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**Risk It All**

**L.S. FISHER**

“Lina, **¿Qué pasó?** What the hell are you doing!? Get over here!” Maria yelled. It was Friday and the bell just let us out for the day. Maria had got into an argument with some girl behind a red bandana headband she saw her wearing at this party last night. I think it’s because she use to date this guy named *Papi* who is the gang leader of the Bloods on 5th avenue. She’s so tough she’ll never admit otherwise though.

Maria dropped out of school last year but comes on campus any time she feels like it. She serves a lot of kids up here and keeps an eye on us. The faculty banned her from the campus after so much gang violence but got tired of calling the police. Now she’s up here today, wanting us to help her jump the girl in the bathroom.

 “I don’t know what the fuck you think this is! We don’t do those colors bitch!” she said kicking the girl repeatedly in the stomach. Veronica kicked her in the head so hard I could see the knot form instantly. The girl looks so familiar. I think she’s in another gang and her friends were not around as everyone crowed and chanted around the bathroom watching.

 I just stood there looking at her ass blood came out her mouth. “Mr. Mason is coming!” someone yelled. We all ran out the bathroom and on the road headed toward the projects.

 “Now that’s what I call an ass whopping! *Perra Tonta*.” She said.

 My name is Angelina Martin. People call me Lina for short though. I’m 16 years old and I’m in a gang called Rover Crips or RC for short. Our gang is just Maria and I, Veronica, Gloria, and Francisca. I’ve been down since I was 14 so that makes 2 years now. My sister Maria is the gang leader and she has no soul. I’m sure of this. They told me stories about Maria killing 2 people before. I never asked her.

 Maria just turned 18 and has been in the RC since she was 10. She became the leader when Valentina died in a drive by. She has a tattoo of a broken heart near her right eye and *Rover Crips* tattooed going across her neck. Maria had no care in the world for no one but the people in her circle. The gang life and protecting its name was all she seemed to live for.

 Our mother, Josephina, is only 31 and she acts like we are the parents. Maria and I make the money, most of the time, and she just drinks and smokes all damn day. She refuses to work as long as she has government assistance and men with money she can sleep with when she needs something. I guess as long as she stays beautiful she won’t have to worry.

Our father, Antonio, is in jail for life. He killed a very important man about 10 years ago, same year the twins were born and the same year Maria got jumped in. He’s not really me, Maria, or José’s father but he taught us everything we needed to know about the streets and how to survive in the gang life. We go see him at least twice a month. Only Maria and I were going until Jose got jumped in. Maria looks up to him when it comes to being a gang leader. He’s like God to her and even with him being in jail he still protects the family and has connects.

 Its 5 of us all together, Maria and I being the 2 oldest, then there was José who is 15, and the twins Javier & and Marlon who are 11. José was headed down the wrong path also. He caught his first body the same month he joined the RC’s. He got jumped in last year. He was jumped so bad he had to miss school for two weeks and has a permanent scare under his eye. He went from a nerdy kid who read books and watched cartoons, to a gang member. It happened to fast, I hardly noticed. I blame us. I don’t want to see my brother dead. It’s a higher risk for boys. Especially young boys fresh in. They use them for the dirt they don’t want to do.

I have a boyfriend named Angel. He’s in a gang too only is a blood. He rolls with some older Cholos instead of ones our age. Angel and I fell in love at first sight when I was 14. I thought it was so cute how his name is in my name. Angel and Angelina. He’s such a tough guy, but not with me. He loves me more than anything and always lets me know. The only thing is, we can’t let our families or close friends know because we’d get killed. It’s not like there are written rules in the gang life, but there are rules you must follow in order to stay

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That night I could tell Ma’ was about to leave. It was night and Jose was getting ready to run the streets also. The house smelled like curling iron and cigarettes. I started washing the dishes because they were pilling over the sink. Maria seemed more bothered than usual as she pirated around the house frustrated.

“Okay. Now I’m going to a motel a few days with Marlo. Maria, I need you to take care of the electric bill or they’ll be coming to turn the shit off Monday.” Maria sat on the stood in the hall way looking at Mami.

