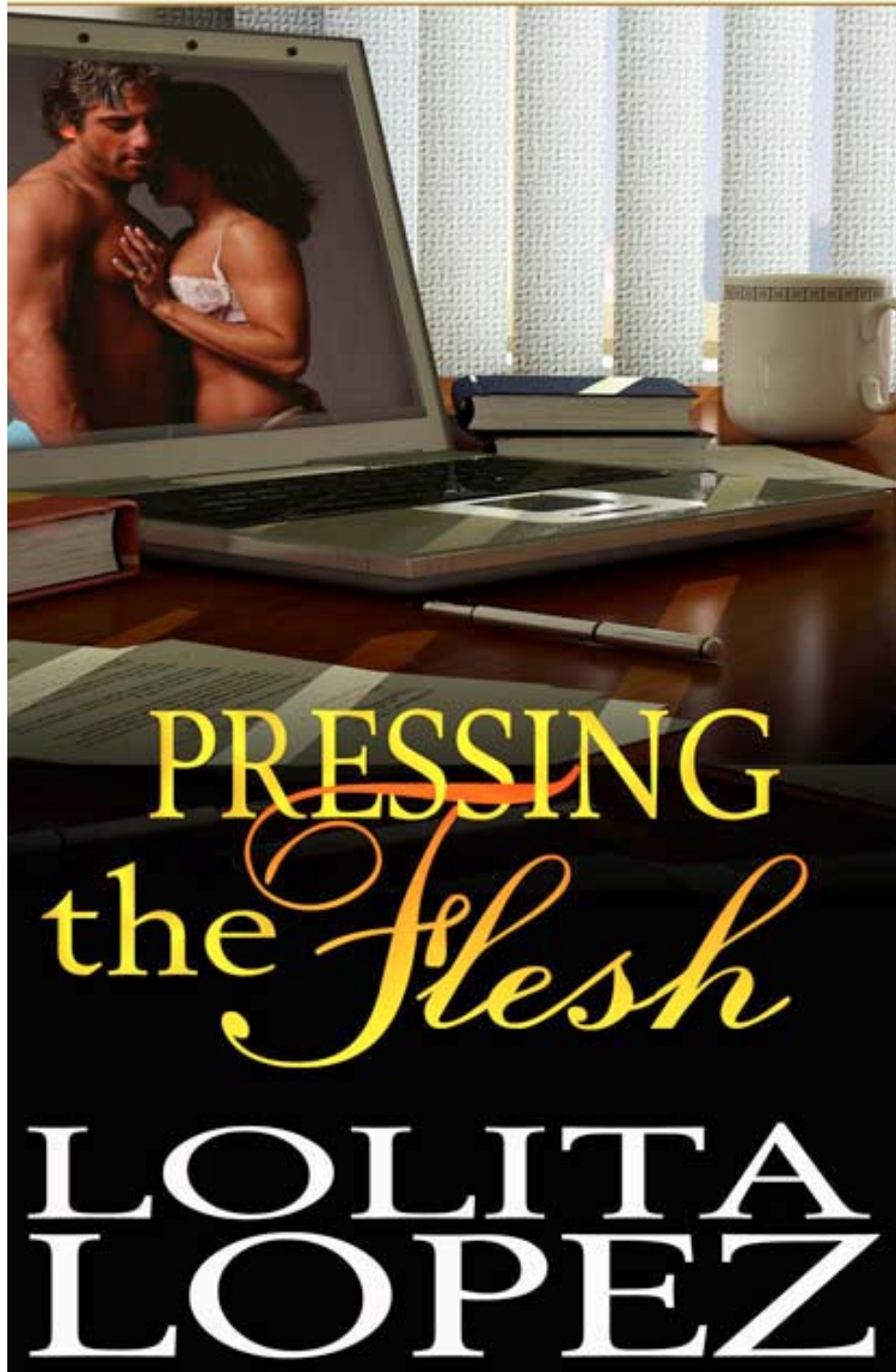


ELLORA'S CAVE *Sophisticate*



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Pressing the Flesh

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PRESSING THE FLESH

Lolita Lopez

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Chapter One

He couldn't take his eyes off her. Those dark curls, that mischievous smile, those hazel eyes—he was enthralled.

Luz Hernandez, the current object of his obsession, held court in a corner booth of the hole-in-the-wall cantina situated far away from the touristy section of Mazatlan, Mexico. Surrounded by her three closest friends, Luz chattered animatedly, waving her arms as she told what appeared to be quite a story. By the time Luz finished her tale, she seemed to be struggling not to collapse into a giggling fit. Her friends erupted into raucous, high-pitched laughter that overpowered the modest sound system servicing the rundown bar with tinny renditions of popular music of the American seventies.

Glancing around, Heath noticed the gazes of the bar's patrons were focused on Luz's smiling face. How could they possibly look elsewhere? Charisma—it radiated from her in powerful waves. She was legendary in D.C. for her ability to walk into a room of the most powerful movers and shakers and instantly capture control. Where most politicians paid outrageous fees for PR firms to help them develop that warm and fuzzy public persona, Luz had the distinct of advantage of being born with that oh-so-coveted *je ne sais quoi*.

Her renowned "it" factor had been the draw that spurred him to book a flight to San Antonio in late February to watch her in action. He'd known of her before then, of course. It was his job. Even so, he'd never had the slightest inclination toward interviewing the junior Democratic senator for the state of Texas.

But when the small staff of contributing bloggers to his netroots-inspired political blog began bribing and haggling with one another for the chance to cover the final push of her reelection campaign for the Texas primary, his interest had been piqued. Although she was being challenged by a fellow democrat, she had been polling near

eighty-nine percent. There was no question that she was going to secure her spot as the democratic candidate for the senate and—barring any major scandal or fuck up—she would triumph over her republican opponent in November.

So just what was so special about Luz and her campaign machine that had his staff in a tizzy?

From the moment she took the podium on that unseasonably warm February morning, he'd understood implicitly. Quite simply, she was captivating. She easily engaged the crowd with her passionate speech, her words fluid and seemingly unrehearsed. During the obligatory Q&A session that followed, Luz had given no bullshit answers to questions that most in her position would have dodged. That unfailing integrity added to her charm. It was little wonder that she was considered a rising star in the Democratic Party. There was no doubt that she would accomplish more than any Latino politician ever had.

While the crowd had rushed forward to shake her hand and exchange a few words, Heath had faded into the background, content to watch her interaction from afar. By slow degrees he'd stopped watching her as a politician and had begun observing her as simply a woman. She possessed an almost wild earthen quality to her beauty that had knocked the air right out of his lungs, made his stomach roll with heat.

In that instant, he'd suddenly been struck by the fact that in all his years of dating he'd never been so attracted to an older woman. Granted, he'd had his share of cougar fantasies while in high school and college and had salivated over the MILFs who crossed his path, but something about his attraction to Luz felt different. Make no mistake, he desperately wanted to fuck Luz—but he also wanted so much more, things he couldn't even verbalize or process into coherent thoughts.

Over the last five months, he'd closely followed her campaign efforts but had made certain to stick to facts within his articles, refusing to allow his opinions to infiltrate his work. He'd also studied her biography, learning everything he could about her education, her early career as a lawyer, her reluctant entrance into politics and her

stances on all things political, from the war to women's rights and a whole host of social issues.

He'd familiarized himself with her inner circle, among them the three childhood friends who had accompanied her on vacation—Raquel, a high school science teacher and divorcee with three kids; Katie, a married ICU nurse; and Hilda, Luz's Communications Director. The trio formed Luz's supportive foundation. Insiders had informed him that when faced with difficult decisions, she often bounced her options off her friends, trusting their opinions above all those rather politically warped minds in D.C.

But armed with all of this information, Heath had realized that he still didn't really know anything about Luz, about the woman behind the political machine. What was her favorite ice cream flavor? Did she prefer chick flicks to dramas? Was she a dog or cat person or did she prefer exotic birds and fish? Did she believe in love at first sight, or had all those years in D.C. turned her into a cynic? These were all questions that no press release would ever answer.

Realizing he was treading dangerously close to the edge of obsession, Heath had finally decided that he needed to get out of the office and escape to a beach to clear his mind and refocus on his job. National political conventions started in just over four weeks, and he needed to be on his A-game. His blog, *BeltwayBlitz.net*, was *the* place for trusted political news and lively yet balanced commentary. He had a reputation to uphold and he'd be damned if a pipe dream of an infatuation was going to ruin everything he'd built.

Stealing away to Mexico had seemed the perfect solution to escaping the stress of an election season coupled with unrequited lust.

Unfortunately, it appeared Luz and her cohorts had shared his opinion.

Imagine Heath's surprise when he'd glanced up from his morning paper to see Luz striding across the lobby of his hotel, a sheer turquoise sarong stretched across her luscious hips and a white halter top cupping her full breasts. It had taken every ounce

of self-control not to spray his paper with orange juice. What were the odds of Luz staying in the same hotel during the same week of his vacation? He figured they had to be astronomical. Surely this was fate?

He'd spent the rest of the day holed up in his room, debating his various options. He knew that his position as the owner and sometime reporter-commentator of a highly regarded political blog and her position as a senator meant that, strictly speaking, it was a no-go. Conflict of interest was an almost certainty and that was the kind of negative publicity that wouldn't do either of them any good.

And yet he couldn't get her out of his mind. She was here, just out of his reach but closer than ever before — if he dared.

As he'd paced his hotel room, it became easier and easier to convince himself that it just might work. Firstly, he operated his blog under a pseudonym, The Bull Whip, and when he conducted interviews of politicians they were always done via email or phone. There was no way Luz or Hilda would know that he was the invisible hand behind BeltwayBlitz.net, especially since he'd never interviewed either.

Secondly, they were in Mexico, far away from the political-beat journalists who would have pounced on a story like this. They were insulated from discovery by thousands of miles of foreign soil.

