

Safe House

part one



by *Bea*

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CHAPTER 1

“Come and sit here beside me on the couch darling.” Aunt Kate said patting the area beside her. “It’s time for us to have a nice chat.”

“Wouldn’t you like a cup of tea first?” I asked, slightly miffed at her bossing me around in my own house.

“Maybe later dear? It’s so nice of you to ask, but I’d really like to talk to you first. If you don’t mind?”

I sighed inwardly as I went and sat beside her. I must have this sort of ‘obedience’ gene I guess - and she had that same quiet air of authority that my mother, her sister, had used on me for years.

“It’s about Rosalie, isn’t it?” I said, as I lowered myself down. “Yes dear. I’ve been listening to the tapes you made for me, and though you’re tutoring her quite nicely, I just feel that you’re... well... I don’t know how to say this correctly ... but you’re talking DOWN to her an awful lot...”

“Well, she IS a servant, and she IS as thick as a plank.” I retorted. My aunt’s face got a strained expression, but before she could speak, I added. “And mom always said - and I’ve heard you say the same thing - that you shouldn’t familiarize yourself with maids or servants.”

“But she’s not YOUR maid. Not YOUR servant. Also? She’s a WOMAN deserving of respect!” Kate responded sternly. “You’re her tutor. Supposed to be helping her with her English. Not that you’re NOT” she added hastily. “I can see her improving a little all the time.”

“Well then. What’s the problem?” I asked tartly.

My aunt put her immaculately groomed hand lightly on my

thigh. “She IS improving darling. It’s just that my experience - and I’ve talked to some of the other tutors about this - tells me that she’s not progressing as fast as would normally be expected.”

“Well, I’m only a beginner at this tutoring game.” I protested.

“I know, I know.” she replied patiently. “I just thought I could make a few suggestions?”

“It was you that got me into this stuff in the first place.” I said defensively. “I mean, I didn’t come asking you for goodness sake, and...”

She interrupted quickly. “Oh dear, why are you being so DIFFICULT? I am not criticizing you. I am only trying to forward a few ideas that might help!”

Her rather long face was drawing up into what I privately considered her ‘haughty’ expression - one that usually indicated a storm in the offing.

I was speaking before I even knew it. “I’m sorry Aunt Kate. Truly I am. Please, if you have any ideas of how I can help Rosalie, please tell me.”

And I knew I had given in again. I had the spine of a jellyfish I thought to myself. After my mother had died, it was if aunt Kate was determined to take over the reins on my behavior that mother had used so effectively. At first I had been grateful but then, ashamed of my own weakness, had determined that I would stand up for my rights. Though I’d had some success - managing to stay in my own house by myself was a struggle I’d won - it gradually appeared though that I was incapable of doing much of anything else along these lines. Aunt Kate’s next ‘suggestion’ had been that I needed to do something other than mope about the house. As she was the local administrator for a literacy group within a National Women’s organization, she had roped me in.

I was a little put off by the fact that all of the other volunteers

in her group were women. On top of that, the only students they would accept were women also. As Aunt Kate had explained it to me, it had taken all of her political pull to have me accepted into such an 'elite' organization. Only the fact that my mother had been part of the same group had, finally, been the reason that quieted objections from the other members. In all honesty though, I had been very close to my mother before her accident and was probably more comfortable in the company of women than that of men. This, I think, showed and helped Kate a lot in having me accepted into the organization and then in the training I had to take to become a tutor.

North San Diego County is a lovely place to live. A wonderful climate, and a relatively high average income. Being near to the U.S. - Mexican border has its advantages and disadvantages. One of the facts here is that there is a high incidence: of illegal immigrants from Mexico, of both sexes, trying to get work. Accordingly, a large percentage of the female servants in the district are of Mexican origin. A lot of these are legal immigrants of course, but a high percentage are not.

Many of these girls are taken advantage of by unscrupulous people. At first I thought this of the ladies group I had joined, as many of them had such girls working for them as maids. I soon discovered that this was far from the truth. In effect, the group was trying to educate these girls in the English language and North American customs to increase their speed of assimilation into the workplace - and increase their earning power substantially. It was, therefore, no surprise then when, upon my 'graduation' as a tutor, the student assigned to my care was Rosalie, a rather large farm- girl type, with very little education in either Spanish or English.

She worked as a maid for one of my neighbors, a widow, Mrs. Johns, who lived about a half mile from me. Rosalie would come by my house three times every week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from two pm until four thirty.

I know that this probably sounds silly, but I didn't know how to treat her. I'd been brought up by my mother - with her sister on the sidelines - in an environment that had very little of the masculine. To be honest, I was more scared of women than anything else. All of a sudden I had a position of some 'authority' over a rather large girl, and was totally unequipped to deal with it. To compensate, I had developed a rather distant patrician air with the poor girl, and as Kate had noticed, got in the habit of talking down to her.