“What happened to the $350 I just gave you the other day? I’m not made of money ya know. I’m not about to keep supporting your fucking habits and bullshit.” She said.

“Well if it doesn’t get paid, y’all asses will be in the dark. We can’t do any more extensions so make a choice.” Mami said polishing her toes.

Maria rolled her eyes and went out the front door, slamming it hard. The twins sat on the couch beside Mami watching TV eating sandwiches and chips.

“Mami, how much is it?” I asked, drying my hands.

“Go check the bill; I’m not really sure.” She said. I opened the electric bill and saw a big red *Past Due* stamp over $457.00.

“Ay yai yai, mamá ¿Cómo se puso esto así?”

“I don’t know. I’m barely here. That’s you guys running up the damn electricity.” A horn blew several times outside.

“That’s Marlo. I’ll be back next week sometime. Lina watch the house chica.” She gave the twins a kiss on the forehead and walked out the front door with a suitcase and bags. I went to go check on José. He’s nothing like he use to be. It’s like he changed over the summer. He’s barely home and when he is, he’s in his room smoking weed and listening to music or playing the Play Station.

His door is usually closed but it was cracked. I opened it to let him know Mami is gone til next week.

 “José Mami is-” he had the iron and ironing board out creasing some Dickie’s. A gun sat on the edge of his bed with a blue bandana wrapped around it.

 “Damn Lina, do you know how to knock?” he said reaching for the door to slam it. I put my foot in the way.

 “José, why do you have a gun? What are you planning on doing?”

 “Why do you think Lina?” he said lacing up his shoes.

 “Thanks to you and Maria jumping that fucking girl, we have heat in the streets right now. Papi has already sent warning shots.” He said wiping the gun with the bandana.

 “What the hell are you talking about?” I asked.

 “You know what I’m talking about Lina.” I could hear Maria barging throw the front door of the house. We both got quiet and looked at the ground.

 “Now that Mami is gone we can party in this bitch.” She came in the room with a case of beers and a brown sack filled with stuff. She saw the look on our faces.

 “Why the silence? What’s going on?” I just looked at José.

 “Just tell Maria what you told me.” I demanded.

 “That girl y’all jumped is Papi’s girl. She was 3 months pregnant with his first born child and lost the baby. Now he’s out for blood.” José said standing in Maria’s face.

 “So if I die tonight then it’ll be because y’all wanted to jump the bitch behind something stupid I’m sure.”

 “Who told you this?” Maria asked.

 “The streets talk Maria. Angel and Javier are the ones who told me. You need to make this right or its gonna be a blood bath.” He said.

 I’ve never seen my sister so scared and confused. I could tell by her reaction and how her body language changed all of a sudden.

 “We’ll see. I’m not afraid of war. The fuck I look like?” she said walking out the room.

 “We’ll I’m about to go make some money. Mami is tripping telling us about that bill this late.” José said.

 “We’ll pay that, that’s not an issue. We have other problems to worry about. I’ll talk to Papi myself.” She said yelling from the hallway.

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The park was packed this Saturday afternoon. We all just sat around the bench parked near the cars smoking, drinking beer, and hanging out. Francisca had to work so she was gonna meet us here after a while. I just sat in the back seat of Maria’s car zoned out. I’m so ready to meet with Angel later. I know he knows what Papi has in store because he’s his right hand man. Maria took a big hit and exhaled. No one said anything as they watch Veronica get out the car.

“No matter what, we fucked up. Can you at least admit that Maria?” Gloria said.

“Papi won’t kill me. I know he won’t. We were creeping around at one point and we both knew we wasn’t supposed to.” She said.

“That was years ago and you killed his only child; what makes you so sure?” I added.

“Because, Lina. I was pregnant by him as well a few years ago.” Everyone got quiet.

My stomach cringed from the thought of death. I’ve never killed anyone or seen anyone be killed before. I’ve seen dead bodies but that’s all the time where I live in Cali.