In the end, he'd decided that he simply couldn't withstand her allure. This could very well be his only chance. At the same time, it could be a huge mistake. It was a classic "damned if you do, damned if you don't" moment.

Fuck all, he'd decided. He was going after her.

So here he sat, watching and waiting for his chance to strike. He'd assumed there would be ample opportunities, but although he'd been trailing the foursome for three hours, no such window had presented itself. She was constantly surrounded by her friends. Bluntly, he was effectively cockblocked.

He watched as Luz used a folded neon-orange flyer to fan her face and neck. As the cantina lacked air conditioning, a heavy, damp heat saturated the interior and only the

occasional wisps of ocean breeze offered any reprieve. He could see the soft sheen of sweat on her collarbone. His fingers ached to brush away the chestnut waves skimming her shoulders, to bare the silky brown neck that he was dying to nibble and taste. Would she gasp with surprise or moan with pleasure at the sensation of his teeth gently scraping her flesh?

Consumed by the need to know, he grasped his glass of tequila *reserva* and knocked back the contents. He hissed and ran his tongue against his teeth, licking away the aged liquor clinging to them. Emboldened by liquid courage, he rose and crossed the bar, edging the handful of couples swaying on the dance floor.

When he reached the corner booth, he waited for the women to stop talking. He could feel their curious gazes boring into his skin and suddenly, a fleeting sensation of panic coursed through his belly.

Don't. Fuck. This. Up.

He caught Luz's gaze and addressed her directly. "Would you like to dance?"

She seemed taken aback by his question. "Me?"

"Yes. You." Short responses seemed best, less of a chance for him to say something stupid. He waited nervously, anticipating the worst.

"All right," she said finally, motioning for Hilda to scoot off the bench.

Heath managed to quash the goofy smile that threatened to overtake his face. Luz's friends, however, didn't seem to possess the same motor control. Their eyebrows were nearly touching their hairlines, their jaws slack with shock. Luz, on the other hand, was the picture of calm. She paused just long enough to rearrange the wrinkled tiers of her hot-pink skirt and the bottom of her white camisole before taking his outstretched hand.

When her skin contacted his, he felt white-hot heat jolt through his hand and up his arm. All those months of imagining how this moment would feel hadn't even compared to the real thing. Squeezing his hand, she smiled at him and the bottom dropped out of his stomach.

Oh God, I'm done for...

Trying his best not to make a fool of himself, he led her out to the dance floor. The first verse of “Best of My Love” was ending as they found a spot and smoothly assumed a slow-dance position, one of his hands resting on the gentle curve of her waist and the other clasping her right hand. Their movements were surprisingly fluid for a couple who had only just met.

“I’m Luz,” she said, staring up at him.

“Heath,” he replied, gazing down into her face. Her publicity photos didn’t do her justice, especially those glossy, plump lips.

“Vacation or an ex-pat?”

“Vacation. You?” He played dumb.

“Vacation.”

He silently prayed that she wouldn’t ask him about his job. Lying by omission was one thing, but he’d never answer a direct question with a lie. Amazingly, she didn’t continue her questions. He supposed it was easier that way. It must be terribly tedious to choose romantic partners based on occupations that wouldn’t clash with hers.

As they danced, Luz relaxed in his arms, and soon her cheek rested against his chest. His chin was just centimeters from her hair and the delicious scents of caramel and chocolate filled his nose. Very slowly, his hand slid around to the small of her back and his fingers drew lazy circles there. She shifted in his arms, pressing her breasts against him. He could feel the hardened peaks graze his chest and his heart raced accordingly. With her ear against him, there was no doubt she noticed his reaction.

If only they were dancing someplace private... Heath envisioned hoisting her by the backs of her thighs, backing her up against the nearest wall and mercilessly pounding into her. Or maybe he’d go a gentler route and carry her to the closest table and ravish her that way.

Feeling the fluttering of an erection, he abandoned more lusty thoughts and concentrated on Luz, the warmth of her body penetrating his shirt, the soft swish of her skirt against his jeans, the intoxicating smell of her hair. This contact was what he’d

been craving for months—and he was determined to enjoy it for the remaining moments of the song.

As the Eagles faded and Fleetwood Mac grew louder, Heath reluctantly released Luz. She showed the same reluctance and slowly dropped her hands, allowing her fingertips to trail his arm and torso. Their eyes met, blue against hazel, and there was something there, a quicksilver flash of desire that Heath instantly recognized. Gathering his courage, he started to ask her for another dance, a drink, a quickie in the bathroom—but he was thwarted by the cockblockettes.

“Luz!” Raquel called and motioned for her friend to rejoin them. “We’re leaving. Hilda’s outside grabbing a cab.”

Luz nodded at her friends before turning back to Heath. “Thanks for the dance.”

“Pleasure was mine,” he replied, willing her to stay, but she was already backing away from him.

“Goodnight, Heath.”

“Goodnight, Luz,” he said, trying to mask the utter disappointment in his voice.

So that was it. One dance, a few teasing moments...and then she was gone.

Chapter Two

Isolated in the bathroom of her hotel room, Luz leaned back against the cold door and closed her eyes. Tension tightened her body, coiled in her stomach and made her feel anxious and uncertain. What the hell had happened on that dance floor?

Although she'd caught him staring intently in their direction, Luz had been surprised by Heath's invitation to dance. Evenings out always resulted in a deluge of lustful glances thrown her way, but rarely did they materialize in action. Of course, her normal stomping grounds included D.C. and San Antonio, both cities where she was well known as a power player and thus avoided by men looking to get lucky. In her experience, it seemed the dating pool for women of her stature was shockingly small. What that said about men she wasn't quite sure, but whatever it was, it definitely wasn't promising.

But Heath... He seemed different. It must have taken quite a bit of courage to approach an unknown woman surrounded by her friends, knowing the odds of being shot down were high. While succinct, he'd struck her as incredibly relaxed and humble, a far cry from the cocky blowhards she normally dated. That he looked at least ten years her junior had intrigued her. What in the world did a man like that see in her?

She walked to the bathroom counter and leaned over the navy blue tiles to study her reflection. Fingertips danced across faint lines extending from the corners of her eyes and mouth. They were hardly noticeable to anyone but herself but that didn't keep her from obsessing over them. She spent an absolute fortune on expensive facial regimens and slathered sunscreen on her body daily. A few months earlier, she'd seriously considered Botox. But in the end, her absolute fear of needles, no matter how thin and small, had triumphed over her vanity.

Straightening, Luz tilted her head and carefully regarded her figure. She cupped her breasts through her camisole, gauging their fullness and weight. Certainly they'd started that southward drift that every woman dreads but that was nothing a supporting bra and perky attitude couldn't fix. Raquel was forever grouching that Luz had nothing to complain about in the saggy breast department since she'd never been pregnant or nursed. Luz, on the other hand, always replied that Raquel's deflated breasts were a side effect she would gladly accept for the chance to be a mother.

Luz released her breasts, allowing the built-in bra of her camisole to resume its support. Her flattened palms rode down the smooth expanse of her torso, outlined her hips and slid across the lower belly. For a woman just weeks shy of forty-one, Luz conceded that she looked damn fine. That she'd managed to maintain her figure and natural beauty without surgical aid made the accomplishment all that much sweeter. Did she enjoy sweating in the gym or denying herself the carbs and fat she often craved? No, but the results were well worth it.

But was she really hot enough to tempt a man in his early thirties? To tempt a man like Heath?

At least a few inches over six feet, Heath possessed a rock-solid build, casually unkempt black hair, gleaming blue eyes and a strong jaw. Held tight against his chest, she'd encountered the waves of heat pulsing from his body, had allowed them to relax her early skittishness over dancing with a stranger. She'd heard his racing heartbeat when she'd purposely rubbed her breasts against him. Knowing that she had that affect was unbelievably empowering. And when he'd gazed down at her as their dance ended, the smoldering intensity in his eyes made it seem as if he wanted to devour her right there in the middle of the bar.

God, he was the epitome of lust-inducing, lower-lip-biting, throw-me-on-the-bed-and-fuck-me-right-now sexiness—and she'd blown her chance by letting her friends dictate her moves.

Why didn't I stay?

Fear, she realized. Fear that he would reject her, fear that he was just playing games. The possibility that he was serious, that he really wanted her as badly as she now craved him, would remain forever unknown because she'd chickened out and used her friends as an excuse to escape an uncertain situation.

Depressed by the thought of missing out on what could have been the ultimate one-night stand of her life, Luz left the bathroom. Hilda was nowhere to be seen, but the door connecting their room to Raquel and Katie's had been propped open with a suitcase. She could hear them giggling like a bunch of teenagers on a sleepover and rolled her eyes. Any other time she would have been glad to join them, but not tonight.

Bending down, she jerked open the mini-fridge they'd stocked upon arrival and frowned when she noticed the last bottle of green tea was gone. In its place sat a five dollar bill, no doubt from one of Katie's stealth raids. Luz closed the fridge and grabbed her purse.

"I'm going to run down to the snack machines," she said, poking her head into the room next door. "We're running low on the good stuff. Do you ladies want anything?"

They were all set for the night.

"I'm taking my phone. Call me if you change your minds."

Luz made sure the door locked behind her before hiking her purse onto her shoulder and making her way down the hall to the elevator bank. The elevator doors opened as soon as she hit the down button and she stepped inside the empty box. A quick, uninterrupted ride ensued, and she stepped into a largely abandoned lobby.

Staffers manning the desk waved to her as she made her way across the lobby toward the room of snack and beverage machines. She rifled through her purse as she walked, pulling out her crispest bills. Some might have found it odd that snack machines in a Mexican resort accepted U.S. currency, but she figured it was rather practical. How many tourists had been hit with a case of late-night munchies, only to realize they were out of local currency? Quite a few, she imagined.

