

Chapter Nine

Three years ago,

Samuel Fernandez sat at his kitchen table staring at an egg white omelet with gluten-free toast wondering if it was worth eating. The cancer was spreading from his lungs, and the doctors wanted him to go north to see a specialist, but Sami made it clear he would never go into that country. He told his son Jorge that the American's war on drugs was fought to let the white men kill the brown men and keep them in their place. He was proud when his son Jorge joined the army to defend the country from the outsiders even if it meant having to work with the Americans. But right there and then he had this egg-white glob staring at him and an appetite that didn't want anything to do with it. He could feel the angry and sad stare of his wife Maria as she cooked for their fifteen-year-old daughter Maria and their nine-year-old son Titus. Samuel thought about his children and started to eat wanting to be there for them. He even thought about going to America and seeing those doctors.

Little Maria as she was known came out of her bedroom and into the kitchen wearing only her purple nightgown. The gown came to her knees but was just a little too revealing for her father's taste. He had told his wife that she just looked too much like a woman in the gown when Momma, as she was known said, "*she looks like a woman in everything she wears.*" Little Maria sat at the table, and her mother gave her a plate with sausages and eggs that made Samuel's stomach lurch. He fought the urge to vomit and went back to his paper. Little Maria watched her father's hand shaking as he held the paper. They could hear Titus in the bathroom rapping along with some song he was playing on the radio. His voice broke with the words making the act more comical than he knew causing the others to fight not to laugh. Little Maria stopped laughing when she saw her father's shaking grow worse.

When most people in American think about a small village in Mexico if they think about one at all picture rustic adobe buildings and cobblestone lined streets with more mules than cars. The small village of Jaluco was a place that could easily be confused with a small town in New Mexico, Arizona or even Spain. The village was built around an old mission that was long

abandoned then built back up to support a tire plant built after the North American Free Trade act or NAFTA help made in Mexico become a plausible thing. Eventually, the tire plant moved north to Alabama, but the town with the small subdivided subdivisions remained. Smaller manufacturers moved in giving this place along the border a reason to exist even if the locals didn't like being used. Samuel was a third-generation auto mechanic running the shop his grandfather opened in the 1920s. He was one of the few in the area with experience working on Toyotas and other Japanese cars. He preferred working on the non-American cars. The village was near the highway and the border but not much else. This remoteness along with the access to the highway made it a place where people could cross the border for work or with drugs. It also made the village a target for something worse.

Samuel put his paper down and saw his daughter staring at her phone. She was never without the thing as he called it and hated both it and the bill. Samuel said, *“put it away or lose it.”* Little Maria just looked at him. Samuel said, *“no phone at the table. How many times do I have to say, no phone at the table?”* She looked over at her mother who said, *“do as your father said or so help me.”* Before a threat could be said, Little Maria put the phone in a pocket in the front of her nightgown. Samuel said, *“get dressed, or you'll be late for school.”* Little Maria hated the uniform for the Catholic school she attended, but Samuel liked seeing his daughter dress in clothing that made her blend into the crowd. For a few hours a day, she was that young girl on her way to her first day of school and not the woman that turned the heads of way too many older men. Little Maria got up with a bounce and went into her bedroom. Momma Maria said, *“I can't believe we have to buy her yet another new cup size.”* Samuel said, *“I don't want to know that.”*

There were a thump and a crack in the bathroom that on any other day would signal the boy had broken yet another thing. This time the music had stopped. Samuel thought, *“thank God.”* Momma Maria asked, *“Titus is everything OK?”* There was no answer. Samuel yelled, *“answer your mother.”* A strange whoomph sound came from his room then the smell of something foul and strange. Samuel watched as his wife went into the back. She made a gasping sound followed by the same strange sound then the sound of something falling and hitting the

floor. Samuel got up and started for the back when he heard Little Maria scream. He came around the corner to find his wife on the floor with blood pouring out of a hole in her head. Little Maria was there with a man behind her one arm around her the other with a gun pointed at him. The man was wearing all black from his boots to the mask over his face. The front of Little Maria's dress was ripped open as she tried to fight the man and hold the dress closed. Samuel could see his son's foot just inside the bathroom doorway along with a large amount of blood along the door jam. The man pushed his hand into the ripped opening of Little Maria's dress until he had exposed one of her young breasts. Maria pleaded, "*papa.*" The man pointed and fired the gun. Samuel didn't feel the round strike him in the head. He saw blood as the room went black. The man pulled his mask off and said to Little Maria, "*I'm your daddy now bitch.*" He forced her back into her room and did things to her that was worse than death.

