

Chapter 7: Lady Fate.

"Does Mateo know?" I spoke breaking the long silence between us. We were still parked on the side of the road and I was staring out the window watching kids play soccer on the road.

"No. I'll tell him tonight." I turned to see Alvaro had a defeated look on his face.

"How is he going to take it?"

"I don't know," he started, and the way he fidgeted in his seat told me he was feeling uneasy. "When abuela passed, he cried himself to sleep for more than a month. I had to send him for therapy." He ran a tired hand down his face leaving it to rest on his chin.

"And how do you feel?" I knew he would never show any signs of weakness in front of me but it wasn't about being powerful when the life of someone you loved was in danger.

"When that clock runs out there is nothing a man can do to stop it. Abuelo is old. He's been to the best doctors but he has too many underlying conditions."

"You didn't answer my question," I said and he punched the steering wheel.

"How do you think I feel?" He yelled.

"I'm sorry."

"What do you care? You're probably excited you'll be out soon."

My mouth fell open at his accusation. He thought I wanted abuelo to die. "You think that thought crossed my mind?" I was getting mad. How could he think so little of me? He didn't even know me— besides

what he read of me from a page.

I got out of the car. I was concerned for abuelo too. I may have not been with them for so long but abuelo and Mat have been good to me. I cared about them.

"Where are you going?" Alvaro called after me.

"As far from you as possible." I didn't expect him to warm up to me as fast as Mateo did but he didn't even try to know me or understand me.

I slammed the door and he got out of the car and grabbed me. "This is not a safe neighbourhood. Get back in the fucking car."

"I don't care." There were tears in my eyes. Curse my weak heart. But I had enough of trauma for one lifetime and Alvaro was nice to everyone but me and it got to me because I didn't do anything to deserve the way he treated me.

Alvaro loosened his grip on me, not completely letting go. His eyes landed on my face and he looked like he was in pain. He closed his eyes tightly looking everywhere but at me. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that" he said. "Please just come home with me. For Mateo. You two have grown so close in the past week. Don't leave him because of me. He's going to need you."

I nodded, wiping away my tears and moving to get back into the car. He started the car up. We had been sitting in silence for over an hour after he told me everything. "Can I have some time to think about having a child?" It wasn't something I could just give him an answer on. Having a child changed everything for us.

He bobbed his head up and down lazily. "I know it's a big ask."

He drove us home and I saw Mateo's car was already in the driveway.

Alvaro parked his car next to his. He sat in the car for a minute just staring ahead. "He needs to know," I said.

I moved to get out of the car and Alvaro followed me. I felt this feeling of uneasiness settle into my bones as we walked to the front door together.

We entered the house to see Mateo playing a game of chess with abuelo. The tears started to form in my eyes again and I felt Alvaro squeeze my arm.

"Hey, thanks for ditching me," Mateo said.

"Abuelo," Alvaro's voice strained, looking between his grandfather and Mateo, "did you tell him?"

"Hmm?" Mateo questioned looking up from the chessboard, "tell me what?"

"Mi hijo," Abuelo sighed and Mateo turned to look at him. Abuelo looked so frail sitting on the couch. It's like there was a dark cloud hanging over his head. The bubbiness I had witnessed yesterday was nothing but a memory now that there was no trace of it on his face.

"What is it, abuelo?" Mateo tried to smile but his eyes held concern and dread.

"You were such a beacon of light in mine and your abuela's lives," abuelo started, "after we lost Francisco I thought she would never smile again. But then Alvaro brought you home and you made us all happy with the little things you did," Mateo searched abuelo's face with his eyes. "We love you very much and we want the best for you, mi hijo. I just regret I may not be here to see you become the great man I'll know you'll be." Abuelo dabbed his eyes with his handkerchief.

Mateo looked at Alvaro. "What's going on?" He asked. He looked scared and I couldn't take it anymore. My tears started to fall and I wanted to tell them to not tell him.

"Mi hijo, look at me," abuelo said, his voice straining with emotion and Mateo looked petrified. "I'm not going to be around come next year." Mateo went silent as he just stared at his grandfather's face, abuelo reached out to touch his arm. "The doctors can't do anything to help me anymore."

"What?" Mateo questioned in a voice of disbelief, tears rolling down his cheeks as he blinked hard at abuelo. "But you said you were fine!" He stood.

"Mat," Alvaro tried to say in a calm voice.

"Tienes sangre de cucaracha, ¿recuerdas?" Mat rambled in Spanish. "Cucaracha, abuelo!" 1

"Everyone has to go someday," abuelo said and Mat shook his head.