Luz approached the first beverage machine and fed her dollar into the slot. The machine whirred as it sucked the bill in—then clicked and spit the dollar back out at her. Sighing, she yanked the dollar from the slot, examined it, and found absolutely nothing wrong. There were no creases or folded corners, and she was positive she'd fed it into the machine with the right side facing upward. Rather than waste time with the same bill, she switched to another one and fed it into the slot.

When it spit out her second dollar, Luz felt frustration creep through her chest. There was absolutely nothing as maddening as the money slots on these stupid machines!

The rejected bills coiled in her left hand, Luz held the remaining bill in her right and slowly fed it into the slot. Amid the whirs and clicks, she watched as the bill disappeared into the machine. She held her breath, certain it had passed muster—and then, unbelievably, the machine clicked and shot it back into her face.

Growling, she snatched the bill and began berating the machine. “*Chinga!* You stupid piece of crap! I should—”

“Let me help you,” a rumbling baritone interjected.

Startled, Luz glanced over her right shoulder and found Heath leaning against the doorframe, an amused smile tugging the corners of his mouth. He extended his hand and wiggled his fingers. She placed the now-crumpled bill on his palm and stepped aside. Wordlessly, he grabbed the bill by the ends and slid it back and forth against the corner of the machine until it met his standards. Without hesitation, he fed it into the slot and, miraculously, the machine accepted it.

He shot a mischievous grin at her. “There you go.”

“Thanks,” she dryly replied and punched the button for green tea. As the bottle knocked around inside the machine she waved the other bills. “Since you seem to have the golden touch...”

He laughed and took them from her. When she had her three bottles of green tea, he forked over a dollar of his own and selected a bottle of orange soda. She found that

slightly amusing considering his age but said nothing. A hiss echoed in the room as he spun the plastic cap on his soda before taking a drink.

“So,” he said, shoulders against the beverage machine.

“So,” she returned, eyebrows lifted expectantly. When he said nothing else, she felt compelled to speak. “I suppose it’s obvious that you’re staying in this hotel.” He nodded and she continued. “It’s obvious that I’m staying here too.” Again he nodded and sipped his soda. “So the question remains—were you following me earlier this evening?”

He gazed at her for a few seconds before answering. “Yes.”

“Why?”

“Are you serious?”

“Absolutely.”

“Luz, you’re fucking beautiful. When I saw you walking across the lobby this morning, I couldn’t take my eyes off you. I’d be an idiot to pass up the chance to meet a woman like you.”

She gulped, surprised by his frank reply. Well, that answered her earlier question about her ability to tempt him. But what the hell did she do now? She’d never been in a situation like this.

“Look,” he said, running his fingers through his hair. “I’m not good at playing all these flirtatious games. I’m just going to lay it on the line. I’m in room 238 if you’re interested.”

His piece said, he strode from the room.

Stomach trembling, Luz watched him disappear. The proverbial ball was in her court. Dazed, she returned to her room on the fourth floor and slipped her armload of green tea into the fridge. Sitting on the edge of her bed, she considered her options. She could join her friends for a night of gossip and television or she could go indulge her

desires with Heath. The latter could mean risking exposure and putting her career and party in jeopardy.

"I thought I heard you come back," Hilda said as she walked back into their room. A pair of gray lounge pants and a garish, burnt orange University of Texas tee hugged her full curves. She'd coiled her thick, black waves of hair into a tight, low bun and removed her contacts. Sleek silver glasses perched atop her button nose. She passed Luz on her way to the bathroom and then backtracked. Frowning, she stared at her. "Are you okay?"

"I ran into Heath downstairs."

"The hot guy you danced with earlier?"

"Yeah, him," Luz clarified. "He told me he thinks I'm beautiful and gave me his room number."

"Then what the hell are you doing here, *mami*?" Hilda asked incredulously. "I mean, you know I'm all about the girls, but he was hot! I'd definitely consider taking a walk on the wild side with someone like that."

"I don't know, Hilda," Luz replied uncertainly. "We're in the middle of an election season. This is the kind of thing that some of my more conservative block would *not* approve of me doing."

"I get that, Luz, but at some point, you've got to live your life. And anyways," Hilda shrugged, "I'd say the odds of anyone getting wind of a one-night stand are astronomical. Believe me. It's my business to know." She grabbed Luz's hands, hauled her off the bed and thrust her purse back into her hands. "What room are you going to?"

"238," Luz replied, still in a state of disbelief about what she was about to do.

Hilda jotted it down on the hotel notepad and scribbled Heath's name under it. She put down the pen and walked over to one of her smaller suitcases and started rummaging through the contents. She found what she was looking for and rejoined Luz.

"Take these." She thrust a strip of condoms into Luz's hand.

"Do I even want to know why my lesbian best friend has condoms?"

"Probably not," Hilda cheekily replied.

"You're right," Luz agreed, smiling. She tucked the condoms into her purse. "Thanks."

"*De nada.*" Hand planted firmly on Luz's back, Hilda steered her to the door. "Be safe. Have fun. Text me when you get there and if you decide to stay the night. Don't make me worry."

"I won't," Luz promised, suddenly feeling like a teenager about to embark on her first date. She started down the hallway to the elevators but was stopped by Hilda's laughing voice.

"Unleash that inner cougar, *mami!*"

Snorting, Luz waved dismissively at Hilda before stepping into the elevator. Even as the shiny chrome doors closed, Luz could still hear Hilda cackling. As she descended, Luz played different scenarios in her mind. What would she say when he opened the door? Should she let him make the first move?

Before she was ready, the elevator stopped. Nervousness rippled through her as she stood in the hallway of the second floor.

This was it. She went to his room or she got back on the elevator.

As if moving of their own accord, her feet made the decision for her and carried her down the left side of the hallway. Her eyes scanned the plaques on each door, and when she reached the 230s, her pulse skipped and sprinted.

Mouth dry and breaths short, she stood outside Heath's room. She fished her cell phone from her purse, typed a quick message to Hilda and then switched the phone to vibrate before tucking it back into her purse. Lifting her shaky hand, she clenched it into a fist. Fully aware that a timid knock would set the tone for the encounter, she sucked in a calming breath and then boldly banged on the door.

Seconds later, the door swung inward. Luz swept her gaze from Heath's bare toes, up his faded jeans and tight-fitting black tee to his face. From his lust-darkened eyes and the heavy heaving of his chest, she knew that he was awash with need.

She could only imagine that her shallow breaths and hungry gaze communicated the same to him. Yet even though they were both driven near to madness with want, neither seemed willing to make the first move.

To hell with caution, she decided, and flung herself at him.

Chapter Three

Arms outstretched, Heath caught Luz as their mouths clumsily met, lips smashing and sliding until they found their natural grooves. He carefully dragged her inside the room, kicking the door shut with his foot before pressing her up against the wall. Her purse thudded as it hit the ground. Her hands gripped his neck, keeping his mouth firmly against hers as her tongue stole out to lick his lower lip, prompting him to part his lips just enough to allow her tongue to dart inside. She filled his mouth with the taste of pineapple and coconut.

He groaned, loving the sweet taste of her. His hands skimmed her sides and clasped her hips, pulling her tight against his front and away from the wall. With enough space created, he slipped his hands down the generous curves of her ass and down the backs of her thighs. He bent just enough to haul her off the floor. Instinctively she wrapped her thighs around his waist while he backed her against the wall again, using it for extra support as he plundered her mouth.

Cool hands slid under his shirt. The overwhelming sensation of her soft hands against his hot skin sent shivers of delight coursing straight to his stiffening cock. Wanting her to know just how badly she affected him, he rocked his hips and simulated thrusting into her. She gasped, and he knew she felt his straining cock stabbing through his jeans.

Insistently, she tugged on the hem of his T-shirt. Lifting his arms, he used the angle of his hips to keep her in place, only breaking their kiss for the brief seconds needed to yank his shirt up and over his head. Where it landed after she tossed it aside, he had no idea nor did he care. His only thought was getting Luz out of her camisole.

As he freed her from the cotton garment, her breasts bounced free, their deep-brown nipples puckered and begging for his tongue. Abandoning her mouth, he

lowered his head and sucked her right nipple between his lips. Luz moaned and fisted his hair, her hot breaths buffeting his ear as she watched his mouth move from peak to peak. Each whimper that escaped her lips shot through his groin, making his impossibly hard cock engorge further.

Desperate for her to feel what he was feeling, he left her breasts and returned to her mouth. His left hand rode down her thigh, along her knee and calf, then swept under the pink tiers of her skirt. Not willing to waste time removing her skirt and panties, he simply grabbed the damp crotch of her cotton underwear and pulled it aside. His fingertips encountered smooth skin as they searched for the entrance to her cunt. Slick with her wet heat, his middle finger found its way inside her, curving as it stroked.

Lips against his neck, she gasped at the intrusion. Using her small moans and sharp intakes of breath as his guides, he continued fucking her with his digit and worked the pad of his thumb against her hardened clit. The combination of circling and thrusting drove her wild, and when he added a second finger, she arched encouragingly into him. He could feel her juicy walls clamping down on him as she chased her orgasm, and increased the speed of his thumb rubbing her stiff clit.

When her fingernails bit into his shoulder blades he knew the end was near, and put his lips against her ear. "Come for me, Luz. I want to feel your cunt squeezing my fingers."

Head thrown back, neck exposed to his teasing bites, Luz came with a vengeance. He continued flicking her clit and pumping his fingers inside her until she begged him to stop. Very slowly, he removed his fingers and allowed her to lower her shaking legs. Her forehead rested against his chest as she steadied herself.

After regaining her composure, she pulled his head down for a deliberately deep kiss. She released his lips and began kissing her way down his bare chest. When she started nipping at the skin just above the waist of his jeans, he lowered his arms to his sides and watched apprehensively as she unbuttoned them and slowly lowered the zipper. The swollen head of his cock had already escaped the placket of his boxers, and

she ran a teasing fingertip around the sensitive head. She worked the waistband of his boxers down low enough to reveal his balls – and then went to town.

