

Mary sat on the toilet seat, holding the pregnancy test with her shaky hands. She couldn't believe her eyes. She refused to even think of what she was looking at. The bedroom fan hummed loudly. The only sound her ears could hear. The humming took her in a trance. Her mind teleported back a week ago. The same humming noise was bothering her.

The wine had made her bold, but it wasn't the wine that kept her from pulling away. When Daniel's fingers tightened around her waist, she arched into him, her body answering before her mind could protest. His breath was hot against her neck—sharp, uneven—and when she turned her face to his, there was no hesitation.

The kiss was hungry, all teeth and shared heat. She tasted the beer he'd drunk

earlier, the salt of his skin, the faint tang of sweat. His hands were everywhere at once —tangling in her hair, skimming down her ribs, gripping her hips hard enough to bruise. She wanted it to hurt. Wanted proof this was real.

He backed her toward the bedroom, their steps unsteady, mouths still locked. The doorframe dug into her shoulder blade, but she barely noticed. His thigh pressed between hers, and she moaned into his mouth, shameless.

(How long had she imagined this? How long had she lied to herself?)

The bed creaked under their weight. Clothes were shoved aside, fabric tearing somewhere—a button skittered across the floor. His hands were calloused, rough in

the best way, dragging over her skin like he was memorizing her. She let him.

Encouraged him. Dug her nails down his back when he finally sank into her, her gasp swallowed by his kiss.

There was no guilt, no hesitation. Just heat, and weight, and the delicious, dizzying wrongness of it. She came with his name on her lips, his own release following seconds after, muffled against her throat.

For a long moment, they just breathed, limbs tangled, sweat cooling on flushed skin. Then Daniellifted his head, his dark eyes searching hers.

She smiled.

His fingers traced idle circles between her breasts, her heartbeat still wild under his

touch. The air smelled of sex and spilled wine, the sheets damp beneath them. She turned her head to catch his wrist, pressing a slow kiss to his palm—then bit down, just enough to make him groan.

Daniel's laugh was dark, uneven. "Again?"

She didn't answer with words. Just rolled atop him, nails scraping down his chest, relishing the way his breath fractured. The moonlight caught the sweat on his collarbone, the flush still staining his throat. She licked a stripe up his neck, felt his hips jerk beneath her.

"Christ—" His hands clamped on her waist, but he didn't push her away. Dragged her closer instead.

This time was slower. Deliberate. She took

him inside her with a sigh, rolling her hips in a rhythm that had him swearing into her shoulder. His mouth found her breast, teeth and tongue wringing another gasp from her. No shame now—just slick, aching friction, the slap of skin on skin, the creak of the bedframe keeping time.

She came first, shuddering, her forehead pressed to his. Daniel followed with a broken noise, his fingers knotting in her hair.

After, they lay breathless, legs still tangled. He brushed a thumb over her lower lip, smearing what she realized was her own gloss. The silence should've been heavy. Instead, it hummed between them, electric.

Maria stretched like a cat, satisfaction

pooling warm in her belly. "Stay," she murmured.

Daniel's smile was all teeth. "Wasn't planning to leave."

His hands were different now—no longer exploring, but claiming.

Daniel flipped her onto her stomach with a force that knocked the breath from her lungs. The sheets were still damp from before, clinging to her skin as he yanked her hips up.

"You like this, don't you?" His voice was raw, nothing like her son's. A stranger's growl in the dark. "You've been waiting for it."

She could've denied it. Could've pretended.

Instead, she arched back against him, a silent challenge.

He laughed—low, mean—and seized a fistful of her hair. "Say it."

The first thrust stole her voice. The second tore a moan from her throat. By the third, she was chanting "yes, yes, yes" like a prayer, each syllable punched out of her.

He set a brutal pace, his grip bruising her thighs. "My little—" A particularly sharp snap of his hips. "—filthy—" The slap of skin. "—mother."

The words should've shamed her. Instead, they coiled hot in her belly. She came with a sob, her fingers twisting in the sheets.

Daniel followed with a groan, his teeth

sinking into her shoulder as he spilled inside her. For one suspended moment, they stayed locked together—panting, trembling, ruined.

Then he collapsed beside her, his sweat cooling on her back. The silence was deafening.

Maria didn't turn to look at him. Didn't dare.

The room was heavy with the scent of sweat and sex, the air thick like honey. Moonlight spilled across the bed, painting their tangled bodies in silver. Maria traced a finger down Daniel's chest, slow, deliberate, watching the way his muscles tensed under her touch.

