

Seaside Daisies
Excerpts

Excerpt 1

As they ascended the steep hill with tight, serpentine curves, Sole witnessed high canyon walls on both sides of the narrow street, reminding her of the cold metal walls of the ship that had held her imprisoned for five days without fresh air or daylight. Her pulse pounded. She bit her lips.

Professor Truman sounded awful. A demanding man. Just as Sole had anticipated. Mrs. Krause was of the business, Tío's business. Just a bit subtler. She seemed friendly, kind, refined, so deceitfully refined.

Sole thought of Mr. Smith, her last employer, who would eat a fresh pineapple every night after his wife had gone to sleep, leaving trails of juice and the cut-up peel for her to clean up in the middle of the night, or giving her the choice to wait for the morning, to clean up hordes of ants with it, who would sneak in from outside to enjoy the sticky, juicy treat. Sole shivered.

"Are you and the Professor married?"

"No, no," the woman said with a chuckle, moving her head from side to side, her chest bobbing for a second with the sound of her laughter. "He's just—well—he's my companion. I'm his slave, really. He's trained me to give him everything he wants. He's a master of manipulation, but he's also very sweet and cuddly."

Sole clenched her fists again. Her fingers were still icy cold, almost white. Should she try to jump out and run when the car stopped? Back out into the rain when she was hungry, tired, and wet from head to toe?

The drive up the hill seemed never-ending. She felt like a stray dog that had been captured and was taken to the pound to await its uncertain destiny. Trapped. But instead of screaming in anger or running in fear or swearing at her captor, she sat quietly, passively allowing the comforting heater to blow its dry air against her chest.

Excerpt 2

"We will land at Los Angeles International Airport in approximately ten minutes," the pilot announced to the passengers over the intercom. "Please switch off your laptops and other electronic devices. The temperature in LA is currently seventy-six degrees. Local time is 3:15 p.m."

The plane landed smoothly. As a first-class passenger, Tío was one of the first to step off the plane. He walked down the long corridor and took the escalator to the baggage claim area.

He was not fond of airports and pondered whether he should invest in a private jet. Domestically, having a small private plane and pilot had worked to his benefit, but for longer trips he had been taking commercial airlines. *Time for an investment*, he thought as he pulled his black duffel bag off the luggage belt.

He stood in line for the immigration counter for almost thirty minutes, frequently looking at his watch, craving a cigarette. Finally, it was his turn.

He smiled broadly at the dull immigration officer, a woman no less.

“Always nice to come to LA,” he said.

“How long do you intend to stay, sir?”

“Just visiting my daughter for a few days,” he lied. “She’s attending college. US universities are the best!”

The woman handed him his passport. “Enjoy your stay, Mr. Sanchez.” She looked at him sternly from above her reading glasses.

“Thank you, ma’am.”

He would enjoy his trip and return home with his *daughter*. Tío smirked as he signed the papers for his rental car, a boring black sedan. A convertible would have been nice but not on this trip.

This was all business.

Excerpt 3

After one more quick smoke, he took his duffel bag and walked downtown, driven instinctively to the Spanish-speaking part of town. It was Saturday, nine o’clock in the morning. He checked out a couple of stores, a bookstore—certainly something that brainy bitch would have liked. But she was not there. He checked the salespeople and cashiers in a nearby grocery store. He might have to check some restaurants, but first he headed to the local Hispanic bakery.

“Sir, how may I help you?” An old beanstalk of a woman looked at Tío from across the counter.

“Two *panetas* and a coffee.” He wolfed them down at a small table. Rosaura watched him closely.

“You’re a businessman?” she asked.

“Yeah. Beautiful bakery goods,” Tío flattered her. “Those were excellent *panetas*. Just like home.”

Rosaura smiled. “Thank you. We bake them daily.”

“Have you by chance seen my niece?” Tío approached Rosaura. “Came from Honduras all by herself. I want to make sure she’s OK, help her out financially for a while. She’s preparing to go to college.”

He handed Rosaura the small photograph of Maria Elena that he had collected as a backup for her passport before taking her on the ship to Long Beach.

“Yes, yes, I know her,” Rosaura said. “She used to work here but she left for LA.”

“When?”

“Several months ago. She got sick with a cold, and then she took off. She didn’t leave a message.”

Benito walked into the salesroom to add some loaves of newly-baked bread onto the rack. He stared at Tío.

“What?” Tío asked, staring at Benito.

“Nothing,” Benito said. He looked away and turned, then tugged at Rosaura. She looked up at him.

“That’s the guy,” Benito whispered, “the guy from the TV. He shaved his head and his beard.”

Rosaura looked at Tío, her mouth open in surprise, trying to decipher whether this bald-headed businessman with a headband was the wanted man they had seen on TV.

Tío’s eyes narrowed. He stared at Rosaura and Benito, when the door opened, and a young man entered the bakery.