The first broad lick of her tongue against his taut sac made him groan, but the second, accompanied by the sensation of her mouth sucking his testicle between her lips, made his knees tremble. She laved his sac until there wasn't a single stretch of skin that had been missed.

With one sweeping lick, she blazed a hot, wet trail up the underside of his cock before settling her lips over the head and swirling her tongue around it. Rather than applying a dry hand to his shaft, she paused her suckling just long enough to lick her palm. She worked his thick cock with her moist hand while her head bobbed on the tip. It felt amazing to have her hand twisting up and down his shaft as her mouth sucked and her tongue flicked around the head.

When she added her second hand to the mix and started caressing and rolling his balls between her fingers, he thought he would die.

His fingers sifted through her curly hair but he didn't dare apply any pressure to the back of her head. What she was doing at the moment was a hundred times better than any other blowjob he'd ever received. Every girlfriend in his past had given it the old college try, but nothing compared to this. Where the others had seemed begrudging, Luz seemed enthusiastic.

He wasn't stupid enough to do anything that might jeopardize her continuation.

Luz slowed the hand caressing his shaft and allowed it to rest around the base of his cock, her fingers flattened and splayed against the curly black hairs there. Humming around his head, she began deepening her bobs, allowing more and more of his cock into her mouth.

Enthralled by the sight of his penis disappearing into her mouth, he stared down at her, his eyes glazed with lust. When she finally succeeded in taking his entire length into her mouth, she hummed and extended her tongue along the underside of his cock.

In that moment, heat rushed through his groin, tightening his sac. The primal side of him wanted to unleash in her mouth, but the emotional side needed to come inside her.

“Stop,” he begged, suddenly pulling away from her. Seeing the confusion in her eyes, he quickly added, “I want to come while I’m fucking you.”

His answer seemed to appease her and she dragged the back of her hand against her mouth, gathering the excess saliva coating her reddened lips. Scrambling to her purse, she plunged her hand inside and withdrew a strip of condoms. She tossed them at him and then began pulling down the waistband of her skirt and kicking off her flip-flops.

Throwing the condoms on the bed, he followed suit, hopping on first one foot and then the other as he jerked off his jeans and boxers. Totally naked, he ripped into a condom packet and slipped the lubricated sheath down his length before turning to face her.

She stood in all her nude glory, her stance confident, her eyes hungry.

“You’re so fucking sexy,” he growled, reaching for her.

Luz went to him but quickly took control by shoving him back onto the bed. She crawled over him and straddled his upper thighs. While her hands roamed his stomach and chest, she leaned forward and claimed his mouth. He embraced his dominant female, his hands running up and down her back. Eventually she leaned back and grabbed the base of his cock, holding it steady as she lifted her hips and hovered over him. He watched in fascination as she rubbed the head of his cock up and down her slit, occasionally circling her clit. Finally, she placed it at her glistening entrance.

Unable to bear another second of teasing, he lifted his hips and impaled her with one sharp thrust. She cried out and he pierced her again, reveling in the tight heat that squeezed him.

Rising up on her knees, she slowly rode him. Happy to simply watch as she worked her way to orgasm, he kneaded her breasts and stroked her sides. There was something

utterly mesmerizing about watching a woman taking control of her sexual needs, seeing a woman using a man for her satisfaction.

As her speed increased, so too did his level of arousal. Having her breasts bouncing mere inches from his face and watching her lean stomach sway was absolute torture, but he held his impulse to come in check. With one hand buried in her hair, she pinched her nipples and bit her lower lip. She started to swivel her hips, grinding her inflamed clit against him.

Heath took that as a cue that she was close and began to release his hold on his orgasm. Sitting up, he twisted his hand in her hair and brought her mouth to his. His other hand grabbed her ass, squeezing a fleshy globe as she rode him hard, her movements shaking the bed and the picture hanging over the headboard.

She broke away from his kiss. "I'm going to come!"

He felt the telltale fluttering of her pussy and placed his lips against her collarbone. She was bucking wildly, her fingernails biting into his biceps as she held on for dear life.

Her cries reached a fever pitch and she clenched violently around his cock. He bit the delicate skin of her collarbone as his orgasm crashed down on him, his cum milked by each contraction of her cunt. She continued to rock and he to thrust until they were completely spent.

Cradling her against his chest, he fell back to the mattress. Strands of curly hair tickled his cheek but he didn't have the strength to wipe them away. He felt his penis deflating inside her and found just enough strength to shift her up and off him so he could take care of the used condom. Sweating and exhausted, he stumbled to the bathroom, performed the necessary ablutions and then stumbled back to bed.

Luz had kicked down the comforter and moved under the crisp white sheet, so he joined her. She didn't seem to want to cuddle so he stretched out on his side of the mattress and folded his arms behind his head, staring at the ceiling as he tried to decide what the appropriate response was to such mind-blowing sex.

Luz beat him to it. “So — exactly how old are you?”

Chapter Four

"Twenty-eight."

Cringing, Luz placed her hand over her face. She had been way off in her estimation of his age.

"Does it matter?" Heath asked, rolling on his side to face her.

"I don't know," she honestly answered, face still shielded by her hand. "Twenty-eight sounds very young compared to almost forty-one."

Gently, Heath clasped her wrist and dragged her hand away from her face. He placed his fingers against her chin and tilted her face until their eyes met. "I don't care. Neither should you."

She supposed he was right. At any rate, this was just a vacation fling. It wasn't as if she'd ever have to introduce him to her family, friends or colleagues, people who would definitely raise eyebrows at the thirteen-year age gap.

Suddenly, suspicion crept into her belly. A twenty-eight-year-old man as handsome as Heath certainly couldn't be single—or at least *shouldn't* be. Surely some naughty, nubile young thing had staked her claim on him?

Eyes narrowed, she studied him. "Am I some kind of vacation rebound?"

"What?" he asked, seemingly taken aback. "No!"

"You're not cheating on your girlfriend?"

"No."

"Fiancée?"

"No."

"Wife?"

"Again," he said slowly, "no. I'm not dating anyone. I'm absolutely single and unattached."

She exhaled a relieved breath and nodded. "Good. I don't enjoy being screwed around."

"I don't know," he replied, smiling teasingly. "You seemed to be enjoying yourself a little bit ago."

Scowling, she issued a throaty sound of playful disgust and lightly swatted his arm. "Grow up," she advised before turning her back on him and facing the French doors leading to the small balcony.

Heath laughed and kissed her shoulder. "Stay?"

At the sound of uncertainty and yearning in his voice, her stomach flip-flopped. "Okay."

"Thank you," he whispered, his cheek grazing her ear as he moved forward to kiss the edge of her mouth.

He lifted the sheet and slid off the mattress. Not bothering to look over her shoulder, she listened as he dropped the strip of condoms on the bedside table and then moved around the room picking up their haphazardly discarded items of clothing. That struck her as a bit odd, but she reasoned that tidiness was one of his quirks.

"Do you need anything while I'm up?"

"My phone," she said, remembering that she'd promised Hilda a status report. "It's in my purse."

He handed her the phone. "Do you mind if we sleep with the doors open? The sound of the ocean soothes me."

"I don't mind," she assured him. Actually she'd been begging Hilda to let her sleep with the doors open but Hilda had refused on the grounds that the humidity turned her hair into a pyramid of frizziness.

While she texted Hilda, Heath secured the doorstops on the French doors. A refreshingly cool breeze entered the room, ruffling the white, gauzy panels framing the doors. Her message sent, Luz placed the phone on the nightstand next to her and lay back down. Heath switched off the lights and climbed back into bed.

In an instant, his chest was pressed to her back, his left arm loosely draped over her waist. His right arm rested above their heads, his fingertips just centimeters from her forehead. With every deep exhalation, Heath's breath fluttered her curls and created goose bumps on her neck. By and by his left hand idly stroked her lower belly.

Enhanced by the relaxing soundtrack of waves, her current position was among the most intimate and oddly erotic she'd ever experienced. She couldn't quite comprehend what was happening but it felt as if she and Heath, a man who just hours ago had been a complete stranger, were deeply connected. Luz lowered her eyelids and reveled in the strange sensations coursing through her body.

His idle caresses grew more exploratory. She could tell by the snail's pace of his northerly drifting fingers that he was waiting for her permission to continue. Not wanting to break the serene calm with words, she slowly reached down and carried his hand to her breast. He tenderly kneaded and tweaked, coaxing delicate sighs from her lips. Thighs clenching, Luz placed her hand on his hip and pushed her derriere against him. The length of his hardening cock greeted her, pushing right back against her.

Heath's hand left her breast. She shivered as his fingertips trailed down her rib cage and across her lower back. He stroked up and down her full cheeks, eliciting low moans of pleasure from Luz. Almost timidly, he swept a pair of fingers along the cleft of her ass. She stiffened at the unusual sensation, wondering if he meant to go *there*. He seemed to sense her hesitation and bypassed the area in question.

When she felt his hand cupping the back of her left thigh, she obediently shifted it forward, granting him full access to her pulsing, creamy cunt. He smeared his fingers with the slick lube coating her upper thighs and nether lips before slipping both digits into her channel. At first he merely moved his fingers in and out, slowly stoking the fire

building deep within her. He seemed to notice the hitch in her breath when he pressed against the front wall, a spot that sent small shockwaves of delight through her. He concentrated just there, pumping his fingers and making her gasp.

Although she loved the feeling of his fingers inside her, she desperately wanted his cock. Luz reached behind her and grasped his hard rod, squeezing it to silently communicate her desire. Heath placed a noisy kiss on her back and slowly removed his fingers. While he applied a new condom, she gently massaged her clit, surprising even herself with the amount of slick wetness coating her smooth skin. She only stopped her ministrations when he returned to her, protected and ready to go.