"My turn," she whispered.

She climbed over him, her thighs framing his hips, her hair a curtain around them. He reached for her, but she caught his wrists, pressing them into the mattress. His pulse thrummed under her fingers, fast and eager.

"No," she murmured. "Let me."

She took him inside her with a sigh, sinking down inch by inch, savoring the stretch, the fullness. His breath hitched, his hips lifting instinctively, but she held him down with the weight of her body.

"Slow," she reminded him, rolling her hips in a lazy circle.

And so they moved—not in a frenzy this time, but in a rhythm as old as the tides.

She rocked against him, her hands roaming his chest, his stomach, his throat. Every touch was a claim. Every sigh, a promise.

Daniel's hands finally broke free, gripping her waist, but he didn't rush her. His eyes were dark, locked onto hers, watching every flicker of pleasure cross her face.

She leaned down, brushing her lips against his. "You feel so good," she breathed.

His groan was muffled against her mouth.

The minutes stretched, the world outside the bed fading into nothing. There was only this—the slide of skin on skin, the hitch of breath, the slow, sweet climb toward release.

When she finally let herself fall, it was with

a cry she didn't recognize as her own. Daniel followed, his fingers digging into her hips, his voice breaking as he whispered her name.

After, she collapsed against him, their hearts pounding in tandem. The room was quiet, save for their ragged breaths.

Maria pressed a kiss to his chest, right over his heart.

"Again?" she teased.

Daniel's laugh was rough, exhausted. "Give me a minute."

She smiled against his skin. They had all night.

The room was still warm, the sheets

tangled around their legs. Maria lay with her head on Daniel's chest, listening to the steady thud of his heartbeat. His fingers traced idle patterns along her bare shoulder.

"This is insane," Daniel murmured, but there was no guilt in his voice—only wonder.

Maria lifted her head, meeting his gaze. His dark eyes were heavy-lidded, satisfied. She smirked. "You didn't seem to mind a few minutes ago."

He huffed a laugh, his thumb brushing her lower lip. "I didn't say I minded."

She shifted, straddling him again, her palms pressed flat against his chest.

"Good. Because I'm not done with you yet."

Daniel's hands slid up her thighs, gripping her hips. "You're gonna kill me."

"Mm. What a way to go." She leaned down, her lips grazing his ear. "Tell me you don't love this."

His breath hitched. "I love it." The admission was rough, almost reluctant.

Maria nipped at his jaw. "Then stop pretending you have any self-control left."

Daniel growled, flipping her onto her back in one swift motion. His mouth crashed against hers, hot and demanding. When he pulled back, his voice was low, possessive. "You're mine now."

Maria arched beneath him, nails scraping

down his back. "Prove it."

The air between them crackled—half challenge, half hunger. Maria shoved Daniel backward onto the bed, but before she could climb over him, his hands locked around her wrists, flipping her beneath him in one rough motion.

"Not this time," he growled.

She twisted, knee pressing against his ribs, forcing him to roll with her. The bed groaned as they wrestled, limbs tangling, sheets knotting around them. A laugh escaped her—sharp, breathless—as she pinned him down, only for him to arch up and reverse their positions again.

"You're not winning this," Daniel muttered against her throat, teeth scraping skin.

"Try harder," she taunted, bucking against him.

Their struggle was fierce, neither willing to yield. Hands gripped, bodies strained—every shift of weight met with equal resistance. A kiss turned into a bite; a caress became a punishing grip. The line between fight and desire blurred until neither could tell where one ended and the other began.

When he finally sank into her, it was with a ragged groan, her legs locking around his waist to drag him deeper. She scratched down his back, drawing a hiss from him, and he retaliated by catching her lower lip between his teeth.

"Mine," he gritted out.

"Only if I let you be," she shot back, arching up to meet each thrust.

Control slipped like sand through their fingers. Dominance fractured into shared desperation, their bodies speaking where words failed—clashing, clinging, neither willing to break first.

When release came, it was messy, mutual, a surrender that felt like victory.

Collapsed atop each other, gasping, Daniel let out a hoarse chuckle. "Stubborn."

Maria nipped his shoulder. "You love it."

He didn't deny it.

The bed was too soft, too confined. Daniel's

hands found her waist, lifting her with a growl as she wrapped her legs around him. The first thrust against the wall knocked a gasp from her lips—her back pressed to the cool surface, fingers scrambling for purchase.