Across the village, the individual houses were cleared out and anyone found was killed. That is almost everyone. The cartel had connections in human trafficking, and they knew that girls ranging from seven to nineteen could bring about a good payday. They drew the line at selling boys, so any boy found was just killed on site. Any child, boy or girl under seven was also killed, but they didn't waste a bullet knowing a knife or boot works just as well and is cheaper. The remaining girls including Maria were brought to a warehouse on the border side of town. Most of them were beaten and bruised or worse. When the unnamed man was finished, he had let Maria put her nightgown back on and clean up a little. Maria found the little eight-year-old Jessica Martin among the group of girls. Maria would babysit Jessica on some nights, so their parents could go out. Jessica had a crush on Titus. The Two embraced as Jessica asked where Titus was along with all the other boys. The man took her phone, but he left a marker she had in her pocket. Maria wrote a number on Jessica's arm and told her to call when she was free. She figured that the men didn't count the girls, so she helped Jessica out a hidden vent in the back. Jessica made it out of town and to the border where she found a family crossing. They had a cell phone.

Jorge sat on a beach on the gulf side of Mexico near a resort. He was wearing a pair of bright blue speedos and orange flipflops. It was mid-day, and neither he nor Luis had done

anything but sit by the pool. Luis was in a matching pair of speedos. It had been about two years after he left the army and about six months after they became more than friends. Luis always knew he was gay. His father would call him queer or something foul if he knew so Luis kept his life his and away from his family back home. Both Luis Martin and Jorge Fernandez were from the same town, and their parents were longtime friends, but he and Jorge didn't know each other until the army. Jorge never had a girlfriend. He had girls that were friends but never a girlfriend. Luis would drive across the border and look for people that felt the way he did finding a couple of clubs that didn't ask questions. Both men were proud to be from Mexico and never wanted to leave. They became friends in the army and rented an apartment together afterward. One night over a bottle of cheap whiskey they became more than friends and Jorge started to understand himself a little better. They both worked in security using their specialized training to help protect rich people's stuff. Jorge's phone rang. The number was one he didn't recognize, but he answered it anyway. The girl on the phone was frantic, but he knew her voice as one of Luis's sisters.

Jessica, her six-year-old sister Jessie, twelve-year-old sister Sara and fifteen-year-old brother Jacob were waiting for the bus when a van pulled up, and four men came out with guns. The men force Jessica and Sara into the van. One of them asked Jessie her age. She said, "*six.*" Before the door closed, Jessica saw the men stab her brother and little sister to death. She and Sara screamed until one of the men struck her in the face. One of the men held her licking her face as two other men ripped at Sara's dress until she was naked. Sara said, "*Jessica turn your head.*" The man holding Jessica whispered, "*do that, and we do the same to you.*" Jessica watched as the men took turns with her sister. When they were done, Sara curled into a ball in Jessica's arms. Sara cried but didn't make a sound. One of the men came over to Jessica and whispered, "*I think I'll keep the two of you for myself.*" He put his hand up her dress and squeezed her between her legs breaking something causing her to bleed. Sara looked at her sister then at the men. She got up and started to attack them causing the van to swerve. One of the men pulled a knife and buried it in Sara's chest.