"I can't lose you too..." He cried falling to his knees in front of his grandfather.

"You are going to be okay. You are strong. You and Alvaro need to take care of each other now," abuelo ran his hand over Mateo's hair.

Mateo cried and I felt Alvaro's hand on my shoulder as I tried hard to control my own emotions. Mat suddenly stood. "I can't be here right now," he said and moved to leave the house. 1

Alvaro grabbed his arm. "Pasa tanto tiempo con él como puedas ahora." He sounded like he was trying to reason with him. 1

"No," Mat shrugged his arm off. "He's still going to leave!"

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"Mat," I called.

"Everyone just leave me alone!" he yelled and Alvaro reluctantly removed his hand.

Mateo gave us one last look before he slammed the door on his way out. I heard his car start up and he revved it with purpose causing my heart to race.

"Mateo," I yelled and ran outside. His tyres burned against the tar as he drove towards the gates.

"Open the gate," Alvaro yelled for someone and the gates flew open.

Mateo drove away his tyres screeching as he went and I prayed with everything in me that he wouldn't do something reckless.

I couldn't get the look of anguish on Mateo's face out of my head. I wish I could do something to help but I knew there was nothing I could do. "He will come back," Alvaro said squeezing my shoulder.

We walked into the house again to see the nurse help abuelo back into his wheelchair. "I think you should stay here. We can take care of you. You should be with us for the next few months," Alvaro said.

"No!" Abuelo roared, "I do not want to see you and Mateo's sad faces every minute of the day. It will put me in that grave faster. I'm going to go out there and enjoy whatever time I have left."

"Abuelo," Alvaro tried to reason.

"My word is final, Alvaro," he said, and the nurse wheeled him out of the house.

Alvaro looked conflicted. He looked like a man that was about to lose everything. I looked at him and he looked at me— his eyes saying a

million things his lips would never say. He stormed off to his study, slamming the door hard.

Suddenly the house felt colder and darker than usual. I was worried about Mat and I was also worried about Alvaro, but he was never going up to me.

I walked towards my room catching Cynthia and Marian the other helper lingering in the hallway. "Hey ladies," I greeted.

"Mrs Castillo." They both jumped.

I knew they were eavesdropping and I smiled at both of them. "You two think I can use the kitchen for my craft?" I asked.

I was a stress baker and I had a lot of stress to work through.

"The kitchen is yours, Mrs Castillo," Cynthia squeaked.

"Thank you," I said, turning to go find it. I had a general idea that it would be at the side of the house and I was right.

The kitchen was clean with marble countertops and glass shelves. The tiles were black with hints of grey and the fridge looked like it could fit two grown people in it.

That was an eerie thought considering all the noises I heard at night.

I had a lot to think about and doing something with my hands helped me think things through. Abuelo wanted to see his great-grandchild and Alvaro offered me anything for a child.

But I couldn't put a price on a baby. 1

I never thought I'd marry someone I didn't love either, and that proved we never got what we wanted in life. It didn't mean because you were good that life would be easy. Lady fate was always shuffling the deck

and more than often even good people got a hand with a joker in it.

The real test was resisting the things that could turn you bad. Anyone could be good under the right conditions but it took willpower to remain good during bad times.

I found chocolate brownie mix in the cupboard and decided why not. I got a large mixing bowl and decided to wing it by adding my own measurements of eggs, milk and sugar.

I never could follow instructions.

I got to whisking the mixture until it was smooth and then added the mixture to a thirty-centimetre square pan. I set the oven and put the pan in. I looked into the fridge and found a chocolate bar.

Alvaro's words kept ringing in my head as I worked.

If I had a child with Alvaro it wouldn't be the worst thing... I would be giving Abuelo his last wish. But then a child was not something that could be discarded. It was a lifelong commitment and I'd be entering into that commitment with Alvaro.

I would just need to set some rules. I didn't want money I wanted the child to be raised properly and in a good home. Not in this house. I would have to make an agreement with Alvaro that involved me raising the child somewhere else.

That was the only condition I was going to settle for because I was not going to give up my kid and at the same time, I was not going to stay in this house with a child. Alvaro could visit the baby if he wanted since they would be his kid too.

I put the chocolate in the microwave with some cream and let it soften. "Everything to your liking Mrs Castillo?" Cynthia asked, walking into the kitchen.

"Yes and please Cynthia call me Jane." She nodded and moved to leave the kitchen but I felt this burden weighing down on my heart and I didn't know who else to talk to. "Cynthia," I said and she stopped.

"Yes, Jane?"

"Do you have any children?" I asked and she smiled.