"Hold on," he muttered, voice rough.

She laughed, breathless, nails biting into his shoulders as he moved, each snap of his hips driving her harder into the wall. The impact shuddered through her, pain and pleasure twisting together.

They didn't stay there long.

The dresser was next—her spine meeting the edge as he bent her over it, his grip bruising on her hips. The mirror rattled with every thrust, her reflection flickering

between them, blurred and feverish.

"Look at you," he snarled.

Maria met his gaze in the glass, lips parted, eyes dark. "Look at *you*," she shot back, pushing against him just to feel him shove her down again.

Then the floor—knees on hardwood, his hand fisted in her hair as he dragged her back onto him. She arched, spine taut, every nerve alight.

Wall. Dresser. Floor. They mapped the room in collisions, in sweat-slick skin and shared panting breaths.

When they finally collapsed, it was against the bed again, limbs tangled, pulses racing.

Maria turned her head, catching Daniel's lips in a slow, filthy kiss.

"Again?" she murmured.

His grin was all teeth. "Where next?"

Maria's fingers were cool around Daniel's wrist as she led him down the shadowed hallway. The house was silent except for the creak of old floorboards beneath their bare feet. The air smelled of wood polish and something faintly stale—time sealed away behind a locked door.

She stopped in front of the study. The brass key glinted in her palm, its teeth worn smooth from years of disuse.

"You kept this?" Daniel's voice was low.

Maria didn't answer. The lock turned with a heavy *click*, the sound like a bone settling back into place.

The door swung open, releasing a breath of trapped air—dust, yellowed paper, the ghost of pipe tobacco. Moonlight bled through the curtains, painting the room in silver and deep blue.

It was a library more than a study. Floor-to-ceiling shelves groaned under the weight of leather-bound volumes, their spines cracked with age. A massive oak desk dominated the center of the room, its surface littered with yellowed papers, a dried-out inkwell, a pair of wire-rimmed spectacles left abandoned.

Daniel stepped inside, his bare feet

disturbing a thin layer of dust. His father's chair still sat pushed back, as if the man had just risen from it. A half-empty glass of whiskey—long since evaporated—left a ring on the blotter.

Maria ran a finger along the edge of the desk, leaving a clean trail in the dust. "He'd hate us being in here," she murmured.

Daniel's jaw tightened. *"Good."*

The silence stretched, thick as the dust in the air. Somewhere, a clock ticked, though neither of them remembered it ever working.

Maria turned, her back against the desk, and looked at him. Waiting.

The house held its breath.

Maria didn't hesitate. With one sweep of her arm, she sent the contents of his father's desk crashing to the floor - papers fluttering like wounded birds, the inkwell shattering in a burst of black across hardwood. The wire-rimmed glasses snapped beneath her bare foot as she hopped onto the cleared surface, her knees gripping Daniel's hips as he stepped between them.

The first thrust knocked an encyclopedia volume from the nearest shelf. The second sent a cascade of leather-bound sermons tumbling. With each movement, the old oak desk groaned in protest, its legs scraping against the floor in time with their rhythm.

"Look what you're doing," Maria gasped as

Daniel's grip tightened on her thighs. Another shelf shuddered as he drove into her harder, their combined weight making the wood tremble. First editions of Dickens and Twain rained down around them, pages fluttering open like surrendering hands.

When the desk became too unstable, they stumbled backward into the shelves. Daniel pinned her against the mahogany bookcase, the carved edges biting into her shoulder blades as the remaining books jumped from their perches with each impact. A complete set of Britannica hit the floor in successive thuds - A...B...C...

The final thrust came as the entire bookcase gave way. Maria's cry mingled with the deafening crash as the shelf toppled backward, taking its neighbors

down in a domino collapse of literature and splintering wood. They landed in a nest of fallen knowledge, her body arched over a scattered volume of Shakespeare, his fingers tangled in her hair among the ruins.

In the sudden silence, broken only by their ragged breathing, Maria turned her head to see the destruction - pages splayed open, spines cracked, generations of carefully collected wisdom reduced to kindling beneath them. She laughed, the sound bright and dangerous in the ruined sanctuary.

Daniel's mouth found the pulse at her throat. "His favorite room," he murmured against her damp skin.

"Ours now," she corrected, and pulled him down again.

The destruction became its own kind of intimacy.

