*Chapter Seven—*

Valeria was no stranger to the concept of the fundraiser. As what was, essentially, a soldier in a rogue army she had learned that the kindness of strangers coming together for a greater cause could be surprisingly noble and even profitable. But how this party was any different from any of the other numerous functions that had been held at the Presidential Mansion since (or perhaps, even before) her rise to Presidente, Valeria wasn’t sure.

Well, with one key exception; in that *she* was now the one having to ask for money.

“If you could devote some of your vast funds to helping the state, I know that we would very much appreciate it—”

“Someone of your \*hrk\* great societal standing could *surely* rally support among the common people in the—”

“I understand that a fluid budget is important to maintain in this day and age, but if you could throw your hat into—”

These people, her people if by no other merit than having been born in the same country that Valeria and her army had fought so hard to save, were the most contentious and fickle lot that she had ever had the displeasure of working with. Of *playing politics* with.

And if it hadn’t been for Raul’s little metal flask, she almost assuredly would have snapped one of their privileged little necks with her bare hands. She could do it—she’d done it before.

But thankfully for everyone involved, rum helped her to keep the edge off. While nothing could completely remove her tendencies towards faux-pas by merit of her upbringing or predisposed notions toward the elite (if anything alcohol introduced more avenues for her to make a fool of herself in conversation) Valeria was far more sociable *with* this necessary evil than without it.

In fact, she almost certainly preferred it to the necessary evil that was politics.

In her country, drinking culture was as pervasive as the air around them. Nobody thought twice about their presidente having rum on her breath as she asked them for funds to help rebuild the country. In fact, it helped dispel the airs of rigid haughtiness that had come to define her image in the public opinion. Seeing her stumble a bit in her high heels and wobble in her dress made her seem more human.

Too human, sadly.

While Valeria had collected some money that she could put toward Mateo’s debt, it was far from enough to really matter. Her steadily increasing intoxication throughout the night, born from an overestimation of how well she could control herself while drunk, had blown right through the intended use of humanizing her and had run the risk of making her out to be more incompetent.

At least when she was perceived as cold and militaristic, they respected her.

“If I were General Pequeño, and had helped to line their fat wallets and place them on their perches, they would have been more generous.”

Valeria had plopped herself down in her chair with an empty bottle of rum and a platter of comfort food from the table of hors devours that had gone largely uneaten. Despite the high, swimmy feeling that had accompanied some of her most brave actions on the battlefield, now all it could compel her to do was to empty the bottle. And to stuff herself on pricy finger foods—the last thing that she needed after a night like tonight was a hangover.

After all, she was going to have to think of alternative methods to getting Mateo Morales the amount that they had agreed upon. Despite what many a soldier would tell you, pressure did not always yield preferable results…

*Speaking of pressure…*

Valeria leaned back drunkenly in her seat, her stomach bulging out painfully beneath her dress. Gold fabric was drawn harp string tight over the soft caramel chub that had washed ashore onto her lap. Her fleshy hips pressed against the arms of her chair, and the soft rolls of her lovehandles bunched uncomfortably in the gap between them. She might have felt sickeningly weightless in her drunken state, but she knew that she was anything but.

“I need out of this… this *ugly* thing…” the presidente’s meaty arms creased at the elbow as she tugged at the dress, “This… ugly… *fake* thing…”

How much of her displeasure with how the night had gone could be attributed to the drunkenness, and how much could be attributed to the night’s genuinely terrible reception was up in the air. But Valeria’s mind had started turning, along with her stomach, as she wallowed in her office with nothing but her thoughts.

This wasn’t going to work. She couldn’t ask people for money. She couldn’t trust these people to give for the betterment of the country around them. She would need to find another way to get their support. Or at the very least, their *monetary* support.

Her country needed her to act—it didn’t need parties, and it didn’t need dresses, and it didn’t need catering. She needed to get money together. And it started with…

“Oof…” Valeria stumbled to her feet, her belly sloshing as she steadied herself on her desk, “No more dresses.”

With enough foresight to make sure that the door was locked and the curtains were drawn, she removed the sick second skin from her pudgy shape. It sickened her how much fatter she had gotten since she had told herself that she would get her weight under control. She was a cow. A fat-hipped, chubby brown cow who had grown far too accustomed to the sorts of fineries that she had sworn to strip away.

“The gilding is… ufff…” Her belly squelched and her thighs jiggled as she kicked the remains of her party dress off of her thick ankles, “Off of the lily…”

Say what you want about Valeria—she might have been a country mouse, she might have been unrefined, and she might have been a truly awful politician.