Luis turned white as he nearly smashed the phone in his hand. Jorge had handed him the phone when he recognized the voice. As Jessica told him what happened, he could see his family as they were on that last day before he left for the army. There was a thump, then another thump and Jessica screamed. A voice came over the phone saying, “*stay out of our business if you know what’s best for you.*” Luis figured the men found his sister and killed the family that helped her. When the sunset, the two men made their way into their hometown. Most of the lights were off, but there were trucks and various all-terrain vehicles patrolling the streets with armed men in the back. A large flatbed truck piled with bodies slowly went down the street as men added to the pile. They were cleaning out the dead from the homes. They watched as trucks hauling boxes of something into the empty homes. Luis’s house was empty, but there was a light on in Jorge’s family home. They looked inside and saw three men in the living room watching football (soccer). Another three in the kitchen and a sound coming from a bedroom. Jorge looked inside and saw his sister Maria. Her clothes were ripped away, and she was underneath a man as he went at her raping her. Her face was bloody and bruised, but she didn’t make a sound. Jorge went to make a move when Maria shook her head and mouthed the words, “*just go and let me die.*”

Over the next few days, Luis and Jorge watched as an army of men reworked the town until the invasion was complete. The unknown cartel moved in their families to help make the village seem normal. About every third house was empty and filled with boxes of what had to be drugs and guns. About a week into the take over the tunnel was started. It became clear that they had no chance to win against the army the cartel planted in the village. They never found Jessica or any of the other girls. They did find one of the mass graves filled with the bodies of children. They also never found out the name of the cartel. Luis did some research finding out that the larger cartels acted like small nations within the country with their own armies. In his research, he found a place on the California border that forced the gangs out by cutting off their ability to smuggle into America while fighting addiction on the American side. Luis realized while they could never win a war against the cartel, they could use such a tactic to make occupying their village undesirable. Force them out by starvation or do enough harm to bring in the Americans. From there a plan was formed.

Part Two

The Adobe Motel and Spa was a two-story U-shaped motel built around a courtyard and a place for a pool that was never added. The Motel was built just after NAFTA was signed into law with the idea that a motel would service the trucking community going back and forth between the US and Mexico. When the main route never materialized the motel was rebuilt into what was going to be a spa in the desert. A price friendly option for people that wanted to get away from it all, but the new owner never finished the renovation, and the motel was eventually left abandoned and sold along with a gas station and warehouse complex. Wendy didn't even know she owned the Motel until she was asked if she would ever reopen it. The motel was a physical landmark as well as a reminder of a policy most people would have liked to forget. The Motel had thirty single rooms and ten staterooms with more than one bedroom. The remodel was to add a spa complex with a restaurant and rooms for saunas and massage treatments, but only the shell was ever finished on the spa with most of the work left to rot. The fire destroyed most of the center of the U taking with it most of the value in the motel.

Wendy walked around with a fire inspector as he talked about the fire and the damage. He gave her a card for a structural engineer, but he added, *"I can tell you that he or any competent engineer will say that this place is a loss and should come down."* He added, *"the wife and I stayed here once, and the place was nice. Not great but nice."* All Wendy could do was think about how much this place would cost to take down and where would she get the money. Cathy took the card and called for an appointment. The man on the other side of the phone said he could be around in a week. Darrel and Scott pulled into the parking lot with a truck loaded with plywood and chain-link fencing. Wendy asked, *"so where's the van?"* Darrel smiled and replied, *"it's coming just give him some time."* The rest of the day the four of them boarded up the motel then wrapped fencing around the whole building hoping to keep people out. That night the police showed up and put crime scene tape across every opening and put a halt to any work.

The next day a black Range Rover with a heavy tint to the windows pulled into the gas station. A young woman wearing darkly tinted glasses, khaki shorts, a man's button-down blue

shirt over a gray tank top stepped out of the driver's side and into the station. Another older woman with short hair in a pair of jeans and a white blouse got out and went to the pump. In the back was a teenage boy who could be mistaken as the doppelganger for a young Brad Pitt with a stern look on his face. The younger woman walked over to the counter. At first, she seemed like any other to come and go on the road. She seemed like nothing that special to Gina. She was pretty but pretty forgettable. That was unless you looked into her eyes. Alice always had those killer's eyes that could turn a brave man yellow. Alice asked, "*could you call Wendy I need to speak to her.*" Gina put her left hand on the panic button and her right over the place in the counter where her 32-automatic was hidden. Gina asked, "*may I help you?*" Alice leaned in and said, "*you can call Wendy or push that button, but if you go for the gun, I'll have to make you eat it.*" Gina looked into Alice's eyes and realized she wasn't someone you mess with.

