

The Cage

The cage is ineffective.

It's supposed to contain, conceal, restrain. Take the power away from something that had a choice, something that was once running free—maybe on the plains of Africa, or in the sweaty jungles of South America, or on the icy slopes of Antarctica.

It doesn't work on her.

The lioness.

The goddess.

She stares at me when I walk in, her brown eyes the hue of chocolate melting on a sidewalk in the heat. Her posture is perfectly straight, as if she'd gone to Catholic school and they whacked her with a ruler every time she slouched. She looks so out of place on the thin mattress in a powder blue jumpsuit with her hands folded in her lap.

I pull the chair away from the wall and drape my grey duster across the back before sitting down and withdrawing a pad and pen from my pocket. She watches me flip through a couple of sheets where I have things written.

Name: Catalina Amador
Age: Unknown, possibly early forties
Birthplace: Madrid, Spain
Initial analysis: tough cookie to crack

I find a blank page and smooth it with my fingers. Cool, dry. My eyes flick upward to meet her unflinching gaze.

“So tell me about your daughter, Ms. Amador.”

“Catalina,” she corrects, her accent making the name sound exotic and beautiful. My lips tug at the edges, wanting to smile.

“Catalina, then.”

“Why? What does Jordan have to do with this?”

I shrug one shoulder. “Nothing, really. You seem hesitant and uninterested in yourself and so I thought we could start with the little one. She's what? Five years old?”

She eyes me, suspicious. Not that I blame her. “Yes.”

One-word answers. This woman is killing me. “Does she...have a favorite color?”

Catalina crosses her arms and tosses her head, causing the loose black curls framing her face to shift aside. It's a practiced movement, and a brilliant one at that. A lesser man would be distracted by her features, which would allow her the time to switch subjects.

"It's purple," she answers in a clipped tone. "I am uncomfortable with this subject. Perhaps we could talk about something else."

I poise the pen. "Alright, what would you rather discuss?"

"You."

I blink and raise my eyes again. She means it. Hm. Interesting. "Me?"

"Yes. How did you come to this establishment?"

I lick my bottom lip, considering the question. "Do you really want to know or are you just trying to waste time in our session?"

Her eyes widen, and then she laughs. The sound is music. "Touché."

A smile hovers over my lips. "I'm a lot of things, Catalina, but I'm not an idiot. You'll have to try a little harder if you want to keep me out."

"I thought the purpose was keeping me in here."

"Not forever," I whisper. Surprise steals across her face. I clear my throat, adjusting my posture again.

"Your rehabilitation is my top priority. We want to get you out of here as soon as possible."

"You're not one of them, are you?"

I hesitate. "One of who?"

In the blink of an eye, the little bit of the goddess that peeked through vanishes. The vulnerability in her face dries up. I mourn its loss.

A sigh escapes me. "My name is Andrew Bethsaida. I came here as a favor to the head psychiatrist. I specialize in multicultural patients who suffer from different psychological conditions. Does that answer your question, Catalina?"

"Sí. Gracias, señor Bethsaida."

I smile again. "De nada. And it's Andrew, by the way."

A tiny smile forms on her lips. “Andrew, then.”

The cage is hers. The key is mine. One question remains.

Who will open it first?

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