I should have mentioned that, to help me in my debut as a tutor, my aunt had thoughtfully provided me with a tape recorder that I ran all the time my tutoring was in session. At first I had been veily aware of it but then,, shades of Dick Nixon, usually forgot all about it. Hence my aunts visit on this particular day.

Kate tapped my thigh again. "Yes David I do have a few ideas I'd like you to try."

I nodded, trying to evidence some enthusiasm.

"First of all? Try to be more nurturing. Friendly. More of an equal."

She held up her hand. "Yes! I KNOW David. This goes against what you've been taught, but please try. Just a little? For me?"

I took a deep breath. "OK. I'll try Aunt Kate. Honest."

"Very good David! Thank you." She let go a sigh of relief. "Whew! I wasn't overly keen on talking to you about this you know."

I shrugged. "No offense taken. But you said you had a few suggestions aunt. What else?"

"Oh yes. Thank you for reminding me. I've talked this over with some of the other ladies and we'd like to suggest that you take on another girl, her name is Raquel."

"But Aunt Kate? I'm having problems with Rosalie. Won't it just make matters worse if I've to train another girl?"

“Well, you probably won’t need to train her much, if at all. She’s far more advanced than Rosalie. You see, we’ve found that often pairing two students helps both. The least advanced gets the benefit of additional coaching, the more advanced student is forced to think a lot more about the why’s and wherefores of the new language.”

“Well, at least I hope she’s not a big cart horse like Rosalie.” I said unthinkingly.

“NO.” Kate paused, a peculiar glint showing in her eye for a split second. “I don’t think you’ll need to have any concerns along these lines.” She smiled a rather nasty little smile before adding. “So that’s all right David? You agree? You’ll try to be a little more ‘simpatico’ with the girls? You’ll take Raquel on along with Rosalie?”

I shrugged. “Guess I can at least give it a try.” I said, a trifle uneasily. “Though it sounds as if this new girl is more an auditor than anything else.”

My aunt nodded agreeably but didn’t answer. Then she smiled. Pleasantly now, but an edge of something there I couldn’t quite make out. “How nice of you to try. I’m SURE you won’t regret it.”

She left a few more blank tapes with me before leaving, and reminded me. “Don’t forget now sweetie. More simpatico. More nurturing.” Gave me a womanish peck on the cheek and a smile in farewell that had more than a tinge of mockery in it.

Raquel turned up with Rosalie that very afternoon. Kate had been right. She gave no indications of being any kind of cart horse. Plainly dressed in a white blouse, jeans and cowboy boots, she was absolutely gorgeous!

Not quite as tall as Rosalie, but a little taller than me, even in the low heeled boots she wore. Jet black wavy hair cascading down to her shoulders. A bright expression heightened by alert brown eyes that literally sparkled. Even white teeth that shone on a regular basis as she smiled often. Well built, but not heavy, she moved with an athletic

grace that accentuated her femininity. Rosalie wore her usual flounced skirt and ruffled white blouse, but even in these clothes she still looked like a cart horse compared to her companion.

Rosalie was obviously in awe of her and, in a very short while, was joined by me in this regard. I'd never, ever, met anyone with such looks, confidence, and elan in one beautiful package. Her English was accented, but excellent. Just flawed enough that I could bolster my position as 'tutor' with an occasional 'suggestion', although this didn't last too long as I fell into the web of her control quite quickly. Before the afternoon was over, I discovered that she had, confidently, taken over the session.

It started the moment they arrived. She held out her hand to introduce herself, Naturally, I took it and gave her my name. She flashed me a smile.

"I'm SO pleased to meet you, but oh! What SOFT hands you have!" And she chattered something in Spanish, turning to Rosalie. Who stood there dumb, shrugging.

"Here! Let Rosalie feel them!" Raquel laughed, pulling me towards her companion. She wasn't letting my hand go! I almost pulled it from her grasp but got the sudden strange sensation that maybe I didn't have the strength! Blushing, I allowed Rosalie to take a hold of my hand. She did so, then said something, laughing, back to Raquel.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She doesn't know how you keep them like that, doing all the housework here the way you do." She looked at me, a question in her eyes. "Is that true? YOU do all the housework here! I can't believe it! It's so clean! IMMACULATE! Will you show me around? Please?"

And she linked her arm in mine - and started PULLING me! Then, to make matters worse, she chattered something to Rosalie, who came up and linked her arm through mine on my other side! I was then, literally, pulled through my own house by two laughing women!