Darrel looked out of the shop door and saw the woman at the pump. He walked out and over to her saying, "*hot dam Ruth you don't look much like that school teacher I knew.*" Ruth turned around with a smile and said, "*and yet you still look the same.*" The two came together and embraced. Ruth said, "*I heard about George, but I couldn't get away from school.*" Darrel replied, "*its good to see you but what brings you out to the middle of nowhere?*" Ruth nodded to the station and said, "*Cathy called and said what's going on. We came to offer some help.*" Darrel looked at the door to the station then he said, "*its always good to see you but I wish you would have called to say she was coming.*" Ruth's smile faded a little. She said, "*Alice isn't the same girl. I think having children changed her.*" Darrel walked into the station and saw Alice with her back to the door staring at Gina who had a look of fear in her eyes. Darrel said, "*Gina call Wendy and tell her Ruth and Alice are here with Jeff.*" Gina mouthed the name Alice as she picked up the landline and dialed. Alice turned around and did something that shocked Darrel. She smiled.

A few hours later Cathy, Ruth, Alice, and Darrel were sitting around a table talking about old times as Gina listened in from the front. Spread across the table were pictures of a man with curly black hair, a diner, and three young children. Jeff sat in the living room watching television as Jill sat near him staring. Cathy pointed at the slack-jawed Jill and said, "*I see Jeff still has that*

effect.” Ruth shook her head saying, “everywhere we go he somehow attracts every pretty girl. The other day I caught him in bed with a freshman as in a college freshman.” Cathy asked, “how’s Ying?” Alice smiled as she replied, “she’s attending Berkley after being granted early entrance.” Alice showed her a picture of a smiling young Chinese girl with her arms wrapped around another girl in what looked like some sort of parade with a rainbow flag in the distance. Wendy walked in first seeing Jeff on the couch with Jill slowly moving closer. Then she saw the people around the table. She smiled when she saw Ruth then she lost the smile seeing Alice. Both Ruth and Alice got up and went over to Wendy. To her surprise, Alice was smiling and embraced her saying, “its good to see you again.” Wendy didn’t know what to say. Ruth said, “we don’t have long so let’s get down to business. Cathy told us about your plans for your motel and how you need a little capital.”

Wendy, Ruth, and Alice left to see what was left of the hotel. Ruth said to Jeff, “*oh no there is no way you are staying here.*” Jeff signed, “*come on.*” Ruth signed back, “*get the fuck in the car.*” Jeff smiled at Jill turning his handsome, stern look into something like a movie star smile. When they were gone, Jill asked, “*he doesn’t say much does he?*” Cathy lost her smile. She looked at the door then a picture on the wall. She pulled the picture off the wall and handed it to Jill. She said, “*this is Jeff and his sister Susan back on the ranch. When Ruth and her team found him and his sister they were living with their grandparents in their meth lab.*” The girl was smiling, but it was clear there was something wrong with Jeff’s face. His jaw didn’t seem right. Cathy said, “*Susan was nearly blind from exposure to chemicals and the cook, but Jeff was.*” Cathy stopped talking. After she took in a long breath trying to fight the urge to cry. She said, “*you need certain chemicals to cook meth. Their grandparents found a pharmacist that would sell it to them for a price. He repeatedly raped Jeff for years. They kept him locked in the basement. When he talked back, they broke his jaw to cut his tongue out. Jeff can’t talk.*”

