

FALLING FOR THE ENEMY Chapter 2 - CHAPTER TWO: WHO ARE THEY?

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"..... We thank you for Ashley's life and all the years we shared with her. We lift her to you today in honor of the good we saw in her and the love we felt for her. Por favor concédenos la Fuerza para dejarla a tu Cuidado..."

Maria had trouble keeping up with the prayers the priest was conducting. Honestly, she had trouble keeping up with reality at this point. To her, it felt like the world would fade and reappear before her eyes. She was constantly being shoved back and forth between reality and illusion.

She knew all this wasn't real. It couldn't be.

Her mom wasn't and couldn't be dead.

No, she was probably back home waiting for her to return so she could tell her stories of how much of a badass sniper she was in her youth. Her mother would always come up with crazy scenarios that involved her being in the mafia. Maria never those stories for once.

Why? Because her mother was too weak to even consider doing the things she told. Perhaps in the past, she was, but for majority of her life, Maria had taken care of her mother, whom sickness seemed to love quite a lot. It's been over thirteen years since her first ailment and each day she just got weaker and paler by the day, so much that Maria had forgotten what an action-packed and fierce woman she was.

So the conclusion Maria came to was that her mother's ailment had her delusional.

"...Señor, we pray that those we love, who have gone before us in faith may know your forgiveness...."

Ah, and that's another point to prove that her mother could have never been involved with the mafia. She was a strong believer in Christ, you could tell by the crucifix that always hung on her neck even in death. She wouldn't dare to take a life or get involved with something as sinful as the mafia.

And although her mother did everything possible to instill those beliefs in Maria, it just wasn't possible. The pain of this world was just too much for there to be a God.

".... And may the blessings of everlasting life, in the company of the virgin Mary and all the angels and saints in ancient heaven...."

Maria's fist tightened at the thought of there being a God and something like this could happen to her mother. Where was he while her mother suffered all these years? Where was he while she tried reaching out for the picture that held the best of their memories? Where was he when she took her last breath?

If Maria had doubts about there being a God before, she was certain he was non-existent now.

".... in the knowledge of eternal life...."

To Maria, the only reason this priest stood with them that day was to honor the belief of her mother, she would have wanted a funeral like this, preferably in a church but this alone was already beyond Maria's limit. She just wanted to go home and sleep away the agonizing tightening in her chest.

For the first time that day, Maria lifted her eyes from the ground and looked around. By her side was Jane who looked solemn at the loss. She loved Ashley, she was always enchanted by the stories she told and the two were almost as close as she and Maria. Ashley was a mother to her too. Jane had handled all arrangements for the funeral because the last few days were beyond hard for Maria. She wouldn't talk or eat or sleep. Hell, it was a miracle she was able to make her shower this morning.

Gratitude filled Maria's heart as she stared at the girl she could proudly call her best friend. Behind them was a multitude that shocked Maria. She didn't expect that many people to turn up. At first, she assumed they were all complete strangers, but as she took the time to look at their faces she was able to recognize each one of them.

Some so happened to be her classmates from kindergarten, preschool, high school, and college. Some of her mother's closest friends attended as well, a few of them crying hysterically as they blew into their tissues. Even Angel was in attendance, his head bowed in shame from how he had previously treated his faithful employee.

But only two men grasped her full attention in a chokehold. They were at the far back of the crowd but somehow they managed to stand out. The two had the height of legendary basketballers, they wore matte black suits accompanied by dark shades. One of them appeared to be in his early twenties while the other seemed to be in his late forties. The younger one had a black mic and earpiece attached to his ear.

With all these thoughts involving the mafia, Maria wondered if they were perhaps assassins. But that was beyond farfetched. They were probably just friends of Jane anyway.

Even with this conclusion, Maria couldn't take her eyes off them and even though their shades made it hard to know exactly what they were looking at, she was certain they were staring right back at her.

"In the name of the father, the son, and the holy spirit" The older man performed the holy sign as the priest spoke, Maria watched in bewilderment as a tear escaped beneath his shades, leaving a trail on his cheek.

Que Demonios?!

That wasn't something a friend of Jane would do. Maria became alarmed.

She grabbed Jane's arm frantically causing her to look at her with worry. "What's the matter?"

"Those men..." her lips came to a halt as the two mysterious men were nowhere in sight.

Jane followed Maria's eyes but found no man that could cause her that much terror. "What men?"

"I..... I don't know, sorry." Maria looked at her feet, trying to comprehend what just happened. Perhaps she was becoming delusional from lack of sleep.

Yes, that was definitely it.

Jane grabbed her friend's cheeks with her bony hands, urging Maria to look directly at her. "Hey, muchacha, I know all this is scary. But I'm here for you, okay? Never forget that." Jane wrapped her arms around Maria and she felt warmed by her friend's reassurance.