I protested at first. “But girls! Raquel! We should be doing the lessons!”

“Certainly David!” Raquel replied. “But not until I’ve seen your lovely house. Come on! Don’t be a slowpoke!”

I was complimented and embarrassed. Mother had always stressed the need for an immaculate home. We could easily have afforded servants, but she wouldn’t hear of it. She and I spent many hours maintaining that place. Since her death I’d closed some of the rooms off to the extent that I only cleaned them every other week, but I spent a lot of time doing housework and was inwardly pleased to have people recognize how well I kept the place.

I had to show all of the four bedrooms with attached bathrooms then mine and mother’s, the sewing room, the library, the den, the bathrooms, the informal and formal dining rooms and, naturally the kitchen. She was very interested in what I called the “barracks”. I explained about mother’s remodeling of the old hacienda. “She practically razed everything to the ground, except for that huge room. I think it used to be the dining room for the workers on the farm.”

“But there’s two bathrooms connected, and they look new.” Raquel said. “Why would your mother want bathrooms on a room you weren’t using?”

“Well. Her idea was that we might have a Bed and Breakfast someday, and she felt that a room of that size could maybe be sold as a sort of ‘family’ or ‘group’ room. That’s why the two bathrooms. That’s why the four bedrooms with bathrooms en suite.” “Smart lady, your mother. Did you ever get around to setting up the B & B?”

“No. Not really. I’ve sort of thought of doing it, but don’t know if I’ve got the knowledge or drive to start.”

When we ended up back in the den, Raquel let out a sigh.

“What a beautiful home. Oh, how I’d LOVE to live in a place like this.” She said something to Rosalie, who nodded enthusiastically.

“She would like that too David.” she translated. “How would you like two beautiful women to come and keep you company here, huh?”

I blushed, not having a reply ready.

“Could we have a soft drink please?” she asked, letting me off the hook.

Instinctively I nodded and went to the fridge. “Coke OK?” I asked.

“A Seven Up or a Sprite would be better if you have it?” she called back.

There were two cans there, so I went and got some glasses and poured the drinks on ice. Got a tray, put three lace doilies on it, then put the drinks on top and served the girls.

“OH! How nice!” Raquel said. “Not too many men know how to serve a lady properly.” She said something to Rosalie who didn’t laugh this time. Just looked up at me as I stood with the tray in front of me, waiting for her to take her drink.

“Gracias.” She said, taking the glass from the tray.

I put the tray on the sideboard, took my drink and went and sat on the sofa beside Raquel.

“I suppose we’d better get started on the lesson.” I said reluctantly.

Raquel shrugged. “It’ll keep I guess. Tell me. Your room is that one looking out over the swimming pool. Si?”

“Yes. Why?” I replied.

“But the master bedroom. The pretty room with the beautiful view and the connecting door to your room? Why don’t you use it instead?”

“That was my mother’s room.” I said. “I’d feel strange in there.”

Raquel smiled gently. “Yes. I heard about your mother’s accident. I’m sorry. But wasn’t that a long time ago?”

“Yes. I suppose I could move in now. But it wouldn’t seem right somehow.”

“Because it is a woman’s room? Because of all the woman’s clothes in the closets?” she paused. “Can I ask why you keep them?” She was pressing me now, in some way that I didn’t know how to handle,

I shrugged. Blushing more.

“You DO know how to sew? Don’t you?” she asked.

“No, not really. What’s that got to do with it?”

She shrugged and took a drink from her glass “Just curious I guess. You seem to like looking after a house. Where Rosalie and me come from? That’s considered a woman’s work.” She shrugged again. “Thought maybe you liked to wear women’s clothes? Lots of pretty things collecting dust in her closets. Bet you’d look nice in them. Figured that if you could sew, you could change them to fit you.”

I know my mouth fell open. This girl - woman - was calmly suggesting that I wear my mother’s clothes! Now, it was true that I’d sometimes worn some of her feminine aprons while working with her around the house. It was also true, though I’d never admitted it to anyone that I sometimes grudged her the nicely colored and textured materials that women were allowed to wear, and that men couldn’t. Wondered how it would feel to wear such nice fabrics next to my skin. But I’d never, ever, worn any of her clothes.

“I wouldn’t - couldn’t - do THAT!” I stammered.

Her eyes opened wider in a sort of astonishment. “Why not? They looked to be about the right size for you. Just a little altering, maybe.”

“But: they’re WOMEN’S.” I blurted.

“But you never answered my question.” she said calmly. “If you’ve no use for them, how come you keep all these pretty clothes? Seems silly to me, the nicest bedroom with closets absolutely full of nice clothes - and none of it being used.”

“I think we should think about getting the lesson started.” I said, trying to inject: a little firmness into my voice and change the subject.