Maria dragged Daniel to the floor, their bodies rolling through scattered papers and broken book spines. A first edition Whitman crumpled beneath her elbow, its pages absorbing the sweat from her skin. When he flipped her onto her back, her hair fanned out across an open atlas—the world now mapped only in the places their bodies touched.

They moved like that—wild, relentless—through every corner of the ruined study. Against the overturned shelves, her nails gouged long streaks in the polished wood as he drove into her. On the floor, their tangled limbs sent a bronze paperweight skittering, denting the baseboard. The air

grew thick with the scent of sex and old paper, their sweat soaking into the pages beneath them.

When Maria came the first time, it was with a cry that shook loose a final shelf of books. They rained down around Daniel's shoulders as he followed her over the edge, his release streaking the faded gilt lettering of a family Bible.

But they weren't done.

By the third climax, the room was unrecognizable. Ink stained their skin where bottles had shattered underfoot. Torn pages clung to their damp bodies like bizarre, literary tattoos. A chandelier swayed overhead, its crystals trembling from when she'd braced herself against it.

Maria collapsed against Daniel's chest, both of them breathing hard, surrounded by the wreckage. She lifted a hand, examining the way a drop of sweat—or maybe something else—blurred the handwritten margin notes in his father's ledger.

"Ruined," she murmured, satisfied.

Daniel caught her wrist, licking the salt from her fingertips. "Perfect," he corrected.

Somewhere in the house, a clock struck midnight. Neither of them moved.

The house creaked around them as they disentangled themselves from the wreckage of the study. Maria rose first, her bare feet stepping over scattered pages

and splintered wood. She reached back without looking, fingers curling in silent demand, and Daniel caught her hand, letting her pull him up.

The hallway stretched before them, dark except for the pale moonlight filtering through the curtains. Their footsteps were quiet but uneven—staggered by lingering desire, by the way their bodies kept gravitating back toward each other.

Maria pressed Daniel against the wall near the staircase, her mouth hot on his, her hands mapping the ink smudges and dust staining his skin. He groaned, fingers tightening in her hair, but she broke away with a smirk, tugging him forward again.

"Bathroom," she reminded him, though her voice was rough, unconvincing.

They left a trail of evidence down the hall—a handprint on the wallpaper, a fallen picture frame knocked askew, the rug rucked up from where they'd stumbled over it. The master bathroom door stood ajar, the tile floor cool and gleaming under the motion-activated light.

Maria paused on the threshold, glancing back at him. Her lips were swollen, her hair a mess of knots and loose strands. Daniel looked just as ruined.

She grinned. "Last one in gets cold water."

And then she was gone, slipping into the steam that had already begun to fog the mirrors.

Steam curled in the air, thick and

suffocating, as the scalding water rained down on them. Maria braced herself against the slick tiles, her fingers splayed against the wall as Daniel pressed into her from behind. The heat of the water was nothing compared to the feverish burn of his skin against hers.

"Louder," she demanded, her voice already raw.

And she was—moans spilling from her lips, echoing off the porcelain and glass, loud enough to drown out the drumming water. She didn't care who heard. Let the neighbors, the mailman, the goddamn ghosts in the walls listen. Let them know exactly what they were doing.

Daniel's grip on her hips was iron, his thrusts sharp enough to make her knees

buckle. A growl rumbled in his chest, primal and possessive, as he leaned over her, his teeth grazing the juncture of her neck and shoulder.

"You love this," he snarled, not a question.

Maria laughed, breathless, tilting her head back against his shoulder. "I love you ruining me."

The water sluiced between their bodies, his muscles flexing under her trailing fingertips. Every movement was deliberate—harder, deeper, **more**—until the steam itself seemed to pulse with the rhythm of them.

She arched into him, nails scraping tile. "Don't you dare stop."

Daniel's only answer was another snap of his hips, another groan torn from his throat. The shower was their world now, the glass fogged, the water near-boiling—and neither had any intention of leaving until they were both thoroughly wrecked.

Daniel spun her abruptly, water sluicing between their bodies as he lifted her with a grunt. Maria's back hit the shower wall, the tiles cool even through the steam. Her legs locked around his waist, heels digging into the small of his back as he pinned her there.

"Fuck--" he rasped, the words rough against her throat.

She answered by sinking her teeth into his shoulder, her moan vibrating against his skin. The water beat down on them,

scalding and relentless, but neither noticed —not when his grip on her thighs tightened, not when every thrust knocked a gasp from her lips.