But would it be enough to face what her future held?

As Maria watched the men lower the casket and cover it with sand, she knew that a part of her had been buried along with her mother. Soon, the funeral was over and the crowd dispersed. Some left while others made sure to give their condolences to Maria.

She couldn't care less about it. The longer she spent by her mother's graveyard, the more fatigued she became. To make it worse, a few of her mother's friends, some she barely knew, began telling stories of discussions they had with the now deceased. What was the point of bringing all that up? Maria didn't know.

As if reading her thoughts, Jane managed to shoo the old ladies away. However, one of them was beyond persistent.

"Oh, Mija!" She cried out as she engulfed Maria in a ferocious hug that was sure to dislocate a few ribs. Luckily, she let go of the baffled girl before any damage could be done.

Maria took several steps back and took a good look at the woman that nearly snapped her bones. She was short, very short. Nothing beyond five feet, that was for sure. She appeared to be around the same age as her mother, only with more wrinkles.

"Your mother was a woman too great to die this young." Before Maria could dodge, the woman had already trapped her in another suffocating embrace. Only this time, she shoved something as tiny as a pebble into Maria's hand before whispering, "Por favor, carry on her legacy."

She released Maria abruptly and as quickly as she came, she was gone.

Jane stared at the strange woman's retreating before returning her gaze to her friend. "What was that about?"

The cemetery was as good as empty at this time, the sun was about to set and the air was cool.

Raising her hand, Maria gasped at what the mysterious lady had left in her possession.

"Holy shit! " Jane's beady eyes enlarged at the tiny object in Maria's cold hands.

A bullet.

With a name engraved on it.

Emiliano.

Maria shrieked, dropping the object quickly on the grass and stepping away from it.

" Que Diabolos real? Why would anyone give me that?" Jane bent to pick it up, "Don't just touch it!" Maria exclaimed, looking at her friend with eyes wide in surprise.

Jane rolled her eyes, "it's a bullet, not a bomb."

"I don't care, get away from it."

Obviously, her friend paid no attention to her and inspected the object between her fingers. "Do you know of any 'Emiliano'?"

"Fortunately, no," Maria responded with a scowl.

"Well, whoever he is, this bullet was meant for him."

"Sin mierda. Now throw that thing away and let's get the hell out of here. Enough strange things have happened today." Maria said, her eyes searching around the now empty graveyard.

"Throw it away? No way! That lady gave this to you for a reason."

"Are you kidding me? She was probably a nutjob! Pure crazy! All this is crazy! I'm going home." Without waiting for Jane's reply, she stormed out of the cemetery as quickly as she could.

"Wait!" Jane ran, trying to catch up to her petrified friend. "Did anything else happen today?"

"I saw two assassin-looking guys and they disappeared in the blink of an eye." Maria rushed out.

Jane froze at her words and looked at her in perplexity. "Jesus Christ, Maria!"

"What?"

"We need to report this to the police!"

"Report what exactly? That I saw two weird-looking guys after three nights without sleep and some strange woman handing me a bullet with the name of someone I don't even know?" Maria looked at her friend incredulously.

"I think I should stay with you tonight," Jane announced, panic and worry swirling in her blue orbs for her friend.

"No, that won't be necessary..."

"Won't be necessary?! There are strange men and bullets involved!"

Her words shut Maria up for a few seconds and it was then she could see the fear in Jane's eyes. She had never seen her like that before, she was always loud, wild, and jubilant, carefree even.

No, she wouldn't be the reason her friend would feel any negative emotions. For the first time that week, Maria forced a smile and looked at her friend with much love.

"If anything happens, I'll call you. I promise." She said calmly.

"I... I don't want anything to happen to you, Maria." Jane's voice trembled as she spoke. She knew the death of her mom was hard on her too.

"Nothing will happen to me, okay?"

"You'll call if even a car drives by, got it?"

"Si, Señora!" Maria chuckled and the two had another embrace before walking each other home. They arrived at Jane's extravagant mansion first and the two said their goodbyes. Although Jane was reluctant to let her go, even if her house was just two streets away.

She couldn't help it, her protective mode had been turned on.

She watched Maria walk away until she was out of sight. She entered her house with a sigh as she hoped her friend would be okay. Did she make the right decision leaving her alone?

As Maria neared her house, the little hairs at the back of her neck stood out. It felt like two holes were boring into the back of her skull. She turned her back but there wasn't a human insight.

Nevertheless, she called out, "Hola"

It was getting dark and she knew better than to spend any more time on the vacant street. Her fingertips felt cold as she sprinted across the street, unlocking the door in a haste she barged in and slammed it shut behind her.

Her heart beating wildly as her head throbbed. But she was safe now.

Or was she?