Raquel just smiled and looked at the clock. “It’s almost time to finish, no? And are you doing anything for dinner?”

I shook my head. “No. Was just going to have a light meal.”

“By yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Well? Why not let us repay you by letting me make dinner for all three of us? I’m a good cook. And? Maybe you and Rosalie could keep me company in the kitchen, sitting at the table. That why she could maybe help you learn to speak a little Spanish, yes?”

Actually, I was thrilled at having this beautiful young lady in my house. In another way, I felt intimidated as J normally was by a strong willed woman. Everything she said was just so reasonable and well thought out. It definitely was presumptuous on her part, but I couldn’t think of any way to negate her request. Five minutes later, I was sitting at his kitchen table with Rosalie, now effectively the student as she and Raquel teased me into learning some Spanish.

Raquel was absolutely right. She was better than a good cook. I ate far more in one sitting than I had done in years. Afterwards, she claimed that as Rosalie and I had sat around ‘loafing’ while she worked, it was our turn to do the dishes. Rosalie was embarrassed at first having an ‘hombre’ working beside her even seeming to protest that I shouldn’t be doing such work, Raquel translated what Rosalie was saying but shook her head, then dug out two aprons - rather frilly ones - for us to wear. Rosalie giggled for a while after Raquel tied a

huge bow at my back but she soon got used to me being there, even handed me back some dishes I hadn't cleaned properly.

I cannot deny it. I had fun. For probably one of the first times in my life, I was working and fooling around with people of my own age. I knew the feminine picture I made. Not only was I the smallest of the three, my apron was decidedly more feminine than Rosalie's. Yet I just didn't care and was even somewhat dejected when they had to leave. Eagerly agreed to have them come back for the next session.

CHAPTER 2

I was even somewhat nervous on the Wednesday, two days later. I'd really given the occupied area of the house a good scrubbing and the whole place shone. I'd washed the windows and vacuumed all of the rooms, even the ones I hadn't been using.

I deliberated for just a little while before putting on an apron. Of course it was one of my mother's but it was quite plain. My reasoning was that if Raquel had got such a kick from getting me to wear one on her first visit, then she'd really enjoy me wearing one voluntarily.

When they arrived, she was wearing a short straight gray skirt and a pink angora sweater. Dark stockings and gray suede shoes with a fairly high heel. She seemed so much more in command. So efficient looking.

Rosalie surprised me by coming to me and giving me a kiss on the cheek. Raquel surprised me even more, she walked up to me, threw her arms around me and kissed me firmly on the mouth, leaving a waxy imprint on my lips and the taste of her lipstick in my mouth.

Then she pulled back, but kept her arms encircling my neck. "You look nice in your apron Daveed. But will you do me a VERY big favor if I ask nicely? Pretty please, with sugar on it?" her eyes were, huge and I could feel myself melting in them. In addition I had been

thrown into total confusion by her voluptuous kiss. I wanted to accede to her request, but tried to maintain some form of dignity.

“What do you want...” I started, but was halted by her pulling a hand back and placing a finger gently on my lips.

“No Daveed. Just say you’ll do me a favor. I promise, it’s just a little thing, you can do it in less than a minute, but it means an awful lot to me. And I PROMISE! I have a VERY good reason.

Please say you’ll do it. PLEASE?”

“Well. If it means that much to you. OK.” I said, smiling.
“Promise?”

“Of course! I gave my word!” I said a little huffily.

“Oh! Em sorry sweetie. I didn’t mean to offend you.” she cooed, pulling me into her for another kiss. Then she whispered in my ear.

“I know you’ve got much prettier aprons than that one you’ve got on. So go and put on a nice frilly one. The prettiest one you see. Tie a nice big bow at the back: too. OK?”

I stared at her. “You’ve got to be kidding! What for?”

She smiled confidently. “Doesn’t matter what for, does it? You gave me your word. Now just take that one off and give it to Rosalie, and go and put another one on. Quick now! Like a bunny!”

Stunned, I took my apron off as she suggested. Rosalie got a puzzled look on her face when I handed it to her, but put it on immediately. As I went in search of my new apron, I heard Raquel say “The PRETTIEST now!”

The apron I wore when I returned was one of my mother’s ‘hostess’ aprons. Purely for decoration, not function. It was multicolored chiffon with a voluminous full skirt that totally encircled my waist and came down well below my knees. It was multi-layered and topped with a pink silk bodice, edged with a very full flounced ruffle

of pastel blue lace trim that came high up on my neck at the back and touched my jaw line at the front.

“OH! How nice” Raquel enthused. “Don’t you feel MUCH better now?”

I was embarrassed. It was almost like wearing a dress.