Jill wiped back her tears. Cathy smiled and said, “*when I need to find strength I think about Jeff. Here was someone who could have let despair own him but somehow, he is the most hopeful person I know. He taught himself how to read in a dark hell hole. He fiercely protected his sister, and when she died, he didn’t let that take him down. He had so many operations to*

rebuild what was done to him, but here he is on the other side.” Jill asked, “what’s with Alice and Wendy?” Cathy said, “Wendy blamed Alice for David escaping then when he came back Alice didn’t let us know he was in Mexico. Instead, Ruth went down and killed him, but I think most of all she was mad about Ying.” Jill asked, “what kind of name is Ying?” Cathy sat down next to Jill and said, “on a raid of a drug house they found a young Chinese girl being used as a sex worker. Her owner named her Ying and dressed her in a red kimono. A few years after the ranch both Ying and Alice went back to killing dealers and those people that abused Ying.” Jill asked, “so they did what we’re doing. I don’t see why Wendy would be upset?” Cathy said, “Ying was still very young, and as Wendy saw it, Alice was just too reckless with Ying’s life. All that ended with Alice getting pregnant and Ying getting shot.” Cathy got up and said, “don’t ask Wendy about any of this. Too much of this story is tied to David.”

Part Three

One month ago,

Luis striped and cleaned an AK47 at a table in what was the local police station. As he worked, he inspected the parts making sure it would work when needed. When he was finished, he moved on to the next one. As he worked on the guns, Jorge taught basic stratagem to the men assigned to guard duty. Both Luis and Jorge join the cartel using their experience with the military and as private security to gain access. Their final payment would be an entrance into America guarding a shipment using their training to cross the desert. A large man with tattoos running up his arms and a thirteen tattooed on his face walked into the room. Tony always looked like he was about to either kill or fall asleep. In most cases, he never had to say a word his presence intimidated people into doing what he wanted. Unlike the others, Tony was neither Mexican or a part of the cartel. He was born in Spain and moved to America where he joined a gang at the age of fourteen. He was there to buy guns and drugs.

Luis watched Tony out of the corner of his eye while never stopping his work on the guns. Tony picked up one of the Russian built rifles and held it in his arms. He said, “*dam that’s heavy.*” Without taking his eyes off his work, Luis said, “*yes, that is an original milled receiver*

which tends to be heavy and stronger than the cheap stamped AKs.” Tony put the gun to his shoulder. Luis said, *“the weight helps with the recoil making it easier to keep on target.”* Tony dropped the rifle on the table causing it to shake. He then picked up a small automatic Mac-10 with a suppressor. He held it out like he was spraying a crowd saying, *“now this is more my style.”* Luis whispered, *“cheap, inaccurate and small.”* Tony held out the gun miming firing at people as they walked by the window. Wanting this man to go, Luis said, *“that Mac-10 uses 9mm making it easier to get the ammunition, and without the suppressor, it’s easy to conceal.”* Tony put the gun back on the table gently. He said, *“I’ll tell your bosses we want as many of the Mac-10s as he will sell us.”* Luis nodded as he stripped an old Beretta 92 down. He watched Tony leave thinking about how easy it would be to bury a knife in his back.

An hour later, Jorge walked into the room with two rifles. He put them on the table and sat down across from Luis and stared. After a few minutes of this Luis looked over at him and angrily said, *“what?”* Jorge leaned back and said, *“that asshole Tony came into the office and complained about how you acted to him and the lack of respect.”* Luis replied, *“I have no respect for crap on my shoe.”* Jorge turned to the window and said, *“we are almost out of here. All we need to do is keep our cool, and soon we can be over the border and going to work.”* Luis stopped working and asked, *“you found her didn’t you.”* Jorge turned back to Luis then to the door. He said, *“Maria is back in my parent’s house with that man..... and their child.”* It had been nearly three years since they left her in that room as she was being raped. In that time her rapist decided to keep her and play house. After joining the cartel, Jorge did his best to find out what happened to his sister Maria and Luis’s sister Sara. The closest he ever got to Sara was a picture with the amount of nine-hundred dollars printed on the back. A few days ago, he saw a pregnant Maria as she walked around what passed as a market. He followed her back to the hose where she saw another child around the age of two. Maria never saw him.