Lifting her leg a few inches, Luz gave Heath the small space he needed to align their bodies. He entered her with a series of deepening thrusts until finally plunging his full length into her. When he was completely sheathed, Luz rested the arch of her left foot against his leg and Heath wound his right arm under her body, wrapping it across her chest and clamping her to him. His left hand moved to her hip, holding her at just the right angle to make their spooning position work.

Rather than thrusting, Heath maintained full penetration and simply pumped his hips. She'd never been taken in a side-by-side position—the unexpected and constant stimulation of her G-spot was an amazing surprise. Strumming her clit, she concentrated on each blissful pump of Heath's cock.

Aching for release, she bucked against him, fingers digging into his thigh. He responded by snapping his hips faster and she answered by increasing the pace of her circling fingers. Toes curling against his calf, she squeezed her inner muscles, clutching at the wide cock impaling her. Ecstasy bubbled in the pit of her stomach. It wouldn't be much longer now...

A few more flicks of her clit and she exploded, mouth open but no noise coming forth. Her thighs closed, her pussy tightening around him as she flexed and shook. She continued manipulating her overly sensitive nub until she simply couldn't take it any more.

Before she could recover, Heath unceremoniously pulled out of her and dragged her into the center of the bed. He crawled between her knees and plunged his cock into her juicy depths, taking her with long, hard and unhurried strokes. She arched off the bed, shoulders supporting her weight, hands clasping his shoulders. His languid style afforded plenty of time to make love to her mouth, to caress her face, to plant tiny kisses along her neck.

Soon their fingers laced above her head. Unable to use her hands to pull him closer, she hooked her knees around his hips and pressed her heels against his buttocks, pulling him deeper with each stroke.

The strengthening sea breeze skimmed their sweaty bodies and their sighs and moans were lost in the incessant crash of surf breaking against the beach. For Luz it was a moment straight out of a romance novel. When their eyes met in a silver shaft of moonlight, she sucked in a sharp breath, surprised by the passion reflected in Heath's gaze.

It didn't seem possible that she could climax again but the friction building between their bodies was unbearable. They came almost simultaneously, Luz just a few seconds before Heath. There were no screams, no growled curse words, no fists beating against the mattress or a headboard slamming against the wall. There were only softly spoken names.

"Heath!"

"Luz..."

A buzzing cell phone interrupted Heath's much-needed sleep. He slapped the bedside table. When he didn't feel the phone, he cracked an eye and cast a bleary glance around the room. Pale gray light filtered through the open French doors. The smell of caramel and chocolate met his nose and he became aware of the weight upon his chest. Glancing down he saw Luz's sleeping form, her face relaxed, her cheek against his pecs and an arm draped across his stomach.

Flashes of last night invaded his groggy brain. Triumph swelled in his chest. He'd gambled and won the prize. He forced the painful fact that it was only a one-night stand from his mind. There was no reason to ruin what few hours he had left in her company with something as devastatingly direct as reality.

Careful not to wake her, he brushed away the hairs clinging to her nose and the corner of her mouth. God, she was gorgeous! And natural, he realized, noting the absence of smudged mascara around her eyes or foundation smears on the sheets. He couldn't remember ever waking up with a woman in his bed and not seeing the after-effects of sleeping in makeup. That Luz didn't attempt to hide the insignificant imperfections of her face pleased him. It proved what he'd always known—she was a *real* woman, a woman not pressured into conforming to whatever ridiculous standards the latest fashion magazine or hottest television show touted. She was truly comfortable in her own skin.

Her cell phone began vibrating across the bedside table again and this time, Luz stirred. She inhaled noisily and stiffened as her relaxed muscles engaged in a stretch. Her flexing toes touched his calf and her eyes shot open. At first she seemed a bit confused and alarmed, so he smiled down at her.

"Good morning," he whispered.

"Morning," she replied, rubbing a hand down her cheek. Stretching her arms overhead, she yawned and groaned. "Did my phone wake you?"

"Unfortunately," he said.

"I'm sorry." She gave him an apologetic smile and then rolled away from him. As she reached for her phone, the sheet slid down her back, revealing the toned, tan flesh that had so enticed him the night prior. Unable to help himself, he caressed her soft skin. She didn't startle at his touch as he'd anticipated, but rather melted into it, as if she'd been expecting it. He massaged her shoulders as she hit a speed-dial key on her phone and pressed the device to her ear, waiting for an answer.

"Hey Hilda, sorry I missed your calls. No, no, it's fine." There was a short pause as Luz listened. "No, don't wait for me. I think we'll order room service."

His stomach jumped at the realization that she wasn't going to make a mad dash back to her friends.

"Sounds good," she continued. "I'll meet you guys for lunch then. All right. Uh-huh. Bye."

She snapped her phone shut and returned it to the table. She turned over and placed a hand on his arm. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Mind?"

"That I invited myself for breakfast," she clarified. "If you have plans, I can catch up with my friends."

Gently, he took her hand from his arm and brushed his lips against her knuckles. "I don't mind. I'm glad you're staying."

She smiled broadly and kissed his stubbled cheek. "Good. I'm ravenous!"

Reclining against his pillow, he watched as she kicked off the sheet and brazenly strode from the bed, hips swinging, breasts jiggling.

She disappeared into the bathroom and when she emerged a few minutes later, she had pulled on the white bathrobe hanging on the back of the door. She hopped onto the edge of the desk, crossed her gleaming legs and offered him the tiniest glimpse of her inner thighs. There was a noticeable tenting of the sheet across his lap, but he made no adjustment. There was no reason to be ashamed of a natural response to such visual provocation.

Ignoring the obvious, Luz smirked and grabbed the blue leather folder holding the room-service menu. "I want blueberry waffles, bacon, scrambled eggs, some fruit and tea."

He chuckled and flung back the sheet. "You weren't kidding about being ravenous."

"No," she said, eyeing him as he moved toward her. "What would you like?"

He swiped his folded jeans from the table and moved in for a kiss. She met him halfway, their lips lingering for a few moments before he pulled back. "The same but orange juice instead of tea," he decided and then slipped into the bathroom.

By the time he returned, she'd already taken the morning papers from outside the door and was sitting on the balcony, enjoying the early morning sun. He joined her on the balcony, slowly sinking onto the lime green and orange striped canvas cushion of the teak chair.

"You have interesting tastes in newspapers," she commented, gesturing to the pile of American and European papers in the center of the circular table.

"I like to stay informed." He grabbed the top paper, leaned back and scanned the headlines for any juicy political stories. He despised being bested by any of the dailies and made a point of encouraging his contributing bloggers to post fully vetted stories as quickly as possible, any time of day or night.

Normally he hopped onto his laptop first thing in the morning, checked his email for any notifications of posts or leads and then compared his blog's headlines to those of the biggest papers. Today, however, he couldn't do that. It wasn't worth the risk.

Breakfast arrived and they devoured their food in relative silence. Bellies filled and plates clean, they sat back and stared at the aquamarine expanse, riveted by the swelling waves lapping the beach. Sounds of early morning beach revelers filled the void so neither felt pressured to make conversation. There were no easy topics after a night like they had shared. What was there to say that would not be awkward or unpleasant? It was as if both implicitly understood that they were reaching the end of their interlude and yet neither wanted it to end. But there was nothing to be done. The realities of their lives would never permit anything more than this illicit tryst conducted hundreds or thousands of miles from their homes.

When Luz rose and left the balcony, Heath remained in his chair, mind focused anywhere but on the sounds of her dressing and gathering her things. He felt her

presence again but didn't—couldn't—turn to face her. She seemed to understand his conflicted state and placed a hand on his shoulder, giving it a light squeeze.

"I have to go now," she said quietly.

"I know." Closing his eyes, he waited for a trite response but none came. Instead he felt soft tendrils of hair brushing his cheek, saw them spilling over his shoulder as she bent forward. Her fingers grazed his chin, turned his face—and then her lips were upon his. Although desperate to deepen the kiss, he refrained, certain that he wouldn't be able to let her leave without having her again if he did.

The kiss ended much sooner than he would have liked, and without another word, she left him.

Chapter Five

Later that evening, Luz restlessly tossed and turned. All day she'd been consumed by images of Heath, of memories of their lovemaking. She could feel his rough fingertips blazing across her skin, smell phantom hints of his sweat and soap invigorating her senses, feel heat sweeping through her belly, pooling between her thighs. She needed him desperately and yet she was too afraid to go back, to ask for more. She refused to look desperate or, worse—to risk discovering him with another woman.

That thought made her chest constrict with jealousy. Huffing, she kicked at her bedcovers and punched her pillow in an attempt to find a more comfortable position. It was useless. A minute later, she was rolling over again, shifting the bedcovers and once more smacking her pillow.

"*Jesus, Maria, y Jose!*" Hilda growled with disgust. "You either go down there to your boy toy and let him take care of your problem, or I'm about to jump in bed with you and fix it myself!"

"Thanks, but no thanks," Luz grumpily replied as she sat up and rubbed her face. "And I can't go back down there."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," she replied uncertainly.

"Look," Hilda switched on the bedside lamp, "we're leaving in the morning. You've been out of sorts all day. I know you, Luz. You don't like to leave things unfinished. If you're not happy with the way you left this morning, then go back and make it work for you."

Luz considered Hilda's advice. No surprise that she was right. Luz *did* feel uneasy about the way she'd left him after breakfast. She didn't like that she didn't know his last

name, didn't know how to contact him, didn't know anything about his career or even where he lived.

She wasn't quite sure about the rules of vacation flings. Maybe these things were supposed to remain as anonymous as possible, but it just didn't sit well with her.

And of course, she craved him.

"All right," Luz said decisively and shoved off the bed. "I'm going."

"Thank god," Hilda sighed and switched off the lamp. There was a loud thump as she flopped back to the mattress. "Now I can finally get some sleep."

