CHAPTER 15: THE LAST BEGGING

The rain was a slow bleed against the windowpane, tapping in frantic, uneven heartbeats.

Cruz stood at Vivien's door, soaked through, her badge still clipped to her belt, her mouth trembling in ways she couldn't control. She hadn't called. Hadn't planned. Her hands smelled like gunpowder and cheap coffee. Her heart like confession. Every pulse in her throat felt too loud.

Inside, a worn jazz record played low, Billie Holiday murmuring broken sweetness into the apartment’s damp breath.

Vivien opened the door without speaking. She was barefoot, wrapped in a silk robe that clung to her thighs, damp at the hem where the floor kissed her skin. Her lipstick was half-smeared, the ghost of a smile where her mouth had once been fierce.

She stepped back.

Cruz entered.

Neither spoke. The click of the door closing was louder than the thunder. The sound echoed through Cruz's ribs like a second heartbeat.

Cruz kissed her first.

It wasn't elegant. It wasn't even a decision. It was need collapsing all her training into a mouth on a mouth, a groan swallowed between teeth. Vivien caught her wrists mid-grasp, pulled her closer, their bodies crashing like the storm outside.

The rain hammered the windows harder, a stuttering percussion against the heat rising between them.

Vivien's fingers trailed down, tugging Cruz's wet blouse free from her jeans. Tugging the badge off her hip and letting it clatter to the floor.

"No titles tonight," Vivien whispered, voice low, reverent. Cruz could feel the words against her mouth more than hear them.

Cruz nodded, her breath hitching audibly, body already vibrating with too much sensation.

Vivien pulled the blouse over Cruz's head in a single motion. Dragged the soaked jeans down, slow, worshipful, brushing knuckles along the trembling muscles of Cruz's thighs.

Cruz stood there—bare, trembling, nipples pebbling against the cool air, breath catching in sharp, uneven bursts. Her skin almost buzzed where Vivien's hands had been.

Vivien dropped to her knees.

Kissed the inside of her thighs, lips trailing wet, open-mouthed prayers against salt-slick skin. Cruz whimpered again, her pulse hammering so hard in her neck she was sure Vivien could hear it.

Cruz shivered violently when Vivien's tongue flicked against the soft crease where thigh met hip. Her fingernails scraped against the wall behind her, searching for something to ground herself, the texture of the paint biting under her nails.

"Say it," Cruz whispered, broken, voice vibrating on a shallow gasp.

Vivien's voice was a blade slid between ribs: "Mine."

Cruz shuddered again, a sound escaping her throat like a sob strangled halfway out, breath shuddering against Vivien's hair.

Vivien rose and led her to the bed. Sat down first, legs open, robe slipping off her shoulders to pool around her hips. She opened herself wide, knees spread, back straight, arms stretched out, offering herself like a throne built of need.

She pulled Cruz into her lap.

Cruz straddled her, knees pressed into the mattress on either side, thighs slick with sweat and rain, trembling from more than just the cold. Their skin brushed and Cruz's lungs stuttered, breath snagging on the wet, fevered contact.

She sank down until their bodies sealed—slick, pulsing, aching—and a broken gasp tore from both their throats.

Their foreheads pressed together. Their breaths tangled, catching, hitching, staggering. Vivien's hands rested at the small of Cruz's back, guiding her, rocking her, slow and deliberate, fingertips dragging light shudders up her spine like ripples over water.

Cruz rocked her hips, desperate for friction. Vivien guided her with patience that felt like cruelty and mercy at once. She kissed Cruz's throat, her shoulder, the soft hollow of her collarbone—each kiss slow enough that Cruz could feel the tremble in Vivien's lips.

"Let me," Vivien whispered, her breath warm and breaking against Cruz's skin.

Cruz let go, a whimper escaping as she did.

Vivien slipped her hand between them, fingers finding Cruz's wet heat, stroking slow circles. Cruz gasped—an ugly, beautiful sound—her breath catching on every stroke, her chest shuddering.

Cruz's fingernails scraped down Vivien's back, leaving faint, trembling trails. Every shift of Vivien's fingers pulled another broken moan from Cruz's mouth.

When Cruz came, it was messy. Guttural. She cried out, clinging to Vivien like a drowning woman to a rock, sobbing into the curve of her neck. Her thighs spasmed around Vivien's hips, muscles locking, then shivering uncontrollably.

Vivien kissed her temple, her jaw, her mouth, swallowing the broken sounds with tenderness that cut sharper than any knife.

But Cruz wasn't done.

She pushed Vivien back onto the bed, reversed herself, straddling Vivien facing away.

Vivien's body arched beneath her, her arms thrown back, fingers clutching the sheets so tightly the knuckles whitened. Her legs spread wider, trembling with each labored breath. Her head tilted back over the edge of the bed, blonde hair spilling over like a golden wound.

The rain echoed through the room, steady and relentless, like applause for something they shouldn't survive.

Cruz gripped Vivien's hips, grinding herself down, slow at first, then desperate. Vivien's gasps turned into moans, into cries, into something wordless and sacred, each sound jagged with need.

The room smelled of sweat, rain, salt, and something holy breaking open.

Cruz reached between them, fingertips finding Vivien's clit, rubbing it in tight, reverent circles. Vivien arched so hard her back lifted clean off the bed, a scream torn from her throat—raw, unfiltered, devastating.

Her orgasm hit like a seizure—full-body, trembling, a sob collapsing into a moan. Her thighs clamped around Cruz, nails digging into the sheets, trying to anchor herself to the world.