The cartel was starting to talk about the chances that the American President could get his wall. An order came in from Mexico City that the shipments needed to speed up. The next few nights were going to be clear and moonless. A kind of dark that is almost unbelievable. Five men started across the desert toward a place where there is little to go fencing or guards. Ten minutes

from the border the men came to a dark form standing in front of them. Without a word, the form opened fire cutting all five men down. From there the form took the drugs buried it in the sand. Two days later and they were watching how Mexican and American authorities found a mass grave near the border but nothing about the drugs. Jorge had cleaned the Mac-10 he had used and put it back in with the shipment for Tony. He also placed something else in the shipment. The next morning a tanker truck backed up to the makeshift warehouse that was once someone's home. A secret compartment ran down the center hidden under the oil was used for smuggling. Jorge and another two men packed the compartment with the drugs and guns Tony bought. Jorge made sure the box with the something special was packed close to the cab.

An hour across the border, Tony sat in the back of the cab with a girl he picked up back in Mexico. She wanted across the border and was willing to do anything to get there. As she went down on him, Tony laughed on how easy it was to get across with his cargo. The border inspectors didn't even look in the back of the cab. He told the cartel that his truck was the new way and any fixed tunnel was just a hole waiting to be filled. A thump then another thump woke Tony up then the back of the truck exploded separating from the cab. The cab rolled as the woman in Tony's lap was struck biting down taking Tony's penis with her. Tony had just seconds to realize what just happened before he went out a window and was consumed by the oil fire. The driver went through the windshield leaving the choking bloody woman as the only survivor. By the end of the day, both sides of the border were told what to look for when it came to this kind of smuggling and the cartel focused on the tunnel and overland smuggling.

Part Four

Cathy walked into the dark common room with the only light coming from the television which was shining a dim light onto someone on the couch. Jill looked over while trying to stay low on the couch and covered with a blanket. The back of the couch faces out, and Jill was turned around facing Cathy and the kitchen. Trying not to raise her shoulders above the back of the couch she asked, "*wow that was a short night. I thought the four of you were going to be out for a while?*" Cathy cocked her head at Jill. She said, "*Ruth doesn't drink much, and Alice is still*

breastfeeding so going out all night doesn't seem like a good idea." Cathy took a step closer as Jill ducked down a little. Cathy asked, *"are you wearing a shirt?..... are you naked?"* Cathy's eyes went a little wide and asked, *"Jeff?"* A hand came up from the other side of the couch underneath Jill. Cathy put her hands up and said, *"Jill what the fuck?"* Jill started to get up stopping and going back down. She said, *"it just happened. He was teaching me how to sign, and I was teaching him."* Cathy put up her hand interrupting her saying, *"yeah I can see that you're teaching him."* Jill started bouncing up and down as Jeff laughed. As she bounced, she started to laugh. Cathy looked to the door then back to the couch and said, *"alright, I guess I don't have any place to judge but unless you want Ruth to kick your ass you two should take this into your room."* Jill got up off the couch holding their clothing in front of her. She turned to Jeff and said, *"come in me if you want to live."*

Just as they went into her room Ruth, Alice and Wendy walked inside. Ruth looked around and asked, *"where's Jeff?"* Cathy looked at her then to Wendy then back to Ruth without saying a word. Ruth walked over to the couch and picked up a red lacy bra. She shook her head and said, *"I just don't know what to do."* Alice replied, *"well if you do nothing you might just wind up being called grandma."* Ruth sighed then she went to Jill's door and put her hand up to knock, but then she stopped. Wendy said, *"make a fist then connect that fist with the door going back and forth much like Jeff is probably doing right now with Jill."* Cathy said, *"I have never seen him laugh before."* Ruth put her hand down and walked over to the homemade bar where she poured herself three fingers of Irish whiskey and down it all in one shot. Cathy asked, *"I thought you didn't drink?"* Just as soon as she asked, Ruth nearly spat the booze out. She said, *"it's still hard to discipline him. I look at him and see that boy in the basement and Sue."* On the other side of the door, they could hear a slight moaning and the rocking of a bed.