Rolling her eyes, Luz tapped her toes under the luggage stand until she felt her flip-flops. She worked her feet into them, grabbed her cell phone and room key and tiptoed to the door.

"Enjoy yourself, *nena!*" Hilda called as Luz slipped into the hallway.

Smirking, Luz slowly closed the door, made sure she heard the double click of the locks engaging and headed to the elevators. Unlike the night prior, the hallway was busy and a constant stream of guests were exiting and entering the pair of elevators servicing the hotel. Luz hung back as a groping, grinding couple stumbled into an empty elevator. She couldn't imagine that would be a comfortable ride down.

Less than a minute later, the second elevator stopped on her floor. She stepped inside, moving forward to press the button for the second floor but noticed it was already highlighted. She moved to the opposite corner of the box, away from the sagging, sunburned couple who looked a tad blitzed. Their odd looks didn't go unnoticed. She realized she must look a bit funny traipsing through the hotel in her camisole and pajama pants.

As the elevator bounced to a halt, butterflies invaded her stomach. The sunburned couple exited first and weaved through a small crowd of hotel guests. It appeared that both elevators had simultaneously stopped on the second floor. Just as Luz left the elevator, she caught a whiff of Heath's smell and snapped her gaze in the direction of the scent.

Not a foot from her, Heath stood stock-still, bottles of orange soda and green tea dangling from his hands.

Seemingly bemused, he grinned. "Luz?"

"Heath," she said, surprised. Trying to cover her shock, she gestured to the bottle of green tea in his hand. "Thirsty?"

"I knew you'd come back," he said simply.

Her gut clenched, thighs tensed. "Did you really?"

"No," he admitted. "But I hoped you would. And you did."

"I couldn't stay away. I...I needed more."

She noticed the flush creeping up his neck and across his jaw line. It wasn't embarrassment coloring his complexion, but lust. Wordlessly, he tossed his head in the direction of his room. That was all the invitation she needed. She followed him inside his room and stood back as he placed the drinks next to his laptop and cell phone on the small desk. She dropped her cell and room key onto the low dresser and kicked off her flip-flops.

Without hesitation, Luz crossed the small distance between them and rose on tiptoes, pressing her lips to his. Heath's strong arms wound around her lower back. She slipped her tongue between her lips, prodding his mouth for entrance. A low growl in the back of his throat accompanied the parting of his lips, and her tongue darted inside, sliding against his as her hands found their way to the fly of his jeans.

While they kissed and sighed, their hands worked furiously to rid one another of their clothing. Their movements were awkward, their fingers fumbling, his large feet occasionally stepping on hers, but they refused to slow their impatient pace. Luz mirrored Heath's desperation.

Naked, they tumbled onto the bed. At first Luz was dominant, straddling Heath as she madly made love to his mouth. His stiff cock jutted between her legs and she wantonly ground against it, making him groan with each teasing contact of her labia.

His arms locked around her waist and she barely had a moment's warning before he flipped her onto her back, pinning her against the mattress. Playfully, she arched her hips, testing his hold. He responded by nipping at her breast, not hard enough to leave a lasting mark, but enough to communicate who was in charge at the moment.

Surrendering to him, Luz closed her eyes and concentrated on the sensations his hands and mouth evoked as they explored her body. He shifted to position himself beside her, his lips dancing across the swell of a breast before latching onto a nipple. His fingertips caressed her stomach in long, idle strokes. Bit by bit he worked his mouth down her body, awakening her desires with each pinch, each lick, each kiss.

Heath's chest grazed her lower stomach. Luz waited for him to swing his leg over her stomach and straddle her in the usual sixty-nine position, but he didn't. He kept his knees planted to the right of her hips, creating a V-shape out of their reclining bodies. Instead, he hooked his elbows beneath her knees, forcing her legs wide as he palmed her ass and displayed every deliciously dewy inch of her sex. Feeling taut and exposed, Luz quivered as she watched his head dip between her thighs. When his tongue swiped her clit, her shoulders shot off the mattress. The sensation of his tongue moving downward over the sensitive nub was beyond anything she'd ever experienced.

"You taste so fucking good," he murmured in between leisurely licks. "I'm going to lick your pretty cunt until you come against my face."

"Oh god," Luz groaned upon hearing his promise. Already panting, she fell back to the mattress, hands fisting the covers as Heath went wild on her. He pulled her swollen clit between his lips, swirling his tongue against it before releasing the mild suction. Incredibly powerful shockwaves of ecstasy trembled through her. *Never* had it felt like this! It was as if Heath possessed some instinctive understanding of her body. His tongue flicked at just the right speed and just the right angle...

When the sensations were too much and she squirmed to escape the overpowering bursts rippling through her, he moved away from her clit for a few moments. He

concentrated his efforts on the slick lips of her sex until she was wiggling her hips and silently begging him to return to her clit.

Always a tease, he moved completely away from her pussy and kissed the creases of her thighs.

“Please,” she begged, toes digging into the mattress. “Please, Heath!”

She could feel his lips stretched tight in a smile as they moved back to her pussy. While his tongue laved and swirled, Luz took advantage of their position and caressed the backs of his thighs. She lightly dragged her fingernails down the pale globes of his ass before turning her hand and gliding her palm down his balls and around to his shaft.

Shivering, he paused his lapping as she loosely stroked his rock-hard cock. For a moment, she wondered if he could concentrate on the task at hand if she was simultaneously pleasuring him, but her fears were quickly allayed when he immediately resumed his expert pussy licking.

As Luz fondled his balls and stroked his shaft, she encouraged the gradually approaching orgasm by flexing her PC muscle. With each squeeze, the intensity of the experience was heightened. Her breaths grew quick and shallow as fire spread through her lower belly. Unable to continue stroking Heath, she gripped his thigh, her fingernails imprinting on his skin as she held on for dear life.

A flickering second of panic seized her body, causing every muscle to contract just before she exploded with keening cries of rapture. Hips bouncing, she pulsed against his lips. Heath hummed in satisfaction as his head whipped from side to side, drawing out an already unbelievable orgasm. Tongue dipping into her cunt, he slurped at the juices pooling at her entrance. Luz had never had such an incredibly naughty act performed on her – and it only caused her body to contract and shake harder.

Finally, Heath mercifully halted his torture. He sat back on his heels and stared down at her, his chin glistening with her cum. Unable to find any words, she clasped

his ribs and drew him down to her. With torturously slow licks, she wiped her musky cream from his mouth before kissing him, their mouths wide and tongues circling.

“I need to fuck you,” he breathed hungrily.

“From behind,” she panted, clutching at him.

Eyes wild with lust, he nodded and snatched a condom from the bedside table. Luz rolled over onto her stomach and grabbed both pillows. Ass in the air, she rested her stomach on the stacked pillows, elbows on the mattress as she imagined him roughly fucking her, his hand tangled in her hair as he shoved her face against the bed.

Luz gasped when suddenly both his hands squeezed and lifted her ass cheeks, fully exposing her to his view. In the next instant, his tongue was upon her again. She wantonly pressed back against his face, loving the sensation of his flattened tongue licking the length of her slit. When his tongue drifted higher, she tensed but remained in place. His hot, wet tongue circled the puckered hole hidden in the cleft of her buttocks. Although decidedly new and strange, the sensation was undeniably the most erotic she’d ever experienced.

Heath paired his lapping tongue with gentle thrusts of his fingers inside her pussy. Teeth bared, she moaned and flexed, reveling in every second of rapturous torture.

He abandoned her ass far too soon for her liking, and she vocalized her disappointment with a husky growl. His amused chuckle rankled her and she reached back between her legs and wrapped her fingers around his thick, pulsing cock. Holding him still, she shoved back against his cock, completely sheathing it.

Satisfied that he was finally right where she wanted him, she released his cock and rocked back and forth against him. He hissed and clapped a palm against her right cheek. Senses heightened, she felt the full, stinging impact of his slap and loved it.

Luz clutched the bedcovers as Heath fucked her, varying his speed and depth. Leisurely, deep strokes were interrupted by bursts of shallow pumping. The uncertainty kept her body on edge, made her gasp and moan. As Heath slowly drove

into her, Luz felt his fingertips massaging her anus. Delicious shivers swept through her.

Something wet and warm dripped onto her puckered flesh. Saliva, she realized, as his fingers spread the slippery fluid. A single finger prodded the tight rosebud and slipped inside. Luz groaned at the intrusion, somewhat surprised by how good it felt. She'd always imagined that anything in *there* would feel icky, but at the moment, it felt better than anything she'd ever tried before in a bedroom.

Undulating brazenly, Luz rode Heath's cock and finger. He added a second finger, stretching her as they pumped in and out at the same tempo as his cock. Fire blazed through her, awakening erogenous zones she hadn't even realized she possessed. Like a mad woman, Luz rocked back and forth on her knees, accepting each of Heath's powerful thrusts. Her clit begged for attention so she slipped a hand between her legs, glad for the pillows' support. At the first brush of her fingertips, her cunt contracted. She knew it wouldn't take much to send her hurtling over the precipice.

The tension in the room had reached a fever pitch. A never-ending stream of "ahs" escaped Luz's mouth as she rubbed her clit in fast, tight circles. Heath's breakneck pace made the entire bed shake and even rattled the alarm clock and lamps on the bedside tables. Luz's yelping competed for dominance with the squeak of the bed, Heath's heavy pants and the wet clicks accompanying his cock as it moved like a piston in her pussy.

Heath's free hand snarled in her hair, using the strands like reins as he ferociously fucked her.

That was all it took. Without warning, her orgasm slammed down upon her. A series of high-pitched shrieks burst forth from her lips as she trembled and convulsed. Intense spasms of pain and pleasure ripped through her as Heath continued slamming his cock deep inside her channel, kept pumping his fingers within her ass and jerked harder on her hair. It was at once too much and not enough.

