*Chapter Five—*

“It appears that the presidency fits you quite well.”

*Unlike that dress.*

Valeria had never been one for tight clothing in general. While it may have had its tactical advantages on the battlefield, she had always much preferred the baggy fatigues as her main vestments, with perhaps a tank or blouse underneath. Being poured into this ridiculous red number with her hair down and her face painted… she might have felt like a clown if she didn’t feel so much like a sausage.

Indeed, to the members of her former military group it felt strange seeing her look so womanly. Soft and curvy, with her hair down and all dolled up. The very same people who had spent most of her life looking at her as just one of the many soldiers fighting for revolution, sitting down with her in the trenches and burping and farting and spitting over rum now had difficulty even looking her in the eye.

“You dirty old man.” Valeria chuckled for the first time that night as she sipped on a glass of champagne, “Say that to my face instead of my chest.”

“I apologize, Madame Presidente.” The old man laughed as boisterously as his aging lungs would allow, “We will blame it on the alcohol and continue to remain friends.”

It had been the first time in many months that Raul had seen his former general. His days were now spent at a fancy estate with his grandson, laying poolside with a cold can of beer. Valeria was not the only person who had put on weight since the revolution ended, obviously. But if you asked Raul, she was by far the best-looking person in the army who would have had trouble squeezing into their uniform.

“I suppose that makes me feel better about my looks.” Valeria rolled her eyes wryly, “If you couldn’t tell, I am sweating like a pig in this thing.”

“If pigs looked like you, I would have given up the revolution and started a farm years ago.”

Valeria laughed again and then escorted her old friend to the hors d'oeuvres, all the while tugging as inconspicuously as she could manage at the tight red fabric that hugged her belly tight. Her lean, washboard stomach had swelled into a soft tummy that bunched her new dress in the front, and her small breasts had plumped and ripened in a similar fashion within the red hammock of the dress’s bustline. The sashay of her hips as they stretched the slinky red dress to its limits was enough to gather more than enough attention than she was used to getting as a soldier—or, honestly, as a woman.

From her former colleagues, from the politicians, from the businessmen… the added weight had gone a long way towards making her more desirable, apparently. Had she really been so haggard and malnourished before? She didn’t exactly see what was wrong with the way she looked when she was a tight, fit soldier fighting for the liberation of her people…

“Here, try one of these.” Valeria bent over the table to pick up a small sausage with her fingers and give it to the old man, “They are my favorite from everything on this table.”

“We have come a long way, haven’t we?” Raul chuckled as he popped the thing into his mouth, “From starving in the fields to growing fat off finger foods. I never would have guessed it.”

“I always figured that we would win.” Valeria shrugged, sucking down two of the little sausages for herself, “You always were too cynical for your own good, my friend.”

The party goers at this function were far from the sort of people that Valeria wanted to rub elbows with. She felt so much more at home with people like Raul and Hector and George, the only three of her former allies who had made appearances thus far at what was supposed to be a social gathering. She did not want to talk to spoiled socialites and shady businessmen—if anything, she wanted to go back to their sad little tents and eat beans out of a can.

But more than anything, she wanted a smoke. This place, these people, the way that they looked at her in this dress… it made her feel so uncomfortable. Like she was trying to be someone that she was not.

“You don’t have to humor an old man, Valeria.” Raul said with a little wave, “There are many more young, equally handsome men who require your attention tonight—certainly ones that want their turn to speak to the presidente.”

Here he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small metal flask, offering it to his old friend with a knowing smile.

“But if it becomes too much for you to handle, take a swig of the good stuff.” The old man sloshed the half-empty bottle in his hand, “I know that my little friend here has helped me *greatly* tonight.”

Valeria shook her head, unable to hold back a laugh at the silly old man and his little liquor bottle. She took a long look over to the crowd of socialites and politicians towards the center of the room, looked back to her old friend, and grabbed the bottle from his shaky hand.

“I think that it is better for them that I take you up on that offer.” She said, throwing back her head and taking a quick shot before handing it back to Raul, “You are a good friend.”

With some liquid courage coursing through her veins, Valeria took a deep breath and sashayed over to the crowd of wealthy so-called “elites”, picking at her panties one last time as they rode up into the meat of her backside. She pulled her dress taut to smooth out the wrinkles that had formed over her paunch, sucked in a little…

“I am the Madame Presidente.” She steeled herself with the same low, slow breathing exercise that had brought her ease in the trenches, “I can do this.”

*Chapter Six—*

In her new and often thankless job as the Presidente, Valeria had learned to take what few opportunities to enjoy herself that she was presented with.

