deny them.

He watched me and I slowly moved to rest my head on his shoulder. His body relaxed as he brought his arm around me.

"I'm curious," I said and he looked at me, "how did you find me? I covered up all my trails."

He smiled running a hand over my hair and placing a kiss on my forehead. "You're smart, sweetheart," he murmured against my forehead, "I'll give you that much but no one can hide from me."

I rolled my eyes, a small smile creeping onto my face. "Just tell me how?"

He shook his head. "I can't." A serious look formed on his face.

"Why?" I asked.

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"You don't want to know," he said and the look on his face made me want to.

"What did you do?" I asked, moving to stand.

His jaw clenched. "Jane it will only upset you."

"Just tell me," I demanded.

"I used your brother to find you." He watched me carefully.

"What?"

"He wanted money and I wanted answers. I got him to call yesterday and I heard your grandmother call for you. It's how I knew you were here and he gave me the address I needed."

Hot tears rolled down my cheeks. It was Jason's idea for me to run from Alvaro and he sold me out. "Are you upset that I found you or that your brother gave you away?" Alvaro asked in concern. He looked up at me and I couldn't answer I was just too dumbstruck.

He stood pulling me into his body and wrapping his arms around me. I was trembling. I wondered who my brother even was anymore. He was too consumed by his own selfish need and greed.

Jason never really had my back the way I had his. I could never trust again. I thought we only had each other to rely on but if it came down to me or money I knew what he'd choose.

My body quivered in Alvaro's arms and even though I was running from him he still felt like a safe place. I was conflicted and I was confused. I wanted to run from him but I didn't want his hands to fall from around

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my body.

"I'll try to do better, Jane," he rubbed a hand up and down my back. "Please don't cry. You must have been so stressed these last couple of days."

He rest his head on top of my mine. "I'm not going to force you to come home with me," he said, pulling back to look at me, "I'm going to give you the chance to make that choice for yourself."

"Seriously?" I couldn't believe it. He would just let me go. After everything he did to make sure I was always watched by someone.

"Mateo told me you deserved better," he said, letting go of me. "He's a smart kid and he is never afraid to tell me off when I mess up."

"I really do miss him," I admitted.

"I know he misses you too. I'm kind of jealous of how close he's gotten to you. It feels like he's more comfortable with you than me."

"That's not true. He loves you."

"You spend more time with him than I do and after his first day of school he walked into the house and his first question is where is Jane. He didn't even tell me how his day went but I heard him tell you everything."

"Maybe I am his favourite." I smiled victoriously and he smirked shaking his head at my audacity.

"I forced you in the beginning and I didn't know you. I was wrong. I'm not going to force you this time."

"What about abuelo wanting us to be married?"

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"I'll lose everything. He won't sign it over to me. He'd say I'm unstable and without heart. I'd get too lost in worldly things without an anchor to keep me grounded."

There was silence between us and I just couldn't believe he was the same man that forced me to marry him. "I thought I'd be able to avoid you when I married you. But it's impossible when you live under the same roof as me," he admitted. "I thought it would be easy to be married and not have anything to do with you."

I could smell spices and the aroma was delectable. "Your grandmother is cooking?" He asked.

"Yes, my boyfriend is here," I sighed, "of course, she is going to break out a feast."

"I see so you tell old MacDonald I'm your husband, but you tell your grandmother I'm your boyfriend?"

I laughed. "What do you want me to do? She would have been upset that she wasn't invited to the wedding."

Alvaro took my hand and his eyes skimmed over it. "Where is your ring?" He asked.

"I put it in my bag," I said walking over to the dresser and taking it out of my bag.

He came behind me placing his hot hands on my upper arms. He turned me around and took the ring out of my hand. I watched him as he twirled the ring around and he got down on one knee.

"What are you doing?" I asked and he smirked at me placing a finger on

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his lips.

"Now if you come home with me. I promise things will be different." He held up the ring to me. "You will never see another dead body again."

My eyes widened and I could feel my mouth drying out. I blushed and he stood. "I- um..." I couldn't form thoughts.

"Just say yes or if you don't I'll send an entire army of men to watch you if you don't come home. Also if you don't I'll have to deal with Mateo hating me."

"You don't want him to hate you?" I grinned.

"Jane," he smiled, "don't do this to me."

"Fine," I blushed. "I'll come back with you."

I was either making the right choice or I was making a very big mistake. But I didn't know what else to do. I was terrified of what the future held and Alvaro seemed like the only safe choice I had.

He slid the ring on my finger gently—this time—pushing it all the way to the base. His green eyes looked light and filled with mischief as he brought his hand up, tilting my chin up with his forefinger.