Her breath hitched violently, hips twitching, voice splintering into tiny broken sounds she couldn't hold back. Cruz could feel the shudders radiating from her like aftershocks.

Cruz stayed there, holding her, kissing the arch of Vivien's spine as she shook herself apart, her lips dragging soothing, shuddering trails down slick skin.

When it ended, they crumpled together.

No words. Just the sticky thrum of bodies remembering, the rain still tapping, tapping, like a second pulse against the windows.

Vivien's breath hitched against Cruz's throat, small, shuddering gasps she couldn't fully swallow. She tucked herself tighter into Cruz's body without thinking, her bare legs tangling with Cruz's, her hand fisting in the damp sheets.

Cruz stroked her back in slow, reverent passes—up her spine, over her shoulder blades—feeling the slight tremble that still pulsed through Vivien's frame.

Neither of them spoke.

Vivien shifted closer, her forehead pressing against the curve where Cruz's neck met shoulder, lips brushing skin but never quite forming words. Every breath she took seemed stolen from somewhere deeper, a memory she couldn't name.

Cruz closed her eyes and let her, cradling her without pressure, letting Vivien burrow and cling as if anchoring herself to something she didn't believe could hold.

The rain thickened outside. The window fogged. The record spun to silence, leaving only the sound of breathing, of heartbeat against heartbeat.

Somewhere between the shallow gasps, a flicker—the scent of Ellis's cologne, ghosting past Cruz's nose. A hum of old jazz that hadn't played. A whisper in Vivien's broken breathing that wasn't quite hers.

Cruz blinked, heart stuttering, but the room stayed the same. Just rain. Just breath. Just bodies.

For now.

Vivien finally whispered, so soft Cruz almost missed it: "Stay."

Cruz kissed her temple without answering, because she was already staying.

Time shifted. The record clicked over. A new track ghosted into the room—something slow, wordless, almost too fragile to exist.

Vivien rose first. Her robe slipped off completely, leaving her bare but for the river of sweat down her spine. She crossed the room without looking back, opened a drawer Cruz hadn't noticed.

She pulled out a battered folder. Cassette tapes. Polaroids. Handwritten notes.

As she dropped it onto the bed between them, Cruz heard it—a breath that didn’t belong to either of them, a sigh stitched into the rain.

Cruz flinched like it might burn her.

Her fingers, without thinking, scrabbled for the badge lying discarded on the floor. She gripped it in her palm until the metal edges bit into her skin.

"Ellis was trying to buy us a future," Vivien said. Her voice cracked, a raw edge scraping against the words.

Cruz nodded without meaning to, mouthing silent prayers in Spanish under her breath, the old ones her mother used to whisper before lighting candles no one believed in.

As Vivien spoke, a faint, sour-sweet scent of blood and cologne ghosted into Cruz's nose, like someone exhaled memory straight into her mouth.

"He took a loan. From Falco's people. Promised we'd run—a house somewhere, out of this fucking city."

Cruz pressed the badge harder into her palm.

Vivien's fingers trembled against a photo. The tape recorder beside the folder hissed suddenly, even though no one had touched it—a soft, broken static, like a heartbeat skipping.

"He thought if we just disappeared... if we just loved loud enough and far enough away..." Vivien’s voice splintered. "We could be real."

Cruz touched a tape with the pad of her finger. It hissed again, a breath caught between confession and collapse. She jerked her hand back, trembling.

"It started with protecting us," Vivien continued, voice fraying at the edges. "But he found... more. Photos. Payments. Names. Enough to ruin them."

She knelt by the bed, like she was confessing to an altar.

"Falco found out," she said. Her hands shook. She gripped the edge of the bed to still them. "That night. While I—while he—"

Her throat closed. Tears glazed her eyes but didn’t fall. Her mouth opened and closed, a drowning woman trying to name the water.

The mattress dipped slightly. Cruz's heart stopped. For one dizzy second, it felt like another body had shifted weight beside her—Ellis, maybe. Or only her grief.

Cruz closed her eyes, forehead pressing to the edge of the bed as if it could hold her up. She whispered fragments under her breath—*Dios mio... Santa Maria...*—words crumbling before they could become salvation.

"I was..." Vivien whispered. "I was coming. I was..."

She pressed her fist to her mouth, crushed the sound back.

"He died loving me," Vivien gasped. "He... he bled into my..."

Cruz felt her whole body lock, a silent, breathless sob caught in her ribs.

Somewhere between Vivien's broken sentences, Cruz thought she heard it—Ellis's voice, soft and ragged: *"Don't let her fall alone."*

She squeezed her eyes shut harder, the rain swallowing the echo before she could be sure.

"He let me live," Vivien whispered. "Said even my joy belonged to him."

The room trembled with the weight of it.

Cruz opened her mouth to speak. Nothing came out. She gripped her crushed badge tighter, blood pricking her palm.

Vivien leaned forward. Eyes burning.

"I'm going to kill him."

Not a threat.

Scripture.

Cruz's fingers closed tighter around the badge and the folder like they were the only things tethering her to breath.

Vivien kissed her forehead.

"You don't have to choose tonight," she said, voice raw with unshed sobs. "But tomorrow—you will."

Outside, the rain thickened.

Cruz stayed kneeling long after Vivien stood and turned away, mouthing prayers against the cold metal, the ghost of Vivien's touch still burning into skin that had only just learned how to tremble.

And somewhere in the dark corners of the room, grief waited—wet-lipped, patient—ready to open its mouth wider.