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# THE CAULDRON

The Billionaire Spy Series - Book Five

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
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Smoke and Mirrors

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*Marisol*

**M**arisol Gutierrez was told this would be a simple job—fun, even. She got a makeover and got to wear a beautiful, slinky black sequin dress and black spike heels—and all she had to do was walk around being a hostess for a small party, making sure everyone had a drink, and all the VIPs were happy. Oh, yes, she also had to pick the pocket of the hostess' driver to steal his fancy phone.

She'd worked in her uncle's bar for a couple of summers and knew how to mix all kinds of drinks. Pouring straight whiskey and champagne into pretty crystal glasses would be simple. Pick-pocketing wouldn't be a problem. Marisol wasn't a thief, but she was the daughter of the Great Tamarín and had learned the science of sleight of hand and illusion from the time she could walk on two feet without falling on her ass. Marisol would have been perfect to work the table, if they'd asked. She was great at card tricks, but the people who gave her this offer she couldn't refuse weren't interested in her

amusing skills. They wanted that phone, or they were going to kill her uncle.

The delicate part was this was a small group of gamblers, meeting for high-stakes poker at a fancy hotel in LA. There was every possibility some of their bodyguards would be large and armed. If she slipped up, anything might happen. The people who gave her the job were very clear on the point. And they were right.

She tried not to be nervous. After all, her target wasn't the most intimidating guy in the room, all things considered. He was definitely large, and dark, and brooding, and he was really watching her too closely to be polite, but he wasn't a gorilla, like the other drivers or bodyguards, or whatever, who stood near him, somewhere between the game table and the suite's front door.

This was the other problem. Everyone at the table seemed eager to have her serve them drinks, and some were eager to put their hands on her and pinch her butt—*excuse me?* Some brutes in suits were also happy to have them circle around to offer them beverages. But her brooding target—*Why did he have to be so hot? Geez, those bright honey eyes. He was like a wolf.*—had turned down an offer of water or anything with a stern 'no' and a look that said, 'little girl don't come asking for trouble because you'll find it'. She needed a pretext to get close enough to reach his left inside jacket pocket, where she was told he stored the phone, but he seemed to be intentionally keeping her at a distance.

Time was running out—for the players, for her uncle, and for her. After all, Marisol was not stupid. She knew the people who had her uncle would happily kill her too if she didn't come through with the goods.

The woman who ran the game, Dolores Lackey, had reluctantly agreed to hire Marisol, because Marisol looked younger without makeup than she actually was, and it was a last-

minute hire. Dolores was also watching Marisol too closely, still obviously concerned Marisol might mess something up at any minute.

Marisol needed smoke and mirrors. A big ‘poof’ that would confuse and draw everyone’s attention on something else, and leave her target momentarily disoriented so she could approach him and—just briefly—slip her hand into his jacket, take the phone and slip it into her bra. That was the only place she could hide it because the dress they had given her to wear had no pockets and they locked her purse with the other staff’s handbags in the suite's bedroom.

Then Marisol had to figure out how to leave in a rush—without her purse, unfortunately—and get out before the devastatingly gorgeous and deadly serious man she was about to steal from realized she had taken his phone.

God, he was so hot, all hard edges, like a dark knight in an impeccably fitted navy suit. Why couldn’t the phone have belonged to the big dumbbell who kept giving her those leering looks and twisted smiles? She could have flirted with him for half a minute and got his phone, his wallet and his Rolex knock-off watch, before he knew what was what.

Smoke and mirrors. That’s what she needed. Sometimes that was figurative, but this time it had to be literal. She got her chance while clearing the ashtray from the table. When you booked a suite for one of exclusive games, apparently, the no-smoking laws were flexible.

One of the Cuban cigars that a player had left on the ashtray was still going strong, burning with a bright hot cherry, but it was close to the butt. Its owner distracted, holding a pathetically bad hand that would cost him over \$20,000. There were other cigarette butts in there, some crushed, others just smoldering away. Marisol brought a fresh crystal ashtray and took the full one away. She dropped the contents into the metal trash receptacle behind the mirrored bar which

already contained some paper napkins. She tossed in a couple of other napkins for good measure and fanned the flames with her palm while she thought no one was looking. It still took a while for the fire to catch, which was good. It helped her move on with her work, position herself closer to where she needed to be, while keeping a discrete eye out for her smoke signal in the mirror.