Veronica came pulling up all crazy beside us like someone was after her.

 “Francisca’s been hit! They shot up the burger joint and she was hit three times!” she yelled out of breath.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Maria responded.

“They came and shot her man. I think she’s dead. por favor dios no!” she cried.

My head started to spin as I started to intake what she was saying. *Francisca dead? It hasn’t been 48-hours yet. What if he starts picking us off one by one? What if he kills José just because he’s our brother even though he had nothing to do with it?* I felt like I had bubble guts, just like the time the teacher called Mami in 2nd grade and told her I was cussingand I knew I had an ass whooping waiting on me the whole time I was at school.

“I need everyone to lay low. Come to my house tonight at midnight. Let all the young vatos and the OGs to be there shotties loaded. We ride out tonight.”

“Mataremos a esos cabrones!” Gloria yelled throwing her bottle on the sidewalk.

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Maria let me hold her car to go to the store but I was really going to see Angel before we had our little gang meeting. The sun had just set and it was 7:35pm. Everyone knows what Maria’s car looks like so I had to meet Angel at old abandoned gas station near Los Santos to get a chance to see them. We called it our spot. It seemed like a heap of shit but the view over the city was no different from the rich people houses in Beverly hills or San Francisco. No one knows about it but maybe a few kids and homeless people. It was the only place we could be together in plain sight without causing a distraction.

He’s never late. I hope everything is ok. I don’t need another person close to me hurt.

Angel pulled up in his nice drop top Cadillac. I couldn’t see his face that good but his silhouette was enough. Angel had a very unique style. Even though he was a Blood he dressed like the Greaser white boys with his long hair slicked back in a ponytail and he always stayed really neat. I loved how smooth he was and how he plays the role of a stranger when I see him out. I’m ready to be open and free with our relationship with my love for him.

He got out the car and had his arm in a sling and his face was cut. He has blood on his clothes and it was still fresh because it was wet when I touched him.

 “Angel what happened?” He just looked in the other direction. I grabbed his face and his eye was cut underneath.

“What the fuck happened? Are you not gonna speak?” he stood silent.

“Fine Angel, I’m bouncing.” He grabbed my arm.

“No Lina.”

“Then tell me what happened and what’s going on?”

“I’m sure you know what’s going on. I should be asking you questions. Why’d y’all do something so disgusting?” he said. Those words stung so bad. He’s always looked at me to be so sweet and now he probably thinks I’m a monster.

“I didn’t, well we didn’t know she was pregnant Angel. Maria got mad at the girl and wanted to jump her.”

“That doesn’t change the fact that she lost the baby. It won’t change Papi’s mind either. He’s not gonna stop until all of y’all are dead or in wheel chairs.” He said.

“That’s why I have to get us out of here. I can’t let him hurt you.”

 “What about my family?”

 “Lina I can’t save all of you. Maria did this to herself. Unless she kills Papi, this war will go on. Just please think about leaving.” He said holding my face.

 “Where will we go?” I asked.

 “Hell Nevada, Ohio, Utah, Colorado, anywhere you want to go baby. If we stay here we’ll die. Our people are at war and if they find out we are together, we’re as good as dead.” He said hugging me.

 “Who did you get into it with?” I asked him. He took a deep breath.

 “José.” He said.

 “My brother? Is he ok?!” Angel just looked me in my eyes.

 “Lina I tried to stop them but I couldn’t.”

 “What do you fucking mean Angel! Where’s José?”

 “We ran into him and his boys about 30 mins ago on the corner of Figueroa and W 130th near the junk yard. They stared banging and Papi lost it. He saw José and that really made him mad. We hopped out the car and started fighting them then Papi stabbed only him a few times and left him for dead. He kept saying he was gonna kill everyone Maria loved.”

 “Why didn’t you do anything!” I kept punching him in the arm, back, and chest as hot tears ran down my face. I pulled out my gun, chocked it back and pointed in dead in his face. Tears kept coming down.