Maria's head tipped back, thumping against the wall. "Harder," she demanded, voice fraying.

Daniel obliged, his growl lost in the spray. The shower rattled around them, the glass door trembling with each movement. Condensation dripped from the ceiling, from their lashes, from their tangled fingers where they gripped each other—anchors in the storm.

She raked her nails down his chest, drawing a hiss from him. "Yours," she taunted, breathless. "Prove it."

His hips snapped forward in answer, water sloshing over the edge of the tub. The wall held. Barely.

The porcelain was cold under her knees as Daniel guided her down, water sloshing over the edges of the tub. Maria's palms braced against the slick bottom, her breath coming in sharp gasps as the water lapped at her collarbones. Every movement sent ripples across the surface—her head dipping, rising, barely breaking through before another wave swallowed her moans.

Daniel's hands gripped her hips, his knees pressing against the backs of hers, anchoring her in place. The water distorted the sounds between them—his growls, her whimpers, the slap of skin on skin—muffled but no less desperate.

Maria's fingers scrambled for purchase, nails scraping porcelain. "Deeper," she choked out, the word half-lost as her chin dipped below the surface again.

He obliged, his thrusts sending water cascading onto the floor. The shower curtain trembled, rings clattering against the rod. Steam clung to them, to the mirror, to every shuddering breath as the tub became their world—a drowning, relentless thing.

Her knuckles turned white. The waterline kissed her lips.

Daniel leaned over her, his voice a ragged whisper against her ear: "Stay down."

And she did.

Maria's body tensed violently, her back arching as the climax tore through her. A choked gasp escaped her lips just as the water rushed in—her mouth flooding with the taste of soap and steam and her own desperate moans. She thrashed, but Daniel's grip was iron, his hips still driving into her, pinning her down through the convulsions.

Her fingers clawed at the porcelain as the waves of pleasure crested, her throat working instinctively to swallow around the water. The world narrowed to the pulse between her legs, the burn of her lungs, the unrelenting pressure of his body keeping her exactly where he wanted her.

Only when the last tremor faded did he finally ease up, letting her surge upward with a ragged, waterlogged gasp. Air hit

her raw throat like a benediction.

Daniel's laugh was dark against her dripping shoulder. "Breathe," he ordered—as if she could do anything else now.

The water around them stilled. For now.

Daniel's hands were bruising on her hips as he bent her over the rim of the tub. The porcelain dug into her stomach, her fingers scrambling against the wet tile floor. Her breath came in ragged gasps, her hair a soaked tangle obscuring her vision.

"Stay." His voice was gritted teeth, a command, not a request.

She could've resisted. Could've pushed back. Instead, she arched into him, a silent challenge.

The thrusts were punishing, the tub creaking under their combined weight. Water dripped from her lashes, her lips, her knuckles where they whitened against the floor.

When his control finally fractured, it was with a groan that sounded more like agony than pleasure—his forehead pressed between her shoulder blades, his grip tightening as if he could fuse them together. His seeds flooding her insides like magma.

Maria smiled into the steam.

Mine, she thought.

The water ran clear, swirling down the drain as they washed away the evidence.

Steam still clung to the bathroom mirrors, fogging their reflections into ghosts.

Maria reached for a towel first, dragging it lazily over her skin before tossing it to Daniel. He caught it with a grunt, scrubbing a hand through his damp hair. Neither spoke.

The bedroom was cool, the sheets crisp as they slid beneath them. Maria turned into him, her leg hooking over his hip, her forehead pressed to his collarbone. Daniel's arm curled around her, heavy and possessive even in sleep.

Within minutes, their breathing evened out—tangled, exhausted, and utterly spent.

The house settled around them. Silent.

The pink lines glared up at her, undeniable.

Maria's fingers trembled around the plastic stick, her breath trapped somewhere between her ribs. The bathroom was too quiet—no hum of the fan, no creak of the house settling. Just the hammering of her pulse in her ears.

One time. One goddamn time.

She thought of the study in ruins. The shower still dripping onto the tiles. Daniel's teeth at her throat.

A knock at the door.

"Mom?" His voice, sleep-rough. Concerned.

Maria flushed the test away. The toilet roared like laughter.

"Just a stomach bug," she called, her smile brittle in the mirror.

Some lies were easier to swallow than others.

Daniel reached for her the moment she stepped out, his hands warm against her waist, his mouth already seeking hers.

Maria shoved him back—hard.