"Three boys," she beamed proudly.

"Did you feel ready when it came time to be a mom?" I asked and she shook her head.

"I don't think it's something you can ever be prepared for but children truly are a gift, Mrs- I'm sorry- Jane," she smiled, shyly.

I nodded and the oven went off. I pulled out the tray of brownies and drizzled the chocolate over it. I cut it into squares. "Have a brownie with me," I said and she nodded.

"I'll tell you what was the hardest part about children," Cynthia said, moving to the fridge to get the milk. She brought the milk back to the counter and poured two glasses. "It's that they grow up too fast. They don't stay adorable babies forever."

I bit into my brownie and it was moist and chocolatey. Cynthia did the same and she made a sound of delight. "You make good brownies," she complimented.

We chatted some more as we finished our brownies and I insisted to clean the kitchen because I made a mess. I had come to terms with my decision and I would tell Alvaro when he cooled down and Mateo returned home.

I walked back to my room and fell on my bed as I stared up at the ceiling. I pulled out my phone and I tried to call Jason. I'd been trying ever since I got my phone back and every time it went straight to voicemail.

There was a small knock on my door and I was too tired to move. "It's open," I said thinking it was maybe Marianne—because she knocked softly.

The door opened and Mateo walked into my room. His eyes and nose were red. "Sweetheart are you okay?" I asked and he shook his head. I patted a spot on the bed next to me and he came over and lay beside me.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you," he said and I propped myself up, on one hand, to look at him.

"It's okay," I ruffled his hair.

"Abuelo is a great man..." A tear rolled down his cheek and I caught it, wiping it away. "I was blessed with the opportunity to know what it was like to have a family and now I feel like I'm losing them one by one. It's just so cruel."

"Alvaro is always going to be there for you," I cooed and he looked up at me with watery eyes.

"And you?" He questioned and I felt my heart ache. At that moment I knew that no matter what happened between me and Alvaro there was always going to be a piece of my heart tied to Mat.

I inhaled sharply. "And me..."

"These are good," I heard Alvaro's voice and I looked to see him lingering at my bedroom door, "Cynthia said you made them," he

popped the last piece in his mouth.

"You eating cake without me. You're a monster," Mat tried to smile. Alvaro came over and sat down on the bed.

"There is more in the microwave." I ran my fingers through Mateo's hair and that seemed to make his eyes flutter closed in a sleepy manner. 1

Alvaro laid down next to Mateo. "I love you guys," Mateo said, resting his head against my shoulder.

Alvaro looked at me his eyes locking onto mine for a moment and for once he didn't glare. Or clench his jaw. He just looked at me the way one looks at a person with an open mind.

I continued to play with Mateo's hair until I heard subtle snores come from him. Alvaro smiled. "Thank you," he whispered.

"For what?" I asked. I was just happy that Mat came home without a scratch.

"For the way you are with him."

Now that Mat was home and Alvaro seemed calm. I could talk to him about my decision. "We need to talk," I said, and his brows knitted together.

He stood and gestured for me to follow him out of the room. I closed the door quietly allowing Mateo to sleep. "I'll do it," I whispered, just loud enough for Alvaro to hear.

"You will?" He looked relieved and I could see he wanted to do this for his grandfather.

"I will but I have some rules." I had to be straight with him.

He looked apprehensive at first but nodded. "What are they?"

"First no killing in the house or torturing," he seemed to crack a smile at that but I was serious.

"Okay." He agreed.

"No violence whatsoever, Alvaro. No guns no nothing." He nodded and then a secret smile played on his lips.

"So how do you suppose we do this?" I asked and his smile broadened.

"How do you want to do it, darling?" He asked staring at me intensely. My blood got hot and he took a step forward, running the back of his finger down my cheek to the base of my neck. He had a humorous look on his face and I had a feeling he was teasing me.

I placed a hand on his chest. "Well with the development of technology in medical science," I babbled realising I did not think about the process of getting pregnant but just the baby part.

His chest rumbled with laughter. "I'll take you to the doctor in the morning." His face looked lighter and free of stress as he smiled.

He looked like an entirely new person.

"Okay," then I bobbed back and forth on my heels. "I'll see you in the morning." 1

I moved back into my room and I heard Mateo snoring. "You might want to sleep somewhere else. He snores like a tractor throughout the night."

"Is there a guest room?" I asked, closing the door.



"You can sleep next to me if you want," Alvaro whispered, his eyes displaying mischief as he moved to tilt my chin up to look at him.

"Stop teasing me," I warned.

He leaned in, moving his lips to my ear. "What are you going to do about it, mami?" He challenged.



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