The room's smoke alarm noticed before anyone else did, setting off a horrible screeching that threw everyone off their game and caused just the commotion she needed. The only one who didn't seem to lose his cool was her target, so she pretended to lose hers, and made a run for the door, screaming and bumping into him—accidentally on purpose—in hysterics. She had very little time to wrestle with his suit and slip the phone out of its pocket. Trying to palm it was hard because it wasn't exactly small, but she tried to keep his attention on her eyes. This was actually quite easy because he seemed to search for something in her eyes too. Just as she was about to slip the phone down her dress, he grabbed her wrist—*really, really, really* hard—and took his phone back. He growled, “¿*Que carajo crees que haces, nena?*”—what the fuck do you think you're doing, little girl—which had her shaking. For real this time. And boy, did the reprimand sound sexy coming from his mouth—was he Spanish? There was no time to ask.

He pulled her out of the room—his right arm wrapped around her like a vice and his left hand covering her mouth, muffling her screams—all the way down the hall to the fire exit stairwell. Then, he threw her over his shoulder like a firefighter rescuing an uncooperative fire victim, and slapped her butt hard twice as he rushed down the stairs, telling her to be quiet. When she continued to scream, he stopped at a landing and put her down, his hands grabbing her upper arms hard enough to leave impressions on her flesh, he brought his face to hers and said, “If you don't shut up, I will kill you.”

He seemed to mean that literally, and seriously, but she figured it was better to fight back than let it happen.

“Let me go!” She kicked him in the shins with the hard pointy toes of her stilettos. “I haven’t done anything!”

“*Joder!*” he shouted in a deep voice, which was vulgar, but not as rude as what he did next, which was to bend her over his raised knee on the steps and lift her little slinky dress over her hips. With her hands locked against her back—that hard grip of his not giving an inch—he swatted her butt and thighs about a dozen times, her black lace panties offering very little cover, until she was crying and screaming.

“You don’t understand! They’ll kill him and kill me! Let me go!”

“Who?” he boomed, stopping the assault on her butt for a moment, his question echoing in the stairwell.

“I can’t tell you!” Marisol wept. “Then they’ll definitely kill us.”

He put her dress back down, muttered some really interesting obscenities in Spanish that Marisol hardly ever heard these days, and draped her back over his shoulder, where she hung blubbering all the way down the stairs.

When they got to the back parking lot, she started screaming again. He put her back down only long enough to put his hand around her mouth to silence her and trap her in the vice of his arm against his hard chest, using more flowery and downright nasty Spanish as she kicked against him. Then the trunk of a black car, which had been waiting for him, opened automatically and he dropped her in and shut it without warning or so much as an apologetic look. In fact, he seemed thrilled to be locking her away in the dark. Asshole.

*Angel*

“So, we’re just kidnapping women now, is that it?” Rick Curtis asked Angel Fleming as he drove away from the Ritz hotel downtown, trying not to raise the attention of any cops while making sure they got the hell away from there quickly.

“We’re not kidnapping her,” Angel said, his shins still stinging. That little girl had some strength in her calves, and those shoes had to come off straight away. “We’re just taking her some place quiet for a chat.”

“What kind of chat?” Rick asked, clearly liking this situation less with each passing minute. Angel wanted to say he didn’t like it either, but there was no point because he intended to do it. Rick had a code about not interrogating women, which Angel totally respected but which was a little inconvenient. Angel’s one code was don’t fuck with me. She’d already violated that.

“The persuasive kind,” Angel said.

“I’m out,” Rick said, which Angel had expected.

“I don’t need you for this,” Angel said. “She’s feisty but not that big, and I don’t think she’ll need much persuading. She needs help and I just need her to see that we’re her best option out of trouble.”

“I can’t believe out of all the threats in that room, of all the twisted people in there, this one little tootsie roll was the one we had to worry about,” Rick said. “I mean, I assume you didn’t just pull her out of there for fun, right? She’s not your unwilling date for later, right? *She* was the threat Dolores worried about? *That* little thing?”

“Well, Dolores didn’t exactly have the specifics down correctly,” Angel said. “The threat wasn’t to her at all. They sent that wildcat after *me*.”