He stumbled, catching himself against the wall. Confusion flickered across his face, then irritation. "What the hell?"

She crossed her arms, nails biting into her own skin. "Not now."

"Bullshit." He stepped closer, eyes narrowing. "Talk to me."

The pregnancy test burned in her mind. She turned away. "Drop it."

A beat of silence. Then his laugh—sharp, disbelieving. "You don't get to shut me out after everything."

Maria didn't answer. The lie sat between them, fat and rotting.

Daniel's jaw tightened. "Fine."

He stalked past her, shoulder slamming into the doorframe on his way out.

She exhaled.

Coward.

The bedroom was dark when Daniel's hands seized her, turning her roughly toward him. His breath was hot against her neck, fingers digging into her hips with familiar demand.

Maria reacted before she could think—her palm cracked across his face with a sound like a gunshot.

"I gave birth to you!" Her voice shattered.
"Have some goddamn shame!"

For a heartbeat, there was only silence. Then Daniel's eyes darkened, his chest heaving. "You didn't seem to care about shame before," he snarled.

He lunged with anger and lust.

Maria stumbled back, her bravado crumbling. "Stop—please!" The words tore out of her, raw. "I'm pregnant!"

Daniel froze.

The air between them turned to ice.

"What?" The word was a blade.

She couldn't meet his eyes. The truth hung in the air, suffocating.

His laugh, when it came, was hollow. "Of course you are."

And then he was gone, the bedroom door slamming so hard the mirror shook.

Maria sank to the floor, her hands pressed

to her stomach.

Alone.

Finally.

The door crashed open again. Daniel's silhouette filled the doorway, his breathing ragged with barely leashed fury.

"Get rid of it," he spat.

Maria flinched, her arms wrapping protectively around herself. "Daniel, please—calm down. We need to—"

"Don't tell me to calm down!" His voice was a whip-crack. "You stupid, selfish bitch. You ruin everything!"

The words landed like blows. She didn't

fight back, just let them sink in, her tears cutting silent tracks down her face.

"Whore." He paced, running both hands through his hair. "Fucking insane—you think I'd let you keep this? After what we did?"

Maria's voice was a whisper. "It's not just yours."

A beat of silence. Then his fist slammed into the wall, making her flinch. "You're keeping my kid inside you?" His laugh was jagged. "Christ, you're sick."

She pressed her lips together, tasting salt. There was nothing left to say.

Daniel turned on his heel. "Do what you want. But don't expect me to play house

with this fucking nightmare."

The door didn't slam this time. It clicked shut, soft as a coffin sealing.

Maria stayed very still, her hands cradling the life inside her—the one thing he couldn't take away.

The door creaked open again. Daniel stood there, his earlier fury dulled into something colder, more calculated.

"If you keep it," he said, voice low, "you're signing a confession. Every doctor's visit, every glance at your belly—they'll know. The family. The neighbors. *Everyone.*"

Maria didn't look up. Her fingers curled into the fabric of her shirt, over the still-flat plane of her stomach.

He didn't leave. Just leaned against the doorframe, watching her. Waiting.

"You really want that?" A bitter laugh. "To be the mother who fucked her son?"

A tear hit her knee. Then another. But her voice, when it came, was steady.

"Go to hell, Daniel."

Silence.

For the first time, he had no retort.

Daniel's fingers dug into the flesh of her cheeks, forcing her to meet his gaze. His breath came in ragged bursts, nostrils flaring with barely contained rage. But his hands - they trembled.

Maria didn't blink. A slow, venomous smile spread across her face despite the painful grip. "What's this?" she taunted, words slightly distorted by his grasp. "The big, strong man can't decide whether to hit his mother or fuck her again?"

His grip tightened involuntarily, then loosened just as quickly. A war raged behind his eyes - fury, shame, something dangerously close to panic.

"You should've thought with this," she continued, tapping a finger against his temple mockingly, "instead of the little brain between your legs. Now look at you." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "My sweet, stupid boy."

Daniel's free hand clenched into a fist at

his side. The tendons in his neck stood out like cables. But he didn't leave.

The silence stretched between them, thick with unsaid things. The weight of the life growing inside her. The unspoken truth that neither could escape now.

Maria watched the conflict play across his face with cold satisfaction. He was trapped. They both were.

And for the first time, she saw real fear in her son's eyes.

Daniel's hands dropped from her face, but he didn't step back. The space between them crackled with venom.

"This is your fault," he hissed.