He closed the distance between us and my heartbeat was in my ears. Butterflies erupted in my stomach as his lips touched mine gently. I was stunned. He just kissed me and it wasn't because he was trying to tease me or because there was an audience.

But that wasn't the scary part. The scary part was that I liked it. "Did you have to kiss me?" I whispered.



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He shook his head. "I didn't have to," he whispered back, his cool breath fanning my lips.

He left the room leaving me with a heart filled with giddiness. I just wish he'd keep his promises this time or else I would be the biggest gullible dummy to exist.

I went downstairs to see the table was set and Alvaro was sitting down. "Where is Brady?" I asked, and Alvaro quirked a brow in my direction.

"He got an urgent call from work, sweetheart," nana said.

My grandmother made a lamb pot roast with potatoes and carrots. "It smells delicious, abuela," Alvaro complimented.

She petted him over the head. "Thank you, dear."

She came over to the table and started carving up the roast. "You know Jane," she started, "your grandpa had a tattoo too." I could remember what my grandfather looked like and if he had a tattoo I never saw it.

Alvaro smirked as his eyes fell on me.

"I too had a thing for the bad boys," my grandmother went on. "I see you got that from me."

Alvaro laughed and my cheeks were turning red by the second. He stood pulling out the chair next to him for me to sit. I moved to sit and pushed the pushed the chair closer to the table.

After dinner, I washed the dishes and Alvaro wanted to dry them. "Your grandmother is a nice woman."

"Thank you."

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"I'm going to get some people to come and fix this house," he said and I looked at him, "she shouldn't be living here like this. She could get hurt."

I stared at him as if I saw him for the first time. I was seeing a side to him only his family got to see. The tide between us was changing again. It went from strangers to acquaintances and now I didn't know which direction it was going. I just had to ride the wave and hope I didn't fall and drown.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" He asked.

"Nothing," I said, tearing my eyes away from him, "I actually wanted her to come and stay with me when I left here," I admitted. I wasn't just going to abandon her now.

"You would probably need an experienced woman to help you and advise you. You should ask her to move in with us."

"No no no," I heard my grandmother say. She walked into the kitchen with her hands on her hips.

"It's funny how your hearing works for things you're not supposed to hear, nana," I chuckled and she narrowed her eyes at me.

"Do not sass me, young lady."

Alvaro grinned. "Don't sass her," he said.

"Now you two are sweethearts for giving a damn about me but I am more than content living here. I spent my whole life here and I'm going to die here. That's my final word."

"Nana, I can take care of you," I said and she came over to me cupping

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my cheek.

"Sweetheart I'm happy here. Living my simple life. Besides I'm not even seventy yet. I can still walk and do things for myself."

"Grandparents all have the same mentality," Alvaro sighed, "but my doors are always opened to you, abuela," he said and she placed a hand on his cheek too as she stared up at the both of us.

"Just take care of her," she said and he nodded.

"I promise," Alvaro said, looking at me.

"I'm going to go to bed now. You kids behave," she said and Alvaro's chest rumbled with laughter.

She left the kitchen and he turned to me. "I'll sleep on the couch."

"Or you can sleep next to me if you want, darling," I teased him, remembering what he did to me.

"Okay," he said and my eyes widened. I didn't think he'd actually agree. "Let's go, darling." He put the dishtowel down and moved to leave the kitchen.

I followed him up to my room. The bed was big enough to share and it wasn't a big deal. I was going to have his child soon.

Alvaro took some pillows from one side of the bed and a blanket. He moved to drop them on the floor and I picked them up.

"We can share. It's okay."

"Really?" He asked and I nodded. I put the pillows back on the bed and he kicked off his shoes. "I usually sleep nude," he said.

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"Don't push it," I warned, causing him to smile.

I grabbed a pair of PJ's and moved to go into the bathroom to change. I couldn't believe that the man in my room was Alvaro. That he was willing to change so much. I stripped out of my clothes and put on the PJ's.

I walked back into the room to see that he was laying on top of the bed with a hand over his eyes. I switched off the light and laid down as well.

"Do you regret it?" He asked and he had asked me this before.

"I can't bring myself to have any regrets." I felt the bed move and he placed his hand under my shirt on my stomach. My skin fluttered under his touch.

"I know we knew this would happen but I still can't believe it," he said.

"Me neither."

"Do you feel any different than usual?" He asked. He sounded groggy hinting he was tired.

"I feel nauseous after I eat sometimes," I said, softly.

I felt his other hand play with my hair. "Eres un ángel," he whispered and then I heard subtle snores coming from him.

I turned on my side to face him. I couldn't see him because of how pitch black it was but I could feel him and hear him breathe. I moved closer to him and he kept his arm over me.

And I just stared into the darkness knowing he was there until the sandman came to claim me.