“What? How? *Why*?” Rick asked. Those were three excellent questions. Angel wanted the answers too, but he didn’t get



to speculate because almost immediately the lid on the back trunk sprung open and the girl jumped out of the slowly moving vehicle right into traffic. “*Fuck!*” Rick hit the brakes.

“Shit, the escape latch,” Angel shook his head and opened the door, running after the girl who was running right into traffic on the Santa Monica Freeway, trying to flag down a car, still wearing those damned shoes which didn’t seem to slow her down in the least. He had to admire her persistence and her sharp sense of self-preservation, except she was likely to get run over any minute wearing all black.

Fuck, how did this all happen? Why did she want to steal his phone? While the mean-heeled pixie was fast, she wasn’t fast enough to get away. Other drivers were in no hurry on a Saturday night to get entangled in what might look like a lover’s spat more than a kidnapping. People made certain assumptions, often wrong.

He grabbed her again, this time dropping her in the back seat where there were proper children’s locks, and getting in with her. She’d screeched, kicked and scratched all the way there, and also once she was in the seat, until he bound her hands securely to the overhead door handle with his tie, fighting through her kicks and screams. He finally took off those deadly shoes, which were really tight—half a size too small, at least. Then he bound her ankles with his hand, while he removed his belt to make a loop around them. Finally, he stuffed his handkerchief in her mouth. It only muffled her sounds long enough for her to spit it out and start screaming again.

Angel was feeling a little out of control at this point. “*¡Callate!*” he shouted. “*¡Escucha!*”

Her screams stopped for a moment and she looked at him with those enormous eyes, like a frightened doe. He bit his cheek to keep himself from losing focus. Rick muttered something under his breath that Angel was glad not to make out.

The last thing he needed right now was a righteously angry Rick interfering. Angel was angry enough for both of them.

“Listen to me carefully,” Angel said to her, speaking barely above a whisper. “You are going to behave. We are taking you somewhere safe. You will tell me who wants to kill you. We will fix this.”

“You can’t!” she shouted. “Besides, you said *you* wanted to kill me!”

“Do *not* raise your voice at me again!” Angel boomed, then immediately switched back to his softer tone. “Do you understand? Or I will tape your mouth shut with duct tape. You’ve got some, right?” The last question was for Rick, who opened the central storage compartment between the two front seats, took out a roll of tape and tossed it back at Angel hard enough to hit his head. The girl laughed. Great.

“What’s your name?” Angel asked her.

“None of your business,” she said.

“We’re starting off badly,” Angel said. “I want to assure you that if you take me on, you will regret it. I asked you a simple question that deserves an answer.”

“What is *your* name?” she asked.

“I asked first,” Angel replied.

“My name is *tu puta madre*,” she said.

Angel slapped her butt, not too hard, but hard enough to make a point. Nobody, male or female, disrespected his mother. She started crying again. “*¿Eres un desgraciado, hijo de puta!*” He slapped her butt again, this time hard enough to ensure the message stuck. “Stop spanking me!” she whined.

“*Nadie le falta el respeto a mi madre*,” he said, bringing his nose right up to hers, as he growled a warning not to disrespect his mother. “*¿Entiendes, zorrита? Si no te portas bien, te voy a zurrar con mi cinturón y te voy a dejar el culo en carne viva.*” Angel had every intention of taking his belt to the brat as he promised. In fact, at this point it would be delightful.

## The Cauldron

“*¡Eres un bestia!*” she spat, trying to kick against him again, though he held her legs fast. “A monster!”

“Now you’ve got it,” Angel said, smiling. “That is *exactly* what I am. I am a beast. I am a monster.”

“And he eats little girls like you for dinner,” Rick said, trying to be helpful. “I’m sure he’ll make a quick meal of your skinny ass.”

Rick was a big guy, with a voice that bounced off the bottom of the ocean and a strong West Indian accent. Apparently, that was what Angel’s stern voice was lacking. As soon as the girl heard Rick, she went completely quiet and just started weeping silent tears all the way back to their main compound—Angel’s family home, high on a remote road in Beverly Hills. By the time they got there, Angel had bitten his cheek so hard he was swallowing his own blood.

And his Saturday night was just getting started.