While she might not have enjoyed cigars as much as the less expensive, less overwhelming cigarettes, she would be hard pressed to turn one down when given to her. Even if it came from one of the most repugnant men that had ever hailed from their country—Mateo Morales.

In the strictest sense of the phrase, he was an ally to the cause. But only because he could be purchase. Much of the money that had come from their financial backers had found its way into Mateo’s pocket in exchange for the aid of his mercenaries. Given the fragile grip that the People’s Liberation Army held on power of their country, Valeria had been told that it was important to meet with men like him. Lest he become unhappy with the arrangement and cut a deal with the lingering sympathizers of the old regime.

“In all of my days, I never thought that I would see a woman sitting at the seat of General Pequeño.” The heavy, scarred man said with a smile as he leaned back on the terrace’s bench, “Let alone such a pretty one.”

If it had not been for the box of cigars that he had brought for her to enjoy, Mateo Morales would have almost surely found himself flung over the railing. But luckily for him, Valeria missed nicotine more than she missed the thrill of getting the drop on people who underestimated her. So seated he remained.

“What can I say? I get plenty of sun, sitting here on the balcony talking politics.” Valeria shrugged her shoulders, letting herself relax as she allowed the familiar embrace of smoky flavor to overwhelm her, “It is good for my skin.”

Said skin was very much on display. The winters were warm here—no doubt warmer than when she was a child, due to the pollution that had worsened as factories opened left and right. Valeria’s sleeveless blouse allowed her puffy brown arms exposure, and it was roomy enough that it did not bunch along the swell of her stomach as she reclined. Her thick legs crossed, the fabric of her pants swishing audibly as calf grazed thigh. And though she was upset at herself for becoming so plump, her weight paled in comparison to the mountain of man that was Mateo Morales.

“You are looking much better than the last time that I saw you, Madame Presidente.” he said with a crooked smile, “Less… malnourished. There is some meat to you now. A woman should have some fat on her. It is healthy.

Valeria raised her eyebrows.

Mateo raised his back.

“I had better take good care to smoke each and every one of your cigars then.” Valeria took an extra-deep inhale and blew smoke towards him, “I cannot appear to be too healthy when my people are still struggling.”

“A smart woman knows when not to show weakness. You are a very smart woman, Madame Presidente.” Mateo took a hit from his cigar and blew into the wind, “But a smart *leader* knows when to pay their debts to those who have supported them.”

Despite herself, Valeria found herself unnerved by that remark. The country was still unstable, and there was not enough money to repay Mateo now; not all at once.

“The People’s Liberation is still underway, Mateo—we are still undoing that which we *both* fought for in the corruption of General Pequeño’s regime.” Valeria ventured, “You will have to give us a little more time.”

“Bullshit.” He could get very loud, very quickly when he wanted to, “You are going to sit there and tell me that the country has no money? You, with your fat tits and your big ass, show that there is money to spare. I want what is mine.”

There were many ways to get out of this. A few might have solved her problem in the short term. But what little Valeria had felt that she had learned at this job that she could combine with what she learned as a soldier, it was how to not get beaten up by someone who was bigger than you. How to talk man-to-man, rather than leader-to-constituent.

“If I give you too much too soon, we won’t have any money to go towards bettering our country or its people.” Valeria stated with steel, “Half now. Half next year.”

“As in January.” It was not a question.

“As in Next Year.” That was not a compromise.

The two of them stared at one another for a good, long while. Cigar smoke fluttered in the air and wafted about as the great man grumbled like a bear. Suddenly, he turned to the poor maid who had born witness to two soldier’s diplomatic attempts and snapped his great, meaty fingers.

“Rum—two glasses.” He turned to Valeria with an expression that was not quite of hatred but certainly not appreciation of being challenged in such a way, “Leave the bottle.”

As the maid scurried inside, the fat man laid a hand along the swell of his stomach. He scratched and spit onto the stone.

“Have you eaten lunch today, Madame Presidente?”

“I have.”

“I have not.” He said in a gruff, but polite voice, “We will sit, and we will eat, and we will drink. And eventually, we will come to a conclusion that satisfies both of our needs.”

Valeria couldn’t help but hesitate at the sight of the maid coming back with a decanter of bourbon, accompanied by two of Morales’ men. Both just as muscular but less than half as fat.

“Perhaps we will even make merry.” Mateo poured himself a glass of rum, and then one for Valeria, “After I get my money, of course.”

After a proposition like that, she was thankful for the alcohol.