

PROLOGUE

Soft light falls on my naked body. My mouth tastes of mint, and I hear my own shallow breathing. The woody scent of perfume seems familiar to me, but I can't quite place it. Images loom before my eyes. I see Joseph snatch a bottle of wine off the table and throw it against the wall. I feel his warm breath on my face and hear him yell that he's going to kill me.

I grope around and feel cold, smooth tiles beneath me, but I still have no idea where I am. There's a distant ringing in my ears. A sharp pain cuts through my head like a knife through butter. I groan, and my hand trembles as it tries to find the cause of the pain. My hair is wet and sticky. In the twilight I stare at my red-stained fingers. It takes a moment before I realize it's blood. A paralyzing wave of fear comes over me. Has Pepito, the assassin, found me? Has he left me lying here, assuming I'm dead? I turn onto my side and try to get up. I have to call for help . . .