 “Lina I will take you to the spot just put down the gun.” He pleaded.

 “How can I trust you Angel? How do I know you’re not setting me up? You’re playing me talking about leaving and all that dumb shit. My loyalty is to my family, not you!”

 “I would never hurt you or your family Lina. I’m trying to get us out of this shit. It’s on you if you want it to be this way.” Angel turned around and went back to his car like I wasn’t pointing a gun at him.

 I put the gun down. “Take me to him.”

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 We left Maria’s car at the spot at left in Angels car to Fig St. I just stared out the window and looked at the cars and street lights that synchronized on the sidewalk. We pulled up to the spot.

 “This is where it happened.” Angel said putting the car in park. I got out and ran to the spot. There was blood still wet and some dry on the pavement. I’m sure they took him to the hospital around the corner.

 “We have to go home first. I have to tell my sister what’s going on.”

 We drove to the house. I couldn’t think about anything else besides if José was dead or alive. I didn’t care about them seeing Angel or anything. Maybe this was the time to finally let Maria know about Angel and tell her what he told me about what Papi has in store.

 Angel rested his hand on my leg as he carefully drove to my house. He always acts like he’s not afraid or worried about anything. That helps me stay calm a lot but not in this case.

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 We pulled up to the house and there were cars everywhere. With all of this news about José being stabbed, leaving my family, and this war going on, I forgot about the meeting tonight. I also forgot about bringing Maria’s car back.

 “Angel just parked on the other side of the road. Ms. Rosie won’t mind. I’m going in here to talk to Maria.” I told him.

 “I’ll park but I’m coming in with you. I have to talk to her myself and explain to her what happened to José and what’s about to happen with Papi.” He said.

 Angels red flannel with his red chucks, and bandana hanging out his pocket screamed rival from a mile away. He wasn’t in the correct neighborhood. We held hands as we walked up to the door. *Here goes nothing.* When I opened the door Maria was standing up and sweating with just a bra and some Dickies on. About 30 cholos and cholas stared at me as I walked through my own front door. Angel followed behind me as everyone stared like I had something on my face.

 “Lina where the fuck have you been!?” I could smell Maria’s breath a few feet away from her. It smelled like heavy liquor and smoke. Angel just stood there looking around with a blank look.

 “I know him. He’s 59, one of Papi’s boys.” A guy said sitting on the couch.

 “Lina you brought me a present!” she said.

 “Maria we need to talk. Alone.” I said.

 “Why? So you can try to convince me this puto isn’t a threat to us?” she said.

Angel just stood there as if a bunch of killers weren’t staring him down, waiting for Maria to give the signal to kill him. They were like a pack of wild animals under Maria’s spell.

 “Maria José is hurt. He’s been jumped and stabbed by Papi’s boys. We need to go to the hospital.” I explained. Her face changed completely when I said that.

 “Come on let’s go to my room.” She said escorting Angel and I to the back of the house toward her room. I haven’t been in Maria room in months. There were gang posters covering the walls like wall paper. She had pictures of Antonio on the walls also. Candles with dead gang members, rosaries, and letters decorated her dresser.

 “What happened to José and who is this fool you brought to Mami’s house Lina?” she said closing the door. Angel looked around but didn’t say anything. I didn’t say anything for a second. I didn’t know where to start. Maria walked up to Angel and circled him, examining his face and the splint on his arm.
 “You were obviously involved in what happened to my brother. If he’s dead so are you and Papi.” She said.

 “What is so important that you would drag this boy to our house, in our turf after he jumped our brother?” I looked down.

 “Lina you better start talking.” She said, sounding just like Mami.

 “Angel has some important information that he wants to tell you that might save our lives.”

 “I’m not telling you shit. Besides Papi wants you dead for what you did. You fucking disgust me and your time will come.” He told Lina standing over her.

 “You or Papi don’t put a lick of fear in my heart. You just tell him to be ready for what’s coming.”

 “I’m not telling him anything. I’m leaving and I’m taking Lina with me. She won’t make it in this war. She needs to be out.” He said.

