

## **Prologue     A year earlier in the Algarve, Portugal**

A long ray of sunshine comes through the dirty glass and she sees dust particles dancing. The length of the beam tells her it's the end of the day and she feels her throat tighten. This is the fourth day she has been tied to the narrow bed. If the man follows his routine, he can come in any second and start to touch her again.

She tries to distract herself by following a spider making a web on one of the cracked windows, but then feels a draught, immediately followed by the sound of footsteps. He's there.

She hears him coming closer and involuntarily she cringes as the old, squeaky door is pushed open with force and he steps into the small space where she lies. She wants to say something, but prior to he'd left the day before, he put tape over her mouth again because she tried to scream. The tape is so brutally stuck over her mouth that every time she moves her head, a tuft of hair that got caught underneath, painfully tugs at her scalp. Tears burn in her eyes and she sniffs.

'Relax, Teresa, you're upsetting yourself.'

The man reaches out to stroke her hair and desperately she tries to avoid his touch.

'You're exactly like Estrela when she was the same age,' he continues.

'She was just as beautiful and young when I first kissed her.'

She feels his lips touching her forehead and she freezes, her eyes flashing in panic in all directions.

'If you promise not to shout this time, I'll take the tape away. Do you promise me?'

He gives her a hard look and she nods, sobbing.

'Be good, otherwise I'll stick it on again.'

With a quick jerk he pulls the tape from her mouth and she lets out a yelp of pain.

'Shhhhh,' she feels him press his lips against hers and then he gently strokes her over her long hair. She writhes wildly trying to get away

from him, even though she knows he's way too strong for her, but she can't resist trying.

'Shhhh,' he soothes, loosening the buttons of her white lace blouse with one hand, which is now stained.

'You are so beautiful, so innocent.'

He pushes the delicate fabric aside to reveal her tiny breasts in her first bra and leans back to get a closer look. She is lying on her back on a narrow bed, her hands tied behind her back and her feet together. Her long dark hair, which Mother always loves to brush, is tangled and lies in tousled curls over the pillow. At barely twelve years old, she is just turning from an innocent girl into an adolescent. Her body is getting its first curves, but she is barely aware of it. Boys are nothing more than playmates.

'The first time I saw Estrela, she was your age,' he whispers, sitting on his knees next to the bed and looking at her closely. His right-hand caresses her white skin and she shivers with fear, disgust and cold.

'I was her first, just like I am your first.'

She feels his lips sliding down her jaw and a kind of spasm goes through her body the moment she realizes what he means. This time it won't stop with a few kisses and some caressing, she realizes. Despite her bound hands and feet, she tries to move away from him again, but he needs only one hand to stop her.

'Don't do that, honey, I'll get angry.'

His voice is soft, but the look in his eyes warns her not to resist any longer and she stops with a choked sob.

'You'll like it, I'm sure,' he promises her, pushing up her pink skirt so he can see the plain white panties she's wearing underneath.

She sees sweat on his forehead when he looks at her and feels her heart racing so fast that she fears it will explode. She remembers climbing over the fence of the neighbour's pasture with her youngest brother without knowing that he had put his bull with the cows that morning and when that huge animal suddenly came up to them, there was nothing she could do but lift her brother and run back to the gate.

Even then she had felt that her heart would burst out of her chest, but the fear she now feels is many times greater.

‘Yes, that’s fine.’

She feels his warm lips on hers and she swallows hard as he very gently pushes the tip of his tongue between her lips. When his tongue penetrates deeper, she groans in fear, squinting her eyes so as not to have to see him. She hears the sound of a buckle loosening, a pair of trousers falling to the floor, and a moment later she feels his heavy, warm body coming down on top of hers.

She lets out a dreadful cry, which only subsides when his hands close around her neck and she feels him begin to squeeze.

‘You said you wouldn’t scream!’

He hisses furiously and as black spots appear before her eyes, she desperately tries to conjure up her mother’s face.

The last thing she hears before sinking into deep darkness is an almost animal growl, the bull has got her.