Maria barked a laugh. "My fault? You were the one who couldn't keep your hands to yourself."

"You didn't say no." His teeth gleamed in the low light. "You never say no."

"And you never think!" She shoved at his chest, but he didn't budge. "What did you expect? That we'd just keep fucking like animals without consequences?"

Daniel's lip curled. "I expected you to be smarter."

"Oh, that's rich." Her voice dripped acid. "The boy who came inside his own mother now lectures me about smarts."

A flinch. Then his hands were on her again, not to strike but to shake, his fingers biting

into her shoulders. "You wanted this!"

Maria didn't deny it. She tilted her head, sweet as poison. "And you didn't?"

Silence.

They stood there, breathing each other's air, the truth a live wire between them.

Neither moved.

Neither won.

Daniel's hands dropped to his sides, fingers twitching. His voice came out raw, accusing. "You got us both drunk. This is your fault. You wanted me to—"

"Yes." Maria cut him off, her chin lifting. The tears were gone now, replaced by

something fiercer. "Yes, I wanted you. I wanted to feel alive again."

The admission hung between them, stark and undeniable.

Daniel's breath hitched. For a moment, he looked almost young again—lost, uncertain. Then his jaw hardened. "And now?"

Maria's laugh was hollow. "Now I **am** alive. More than I've been in years."

He didn't leave.

He didn't touch her.

But he didn't look away, either.

The game had changed.

And neither knew the rules anymore.

Maria's voice softened, almost tender. "You could have rights to this baby. Raise it with me." She paused, watching his face. "I'd even marry you, if you wanted."

Daniel exhaled sharply, running his hands through his hair before sinking onto the edge of the bed. His shoulders hunched, the anger draining out of him, replaced by something uncertain—but curious.

She took a step closer, pressing her advantage. "We could leave. Go somewhere no one knows us. Somewhere we could... start over."

A long silence. Then, slowly, Daniel lifted his head. His eyes were dark, searching

hers for the trap, the lie.

"Where?" The word was barely audible.

Maria smiled.

"Anywhere."

The seed was planted.

Now they waited to see if it would grow.

Daniel's voice was low, rough with accusation. "Why didn't you take the pills the next morning? You knew we did it raw."

Maria kept her head down, fingers twisting in the fabric of her shirt. The silence stretched, thick and suffocating.

He waited.

She offered no excuses. No lies.

Just the quiet, and the weight of the life growing inside her.

Daniel's jaw clenched.

Maria lifted her gaze, her voice steady despite the tremor in her hands.

"Your father left me nothing," she said.

"Every property, every asset—all in your name. I had no money. No power." A bitter smile twisted her lips. "But I had you."

Daniel went very still.

"So this was...what? A transaction?" His voice was dangerously quiet.

Maria didn't flinch. "Call it survival."

The room seemed to shrink around them.

Daniel exhaled, long and slow.

Maria's voice cracked as she reached for his hands. "If I don't have this child, I'll have nothing. No home. No security." Her fingers tightened around his. "Only you can save me now. Please...Daniel. Marry me. Keep me."

A tear slipped down her cheek as she whispered the final lie:

"I love you."

Daniel stared at their joined hands, his pulse roaring in his ears. The math was

simple:

Her desperation.

His power.

A lifetime of secrets sealed with a ring.

When he finally looked up, his smile was hollow.

"Alright, Mother."

Daniel's grip tightened around her wrists, pulling her close until their breath mingled. His voice was a dark promise.

"I'll marry you," he said. "But never forget—you belong to me now. Every night, I'll take you. Every night, you'll obey." His thumb brushed over her lower lip, possessive. "No

excuses. No resistance."

Maria held his gaze, her own voice steady.
"And in return?"

"In return,"* he murmured, "you get to keep your pretty little life."

A beat of silence. Then her slow nod.

Daniel's grip tightened, his voice dropping to a predatory murmur.

"And when I get bored of you," he said, thumb tracing the pulse fluttering in her throat, "I'll take other women to my bed. You won't ask. You won't complain." A sharp smile. "You'll just kneel where I put you and be grateful I keep you at all."

Maria didn't blink. "And if I refuse?"

His laugh was cold. "Then you can try your luck on the streets—pregnant and penniless." He leaned in, lips grazing her ear. "We both know how that ends."

A pause. Then her slow, deliberate nod.

"Yes, Daniel."

The deal was sealed.

His victory was complete.

Hers was simply survival.