A guttural roar erupted from Heath's throat as he came. It seemed as if he threw his entire body weight behind the final jerky thrusts. Pounded into the mattress, Luz desperately tried to catch her breath as she returned from whatever ethereal plane of ecstasy Heath had just propelled her. He slumped against her back, his fingers and cock still buried inside her. As his hand relaxed on the tangled strands within its clasp, blood rushed to her scalp and sent fleeting pangs through her head. But she didn't care. Bliss saturated every ounce of her body.

In a post-orgasmic daze, Luz hardly noticed Heath pulling out of her and flopping down next to her. Neither possessed the strength to move close enough to cuddle.

Eyes hidden behind a curtain of messy hair, Luz tried to meet his gaze but failed. Instead she extended her hand, placing her fingertips atop his to maintain some sort of intimate contact. He intertwined his fingers with hers in a loving gesture that sent shockwaves of emotion and panic through her belly. The fingers of his other hand swept the curls from her eyes.

"What's your favorite ice cream flavor," he asked softly.

"What?" she croaked in surprise, throat hoarse after shrieking like a banshee.

He smiled and caressed her cheek. "What's your favorite ice cream flavor? I like chocolate."

"All right," she replied, still perplexed by the odd question. "I love buttered pecan, but I only eat Blue Bell ice cream. Why?"

"I just wondered."

"And that's it?"

"That's it."

Smirking bemusedly, Luz shook her head. Heath grinned and placed a noisy kiss on her cheek. She watched his flexing buttocks as he strode toward the bathroom. The realization that she was getting too cozy, that she could honestly imagine herself asking

to see him again, made her nervous. It wasn't just that the sex was mind-blowing and fantastic — she really liked Heath.

Granted, she didn't know much about him, but she could see them rubbing along quite well on a proper date. He was definitely the kind of man who could appreciate a strong woman, who wouldn't feel the least bit intimidated that she wielded more power or brought home a bigger paycheck.

Confused and thirsty, she slipped off the bed and walked to the desk. She twisted the cap off the bottle of green tea and took a swig of the refreshingly cool liquid as she contemplated how to make a smooth, clean exit, Heath's cell phone buzzed and issued a modest gong noise. She fought her curiosity for a moment, but the need to know who could be text messaging him so late at night got the better of her.

Glancing over her shoulder, she judged that she had enough time to peek at the message. She put down her drink, picked up the phone and pressed a button to bring up the message.

As her eyes flitted across the text speak, the bottom dropped out of her stomach.

Heard rumor that Sen. Luz H is in Maz, Mex. Can u confirm ASAP? Any chance for pics?

Reeling from shock, Luz gripped the edge of the desk. Before she could fully process what was happening, she heard the bathroom door opening.

When Heath stepped back into the room, she lost it.

"You lying, conniving son of a bitch!" she shouted — and hurled the phone at his head.

Chapter Six

Acting on reflex, Heath dodged the phone flying at his head and managed to snatch it in mid-air. He glanced at the highlighted screen.

Fuck! She knew. She *knew*!

Stomach lurching, he felt his carefully perpetrated scheme crashing down around his ears. Just moments ago in the bathroom, he'd been practicing how best to tell her the truth. He'd thought he might be able to persuade her to consider seeing him again, even after she knew the truth.

Okay, so not the *full* truth. He'd planned to gloss over the bit about having crushed on her for months. He was afraid that might come across as a bit over-the-top.

But none of that mattered now. This text message, however innocent, had planted the seed of conspiracy in her mind. Still, he had to try to salvage this.

"Luz, it's not what it looks like. I mean, I know it looks bad, but it's not really."

"Who the hell are you?" she demanded, hands on hips, naked breasts heaving with anger. "Are you some kind of journalist?"

"Yes and no," he admitted vaguely.

"What the fuck does that mean? Just tell me the truth!"

He realized that it was time to come clean. "I was a journalist for about a year after grad school, but it was too constricting. I had all of these great stories but my editor would never publish them because the paper had a rather specific political slant. So I started blogging anonymously about all the little interesting bits and pieces that I was privy to on the beat... It was small at first, but it sort of snowballed and became incredibly popular. I don't do much reporting these days. I mainly manage a staff of contributing bloggers."

"Oh god," she exclaimed, suddenly putting the pieces together. "You run BeltwayBlitz.net. *You're* The Bull Whip!"

"Yes," he sighed.

"And that message?" She pointed to his phone. "You're what? Working on some sordid exposé?"

"No," he said emphatically. He lifted the phone. "This message is from a blogger doing a story on how the hot shots of each party blow off steam. It's just a light piece about vacations and stuff, nothing heavy."

"Yeah, right! To me, it sounds as if you're trying to dirty my public image. What? You couldn't find any juicy stories in my past so you decided to create one?"

"You have to believe me, Luz. I didn't pursue you with malicious intentions."

"Bullshit," she retorted angrily and started gathering her clothes. "You knew who I was the night you hit on me. You can't deny that."

"I don't," he replied, watching her jerk on her pajama bottoms. "Luz, the truth is I saw you at a rally in February and I was...I became infatuated with you. I couldn't stop thinking about you, about how beautiful you are, how engaging. I was desperate to meet you. I couldn't shake you from my mind. So I ran away to Mexico to try to clear my head – and then I looked up one morning and there you were. It was like fate."

"Fate?" She scoffed with disgust. "Sounds more like a stalker fantasy."

"That's not fair," Heath replied, insulted.

"Not fair?" she spat, tugging her camisole over her head. "You know what's not fair, Heath? Being duped into sleeping with a journalist. Being lured under false pretenses to your hotel room. For all I know, you've had a camera recording every second of our fucking." She made a sound of disgust and shook her head. "I'm such an idiot. I should have realized that you were playing me from the start. Here I thought I was some sexy cougar, but in reality, I'm just fucking pathetic."

He couldn't bear to hear her denigrate herself like that. "Luz, please, that's not true."

"Spare me," she said, grabbing her phone and room key. She shoved past him and stalked into the hallway.

He started after her but then remembered he was naked. As he hopped into his jeans, he noticed her flip-flops on the carpet. He snatched them up before chasing after her. By the time he made it to the hallway, she was already stepping into the elevator.

He dashed toward her and slammed his hand between the steel doors, keeping the elevator in place.

"Move. Your. Hand," she growled.

"No," he said firmly. "I need you to listen to me. I'm sorry, Luz. I'm sorry that I wasn't straight with you from the beginning. There's nothing I can say to excuse that. I'm *sorry*. But Luz, you can't deny that we have something real. You can't tell me that you didn't feel something back there in my bed." He saw the heat coloring her neck and cheeks. "I know you felt it, Luz. I know it."

Luz closed her eyes and turned her face upward. On bated breath, he waited for her to say something, anything. Finally she opened them. Tears glistened in the corners of her eyes.

"It doesn't matter, Heath. It was all predicated on a lie." She held up her hand as he started to argue. "Maybe you didn't lie to me outright, but you lied by omission. You hid the truth from me. You used me. What happened in your room means nothing. If anything, you've been the biggest mistake of my life."

Very slowly, she reached forward and tugged the flip-flops from his hand. She let them fall to the floor of the elevator. Holding his gaze, she unlatched his fingers from the elevator door. His heart clenched painfully as the closing doors obstructed his view of her. He thought about rushing to the stairs at the end of the hallway, of racing up to her room, of demanding that she give him another chance to explain – but he didn't. He knew it was too late.

He'd royally fucked up and she had every right to hate him.

Defeated, he walked back to his room. He retrieved the slim keycard from his back pocket and inserted it into the automatic lock, the smell of sex and sweat hitting him in the face as he entered. He threw his key across the room and collapsed onto the edge of his bed. Cradling his head in his hand, he replayed her final, excruciating words again and again.

If anything, you've been the biggest mistake of my life.

* * * * *

Tears streaming down her face, Luz sat on the side of her bed facing Hilda's and waited for her trusted friend's response. Hilda's puffy, sleepy face was framed by a tangled mass of black hair. Her mouth hung open as her head shook side to side.

"I don't believe it," Hilda exhaled eventually. "I don't fucking believe it! *Carajo!* How could I be so stupid?"

"You?" Luz replied in disbelief, wiping her face. "Me! I was the stupid one, the gullible one."

"You're not gullible!" Hilda rushed to Luz's side and curled an arm around her shoulders. "Listen to me, Luz. He might not have been forthcoming about who he was, but there is no way he faked the way he looked at you. I think — I'm *sure*," she corrected herself, "that he really was — is — attracted to you. Maybe he even loves you a little, if what he said about seeing you in February is true."

Luz sniffed loudly and scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous. You don't treat people you care about like that. You don't lie to them. You don't use them."

"I don't know," Hilda replied with a shrug. "Men can be really dense sometimes. Maybe he really did come here to get away, maybe it *is* all a huge coincidence."

"Maybe," Luz said uncertainly. "Regardless, it doesn't matter. For all I know, this was just some huge conspiracy to discredit me before the national convention, to tarnish my support for the Democratic presidential nominee."

"I know," Hilda said sadly. "And that's why you need to fire me. Right now," she added urgently.

"What?" Luz turned to her friend in shock. "Why the hell should I fire you?"

Hilda spelled out the obvious. "I failed to do my job, Luz. My job is to protect you from shit like this, to keep an eye on you, to help you make good choices. I should have spotted this as a potential problem.

"Okay," she tilted her head, "I *did* see it as an issue from the beginning, but I wanted you to have a chance to cut loose. I weighed the risks and I decided it was worth it. I encouraged you to be reckless. I acted like a friend, not an employee."

"And that's why I need you, Hilda. I'm not going to fire you over this. If Heath's lying and this really is about some sordid exposé, I'm going to need you in my corner. I'm going to need your support and your expertise in handling that kind of shit storm."

