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The Cartel

A.K. Alexander

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What began as an innocent love affair for one young woman, Marta Peña, in Costa Careyes, Mexico in 1969, sets in motion a series of events that spans the next thirty years. This is the story of South American drug lords Antonio Espinoza and Javier Rodriguez, and their violent quest for power. In a sweeping family saga, we meet the women who love them and the children they vow to protect at any cost. With a complex web of interconnected families, this gritty novel delves into the lives of a power hungry clan, following the rise of their business, the destructive path of their torrid and erotic love affairs, and the struggle to balance intense greed with devout family loyalty. Strong women face tragedies that test their will and their commitment to the men they passionately desire. As young girls grow into women, their traumatic pasts will drive their actions and force them to make gut-wrenching decisions. With murder, drug trafficking, dirty politics, illegal gambling, prostitution, obsessive love affairs, and family strife, The Cartel is a whirlwind in the vein of Mario Puzo's The Godfather. Excerpt from Chapter One: BOOK I 1969-1976 Calí, Colombia CHAPTER ONE EMILIO ESPINOZA TRACED THE SCARS ACROSS the undersides of his wrists, now white with time, but still visible. Not like the ones that remained on his heart. Moving to the ornate wooden armoire, he picked up a framed photograph of his brother Antonio and his lovely young wife Lydia. He stared at his brother’s face, his eyes becoming slits of hatred. He closed them, and threw the picture across the room, smashing the frame against the wall, his hands balling into fists as his vision clouded with tears. Glass shattered into small splinters across the adobe-tiled floor. Pulling the photograph from between the shards of glass, filled with rage and despair, Emilio ripped it into pieces. Antonio was the reason the scars upon his heart never faded. What a fool his brother was! Antonio had no idea of his brother’s true feelings toward him and Emilio planned to keep it that way—for now. But when he struck, Antonio would know. He would feel nothing but pain; the kind Emilio felt everyday of his life. Emilio’s plans were long term. They had to be. He knew the desired effect might not come to fruition for years, perhaps even a decade. But he had plans and they had been brewing for nearly five years, since he was merely a boy of fifteen. He had been patient for this long. He would be patient for as long as it took. He remembered that day five years ago so very clearly. **** EMILIO CAME HOME EARLY FROM SCHOOL, DITCHING BECAUSE he hadn’t studied for a test. He did not want Antonio to find out that he’d left school early, so he crept quietly up the outside back steps to the guesthouse, which was several yards away from the main quarters, a place where he knew he could hide out until the appropriate time. He smelled the candles first. He smiled, knowing he was about to get a show from his Don Juan of a brother and some beautiful young thing. Antonio was known to bring women to the guesthouse and light a few rose scented candles, put on some soft music, and then, having set the mood, complete his conquest. Emilio crawled along the balcony of the small villa, carefully rising up to peek into the window. The music playing--soft, low, romantic--the woman’s back toward him. Antonio held her close, stroking her long black hair, whispering something in her ear. That hair, the lithe body. A shiver of delight slithered through Emilio as he watched in awe. Antonio placed his hands on the woman’s shoulders and easily slipped off her dress, letting it fall to the ground. Emilio closed his eyes, ashamed to be watching. But curiosity and raging hormones opened them. The woman stood completely naked. Antonio swept her up and carried her to the bed and laid her down on the red sateen comforter. Emilio felt the first painful tug on his heart when he saw her face.

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