But she did not make the same mistakes twice.

*Chapter Eight—*

“I see that we have moved back to the fatigues.”

Ramone’s trips to the mansion were not very often. Despite what Valeria might have thought about him, he probably did have a very busy schedule. Doing what, she could hardly imagine, but her experience running a country had taught her to appreciate that things schedules are not always as simple as they appear, and that being in such high demand constantly must have weighed heavily on his shoulders.

“Not exactly. These are new.” Valeria’s double chin bunched as she looked down, “Instead of expensive parties and large catered events, I have decided to go with a more personable approach—this is the new military uniform of your country. Do you like it?”

On the men outside, who wore a version of it, it looked very good. On Valeria even, it looked nice. It was clearly not meant to accentuate her shape in any way, though. Shades of brown with yellow and blue accents were practical enough, but Valeria’s increased weight meant that there was far much more brown on her than there was on anyone else wearing it. Her flaring hips and round ass pulled the pants taut, and her fat belly clearly pressed against the crotch and rebelled against the high waist. Even packed tight in her blouse, her breasts were beginning to sag over her stomach on either side due to their size and weight.

“I think it’s very… fitting.” He chose is words carefully, “You always were more at home in uniform than out of it.”

“Believe it or not, Ramone, I couldn’t agree with you more.” Her round face creased at the chins as she leaned over to pour herself a glass of rum, “Would you like a drink?”

“No, no thank you.” Ramone held his hand up in quiet denial, “I have an important dinner later today. I will drink then.”

“Suit yourself.” Valeria poured dark rum into one of the glasses, “Personally, I’ve found that it makes my own important meetings go by a bit quicker.”

“You wished to discuss something?”

“I did—I still do.” Valeria brought to glass to her lips, “Please, sit. This will be over very quickly.”

Ramone did as he was asked. She offered him a drink again, though silently, and then relented once he denied her for the second time.

“As you are aware, the country is hurting. *You,* as a private citizen have much. *We,* as a country have very little. And while this has been the case for some time now, I am calling on you—as an ally to the cause of deposing General Pequeño—to help me change this.”

Valeria explained the dire straits that Mateo Morales and his company of mercenaries held them in. How much money was owed, and how much money the country could afford to give him, and how much money she and the rest of the struggling government had managed to raise. And how he was going to help them.

“Going to?” Ramone laughed uncomfortably, “Is this not a request?”

“It is not.” Valeria steepled her thick fingers as she leaned into her desk, tummy pooching over the lip, “As an ally to our cause, I am calling on you to help rally support within the wealthy elites. I will be frank—I do not know much about this sort of thing. They do not respect me. Yet. But they respect you.”

“Madame Presidente, I don’t think…” Ramone gulped uneasily, “I do not think that I will be able to convince anyone to hand over their money to me.”

“Nonsense; that is your job, every day, as leader of your company.” Valeria shrugged, “And I come to you as a compromise. If we cannot *gather* the money, we will be forced to *take* it to repay our debts. And that is far, far too close to the sort of thing that we fought so hard to rebel against for my taste.”

The sound of Valeria’s overworked air conditioning unit was the only break in the silence that hung between them in the stale Summer heat trapped in the presidential office.

“Some time ago, you told me that I had to ensure that my constituents felt *seen*.” Valeria accentuated the word, “Well… this is me, seeing you, and what you are good at. And asking you, from one rebel to another, for help.”

“I… I did ask you this.” The young man shifted uncomfortably, his expensive suit and styled hair wilting slightly in the heat, “I will do my best.”

“That is all I ask.” Valeria’s smile dimpled her round cheeks, “It is settled then. See? That wasn’t so bad.”

“I think I preferred it when you were out of your element.” Ramone laughed, “You were much less scary then.”

“Ah yes, but I have grown comfortable.” Valeria palmed a handful of her gut, beige-covered belly bulging between her fingers, “*Used* to my position. As if that were not obvious, huh?”

“You wear the weight well, if it helps.” Whether or not it was a hollow compliment, Valeria did not care much, “But yes—you are *much* better at this than the stomping recluse I met on the balcony the last time that we spoke privately.”

“I just stomp louder.” Valeria tipped the drink back into her mouth and slammed it down on the desk, “You were the first of our wealthy allies that I have met with today—here’s hoping that they all go as bend as easily as you did.”

Before Ramone could comment further, the intercom on the presidential desk buzzed.

“Madame, your lunch is ready.”

“Excellent, send it up.” Valeria’s good mood continued, and even brightened further as she readjusted her supple shape in her squeaking chair, “I’m going to need it, with the day that I have ahead of me…”