The four women sat in the living room and restarted the movie only to see that Jill and Jeff were watching Showgirls. They had paused it at the sex in a pool scene. Alice said, *"OK, with your permission we will stay here tonight and get back in the morning where I will call every contractor I know and get this started."* Wendy shook her head over just how fast this all came together. Alice saw her look of dismay and said, *"when I divested from my grandmother's*

company after it went public, I earned around four billion dollars, and even with the taxes I still have more than we will ever need. As long as you keep up your end of this, then I'm happy to help make this happen." Cathy said, *"as long as it isn't the same people that built those homes that nearly collapsed."* Ruth looked over at Alice as she watched the door to Jill's bedroom. Ruth said, *"go on and check in."* Alice pulled out her phone and called her husband, Max. His image showed on her screen holding a small baby. In the background, she could hear another baby screaming. Max said, *"house of perpetual screams."* Alice didn't say anything. She just stared at the baby in his arms. Wendy couldn't help seeing how the scowling to blank stare Alice usually wore was gone, and she looked like a mother away from her baby for the first time. Somewhere in the back of her mind, Wendy fought the urge to hate Alice even more.

Ruth went to sleep in a large lounge chair while Alice took the couch. Cathy and Wendy offered their bed, but neither woman wanted to put them out. After the two made love, they lay on their bed staring at the ceiling. Wendy whispered, *"is it wrong to feel so jealous?"* Cathy kissed Wendy on her forehead and replied, *"it's only human to want something you can't have and to see someone close to you having that thing you wanted so much."* Wendy put her hand over Cathy's mouth and said, *"I don't think I ever really wanted it until it was no longer a possibility."* Cathy replied, *"and yet here you are saying it instead of baby."* Wendy asked, *"could you send your daughter away like that. I mean Ying is sixteen, and this girl is what seventeen?"* Cathy replied, *"we don't actually know how old Ying is. Those people didn't keep records or celebrate birthdays. She graduated early and passed an entrance exam that got her into one of the best schools in the country. She is also happy."* Off in the distance, they could hear Jill and Jeff. Then like a blast of thunder, Ruth screamed, *"oh for the love of god will you two finish already!"*

Part Five

The Tunnel,

A truck slowly backs up to the back of a warehouse. The doors open, and four men start to unload some small boxes from the back. The men load the boxes into specially built crates

with hooks built into the sides and wheels on the bottom. Two more men push the wheeled boxes to the hole where they are hooked into an overhead crane which picks up the box and puts it over a large hole. The box slowly goes down the hole passing by a ladder and manual elevator. Forty feet down the box came to rest on the ground. Four men unhook the box and push it to a table where they opened it and unloaded the boxes. Inside some of the boxes were vacuum-sealed bricks of white powder and the other boxes had the small automatic Mac-10s. The guns were inspected, and the bags were packed into specialty made vests and small duffle bags. Both were then loaded onto a wheeled cart and pushed to the mouth of a tunnel.

Luis went down the ladder to the bottom to look around. He was on guard duty, and this was a part of his route, but he had never been in the tunnel before. Only a few people were permitted to go into the tunnel. A few guards, the supervisors, and the people who break down the shipments and pack them for the final shipment. Most of the people working in the tunnel were children. The tunnel was a mix of cinderblock and concrete painted white to reflect any light used, but it was perpetually damp and dark even with the white paint and lights. They worked the children to control the parents. Most of them hadn't left the tunnel since it was built. In the corner of the loading zone, Luis saw someone he knew. His sister Jessica was sewing a vest closed. The vests were little more than smocks with slots for the drugs, so the mules can put them on underneath their clothing or in some cases wear multiple vests. He saw her, but she didn't see him. Jessica had lost nearly half her weight and was looking far too old for someone near fifteen.