 “Lina’s never leaving. When I die she’ll take my spot but until then she’ll be here. I be damned if I let someone come along and talk to my sister out of loyalty. Over my fucking dead body.”

 “Lina you need to listen to Angel. He’s leaving the Bloods.”

 “I’m not leaving my gang Lina, I’m leaving Papi’s turf.” He interrupted.

 Over the talking in the living room I could hear the front door slam.

Maria’s door swung open and it was José looking beat up like Angel. He dived toward Angel.

“What the fuck is he doing here! He tried to kill me! Why is he here!?” he yelled.

“José calm down. He didn’t jump you! He’s trying to help.” I said holding him back.

“How do you know Lina? You weren’t there. He needs to go before we have a dead body in this bitch!” José yelled walking out the room.

“Lina its best you take your friend and go.” Maria said. I grabbed Angels hand and we walked toward the front door. José stood in the hall way eyeing us down.

“Lina the next time I run into him, one of us will die. It won’t be me.” He said to me.

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 There was nowhere to go that either of us felt safe or comfortable. Going to my side was a mistake and nothing got accomplished. I feel safe with Angel anywhere but going to his end wasn’t the best thing either. They might kill him just for being with me.

 We pulled up to a hotel on the outskirts of the country. The sun was coming up. I could tell he was tired but he kept it cool for me. I love him and I know there will never be any reason for him not trust him. We couldn’t check in because we were too young so we waited for the right person to do it for us.

 A white man got out his car and headed for the hotel.

 “I’m going to ask him.” Angel said. He went and talked to the man. I could see him throw the window talking to the man. It looks like he wasn’t going to do it until Angel pulled out a stack of money. They both looked around to see if anyone was looking then he pulled out a small sack and gave it to him.

 He came back to the car with a smile on his face. I haven’t seen him smile since all of this bull shit has been going on.

 “He’s getting our room key. We’re gonna lay low here for a few weeks.” He said.

 “What about my clothes and stuff? Or my family? What about school Angel?” I asked.

 “All that’s shit is behind us now. You either can come with me or be them. I know you love your family and I’m not trying to keep you away from them, but it’s too hot right now and your sister is too stubborn to listen.” He said looking in my eyes.

 “Are you going to stay or go back?” he asked. I didn’t answer him. I’ve never had to make a decision like this in my life. The thought of Maria finding out I left, especially during a time like this, made my hairs stand up on my arm.

 We got in the room. In was a perfect get away from home even though it wasn’t that far away.

 “Why are we here instead of in another state?” I said examining the bathroom.

 Angel took his shirt off and turned on the shower. His back was covered in bruises for the fight. His hair was in a long pony tail. He took the ponytail holder off and ran his fingers through his hair.

 “Take a shower with me.” He demanded grabbing my hand.

 “We need to take a bath. That would be better for your body. We need to rest.” He pulled me close to him and took my shirt off. We just stood in the hotel mirror. He looked at me in the mirror as he stood behind me holding me softly.

 “I’m going to get us out of here. We can start a whole new life. I have 50 grand saved up.” He said.

 “50 grand! Baby we can leave now.” I insisted.

 “I can’t because I have so much work I have to get off of me. Papi would have his boys looking for us forever until he found us. After I sell this and flip what I owe him and enough to add on for my own stash, I can leave him alone.” He said hugging me.

 “He’s not gonna let you go that easily and you know that.” I said.

 “Neither is your sister so you need to tell me what you want to do. Are you gonna be down with me or what?” he asked again. I ignored him and gave him a kiss on the chin, and then lips.

 “Let’s just enjoy this moment and we’ll get back to that later.” I said.

 Angel took my pants off and then his own. He turned me around and kissed me. The water kept running in the shower.

 I’ll die for him. I’ll kill for him. Only because I know he’ll do the same for me. So for now I’m just gonna go with my heart and not my gut. Today it’s me and him in this world alone. We’ll deal with this war tomorrow.

 **TO BE CONTINUED………..**