The tunnel was something out of a science fiction story looking more like a city project than something built for human and drug trafficking. A few of the men that walked the miles of the tunnel said how the construction became more of a facade the further you go into it. They didn't want to do any more than necessary on the American side so much of the tunnel was just a thin shell of concrete and cinderblock. On the wall near the ladder was a diagram for the tunnel as well as the planned expansions. The other guards talked about how the cartel was selling trips to people with questionable motives. Luis thought they meant terrorists. As he stood there a voice came from behind him, "*would you like some water, sir?*" It had been more than three

years, but he knew his sister's voice. Luis thought about their plan, and how much work went into it, then he thought about her as well as Jorge's sister and her children. He didn't know if he could face her. Part of him knew that if he looked into her eyes, he wouldn't be able to stop until they were on the other side of the tunnel. Jessica turned away and started to walk back to her sewing table when Luis said, "*stop.*" She turned around but kept her head down. He walked over to her and put his hands on her shoulders. At first, she tried to shrug them off until she saw the ring their father gave him just before Luis left for the army. Jessica lifted her head and stared at her long-lost brother and asked, "*Luis?*"

Twenty minutes later Luis found Jorge in one of the many homes turned into bars. Luis said, "*I found her.*" Jorge started to give him a blank stare until he saw Luis's face and knew who she was. Jorge asked, "*how does she look?*" Luis replied, "*like someone that needs us more than we need our plan.*" Jorge turned to the warehouse where the tunnel was then to his house. He said, "*we put a lot of time into our plan including a lot of money.*" Luis leaned in and said, "*fuck the plan. I don't care.*" Jorge tried to keep his calm, "*do you think I didn't want to take my sister and her child out of that place as soon as I saw her? This is bigger than you or me or even them. This is important for Mexico.*" Luis walked away not wanting to look back. He made it to his room in one of the homes near his family's house. After thinking it over Luis started to pack a bag. He would tell Jorge he was leaving with his sister and if he wanted to come then he would help him get Maria and her child but with him or without he was taking his sister and going to America.

The ground started to shake then a loud thunderous sound came from the warehouse. Luis was on his way back when he saw a large plume of dust force the doors to the warehouse open. Off in the distance, he could see the ground shift. Luis dropped his bags and ran for the tunnel. Inside he found the complex covered in sand and white powder. Knowing what the powder was Luis grabbed a respirator and made his way inside. The power was out, and the tunnel's opening was clogged with dust. Jorge met up with Luis, and they started to break and drop chemical lights into the hole. Luis grabbed a repelling rope and tossed it over after tying it down. He and Jorge would repel down just in case people were trying to use the ladder. The power came back

on, and the fans started to clear the dust sending heroin across the city. The first person they found was the lead foreman. He was shaking while gasping for breath. Jorge went to the tunnel while Luis went to where he found his sister, but she wasn't there. Down in the tunnel, Jorge found the tunnel's ceiling had ripped open. About forty feet in the tunnel was closed. Underneath the rubble was a blotch of blood. Jorge started to move the rock yelling, "*Luis get in here.*" Near the bottom of the pile, they found Jessica and three other girls. The lead foreman was able to speak telling them he sent the girls into the tunnel to get as much of the product as they could. Luis picked up a rock and struck the man across the head then he caved the man's head in. When he was dead, they carried the body into the tunnel and covered him with the ruins.

A week later and word came down to abandon the tunnel and go back to human deliveries. With that message came the word that Luis and Jorge could go on the next trip as guards. Not for the people but to guard the drugs. The night before they were to leave, Luis and Jorge met in an abandoned house where they made love for the first time in nearly three years. Luis told Jorge that the house they were in was the house where the first boy he fell for lived in. He had loved him from a distance not wanting anyone to know about who he was saving that for his trips across the border. Luis said, "*no matter what when we are finished, we are coming back for Maria.*" Jorge didn't say what he was thinking, but he didn't think they were ever coming back. Jorge said, "*we will be in the States by tonight then we stay the day in hiding. Everything is ready, so when we get across, we can start the mission.*"