Chapter Seven

Standing in the bathroom of her hotel suite in Denver, Luz studied her reflection. A tailored cream suit embraced her curvy frame, the double-breasted jacket accentuating her trim waist and the cuffed trousers skimming her hips. She debated adding a gold necklace to complement the simple gold dangle earrings adorning her ears, but eventually decided against it. She had some concerns that a moving necklace might be distracting to viewers of her upcoming live, televised speech.

Leaning forward, she checked her makeup, ensuring that her foundation lines were perfectly blended, that there were no smudges of eyeliner or clumps of mascara. She stepped back to see the full picture she would be presenting.

Satisfied by her classic, stylish appearance, she exited the bathroom and began pacing the sitting room. For the first time in years, decades actually, Luz trembled with anxiety. She despised admitting weakness, but the Heath debacle had seriously dented her confidence.

A month had passed since she'd left Mazatlan in shame and fear. Since that time she'd been gripped by paranoia. Every phone call inspired panic, and every morning she fully expected to wake up to headlines and pictures exposing her with sensational claims of nymphomania or some kind of perverse sexual deviance. At the very least she expected accusations of poor judgment and weak moral fiber. She was just waiting for the other shoe to drop.

And yet she couldn't help but wonder if maybe she was overreacting. Surely Heath had been presented with numerous opportunities to expose their affair, but he hadn't. The cynic in her shouted that if there was ever a perfect opportunity for discrediting her, it would be tonight after she gave the keynote address at the Democratic National

Convention. It would definitely cast a pall over her endorsement for the presidential candidate.

But the romantic, the idealist that she daily repressed, whispered that maybe, just maybe, Heath wasn't quite as diabolical as she'd believed.

Had he acted stupidly? Absolutely. Had he hurt her? Yes. Had his intentions been malicious?

She wasn't so sure anymore.

The more times she replayed his off-the-cuff defense, the easier it was to understand how his misguided attempts to capture his fantasy had spiraled out of control. That didn't excuse his behavior completely, of course, but it made their tryst seem less cheap and tawdry.

At the same time, it also complicated the situation to a greater degree. Luz couldn't sort out her feelings. One moment she hated him and the next she craved him. She tried to ignore her yearnings for his kisses, for his body warming her sheets, but her attempts were futile. With just a few hours of lovemaking, he'd manage to worm his way into her life, into her thoughts...and into her heart.

She'd assumed it was lust, but the need to see him hadn't diminished. If anything it had grown stronger. Was it love? She couldn't be sure. Could you love someone after such a short encounter? Could you love someone you couldn't trust one hundred percent?

A knock sounded at the door and a second later Hilda entered Luz's room. "It's time."

Nodding, Luz inhaled deeply and exhaled her anxiety. *Enough of this weakness*, she thought determinedly. It was time to take back her confidence. "I'm ready."

* * * * *

From his perch in the blogger's gallery, Heath watched Luz deliver one hell of a keynote address. The crowd of thousands of delegates had gone wild as soon as she'd

been announced and their enthusiasm had yet to fade. They waved signs and banners emblazoned with her name and clapped and whistled to punctuate her strong statements on wedge issues. Pairing her charisma with her natural affinity for public speaking, Luz touted the party's platforms by peppering her speech with personal anecdotes. Subtle but effective barbs at the opposing party's candidates were delivered with a mischievous smile. She was working the crowd into a frenzy with the fervor of a preacher at a tent revival, and it was an awesome sight.

Admittedly, Heath wasn't really paying attention to the content of her speech. For the last few weeks, he'd noticed that Luz seemed slightly subdued in some of her public appearances. He'd been sick with worry that his fuck up had left a lasting mark on her, but watching her now, he realized that his worry had been unfounded. She was a consummate professional. There was no way she'd allow his reprehensible behavior to impact her career.

By the time she wrapped up her speech, the convention center vibrated with zealous enthusiasm. He'd never seen anything like it, and judging by the expressions on the faces of his fellow bloggers and press members, they were thinking the same thing.

Enraptured. It was the only adjective he could think of to accurately describe the convention crowd.

Heart surging with admiration and pride, he watched Luz waving and smiling to the crowd before disappearing backstage. Unable to see her any longer, his chest constricted. Being so close to her and yet so far removed was almost too much. It forced him to confront the reality of what he could have had if only he'd done things differently.

He wanted to see her again, to plead his case a bit more eloquently, but he knew it would be impossible for the two of them to be in the same room without revealing everything to the world. Any journalist worth his weight in steno pads would pick up on the tense vibes between them and start digging for answers. Considering they were

surrounded by hundreds of press members, Heath knew that to protect Luz he had to avoid her like the plague. Just the thought of betraying their secret made him queasy.

Feeling suddenly claustrophobic, he abruptly rose and left his cramped workspace. Guilt and anxiety weighed heavily on his shoulders. He didn't know if he could survive another two days in such close proximity to Luz. Perhaps it would be best to turn over the editorial reins to one of the three BeltwayBlitz bloggers who'd accompanied him. At least then he wouldn't be tempted to screw things up by searching her out and trying to talk to her.

No, he decided firmly. He'd made this mess, and he would see it through to the end.

He was a professional. It was time to act like one.

* * * * *

For the next two days, Heath cautiously navigated the milling convention crowds. The fact that Luz attended all the important events made things decidedly difficult but he managed to camouflage himself when necessary. He refrained from posting any entries on Luz, leaving that sensitive topic to the other bloggers. Seeing her laughing and smiling caused him acute suffering, but Heath bore it as best he could.

After the waterfall of balloons and confetti signaled the end of the convention, Heath started packing up his small workspace. The last few days had left him feeling physically drained and incredibly depressed.

He contemplated heading straight to the airport to wait on standby for a late flight home rather than waiting until the next morning to leave Denver. Getting out of the packed convention center was an absolute nightmare and the idea of leaving Denver early started to sound better and better.

As he boarded one of the hybrid shuttle buses that serviced his hotel, he decided that he would do exactly that. He had to get away from here, away from *her*. With his luck he figured he'd end up spending the night sprawled across a row of uncomfortable

chairs at an airport gate. It would definitely be a fitting end to his otherwise disheartening visit to Denver.

Back at his hotel, Heath piled all his belongings into his suitcase and completed a walk-through of his room to ensure he hadn't left anything behind. Downstairs in the lobby, the night receptionist seemed a bit miffed about processing his early checkout, but when he made no protest about paying a series of ridiculous fees, she calmed down. He took advantage of her slow pace and called a cab. By the time he'd signed his receipt, his taxi had arrived.

"Where to?" the driver asked as Heath climbed into the backseat.

"Airport please," he said, wiping his tired face with his palms. As the cab pulled away from the portico, he felt his resolve slipping. "No, wait," Heath interjected. "Can you take me to the Radisson first?"

"Your money," the driver replied with a shrug. "Stapleton or Southeast?"

"What? Oh, right," Heath said, catching the driver's meaning. There were two Radisson hotels in the area that housed delegates. Luz and the rest of the Texas delegation had rooms at the Southeast location. "Southeast," he clarified, sitting back and wondering what the hell he was doing.

The ride between his hotel and hers was relatively short. When the taxi stopped in front of the hotel, Heath pensively fidgeted with the cuff of his long-sleeve shirt.

What now? He wanted to leave her a message, but how could he possibly do that without raising interest?

Brow furrowed, the portly driver glanced over his shoulder. "You getting out or what?"

"I'm not sure," Heath admitted.

The driver clucked and rolled his eyes. "Look, man, I'm not sitting here all night while you try to suck up the nerve to do whatever it is you need to do."

Heath started to offer a rude retort—but his breath caught in his throat.

Looking oh-so sexy in her houndstooth pencil skirt and crisp white blouse, Luz appeared at the front entrance of the hotel. He couldn't believe it but there she was. Yet again it appeared that fate had a plan for them.

He jerked on the door handle and scrambled off the backseat. "Luz?"

Her shoulders visibly jerked before she wheeled around to face him. "Heath," she said, obviously shocked. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm on my way to the airport."

An amused slant graced her mouth. "I think your cab driver needs a better map."

Heath issued a nervous laugh. "Yeah. Something like that," he agreed. There was an awkward pause as both sought the right thing to say. "Are you—do you need a ride somewhere?"

"No."

"Oh." He tried to hide the crestfallen expression that pulled at his face.

"I just needed to get away from everyone for a little while. It can become a bit suffocating."

"I'm sure."

"Are you really on your way to the airport?"

"Yes."

"At this time of night?" she asked skeptically.

"I can't stay here another minute. It's too hard," he said quietly.

She studied him carefully and nodded. "I know what you mean. I thought..." Trailing off, she shook her head. "I expected to run into you before tonight."

"Are you disappointed that you didn't?" His heart stuttered with anticipation as he waited for her reply.

"Yes," she admitted eventually. "And no," she quickly added. "It's complicated, Heath. From one minute to the next I can't decide what it is that I want. I don't know what to believe, what to think."

Knowing that he was the cause of her angst upset him greatly. "I'm so sorry, Luz. I never meant for this to happen. I really thought that if I could just get a taste of my infatuation it would go away, and I'd be free of it. But it didn't work that way. If anything it made my feelings more intense. Seeing you this week has been absolute hell for me, knowing that you were right there but I couldn't even speak to you, smile at you. I was terrified that I'd cause more problems."

Scoffing at himself, he exhaled and rolled his eyes. "And now here I am, standing in front of your hotel, doing exactly what I promised myself I wouldn't—putting you in danger. God, I'm so screwed up!"

"Why did you come here?" Luz asked earnestly, her face betraying her desperate need for an answer.

This was it. He had to tell her even if it meant facing the cruelest of rejections. "Because I love you," he said, exposing his vulnerability.

"Please don't say that," she entreated, closing the gap between them by a few steps.

"I love you," he dared again. "And I think you love me."

"I don't."

"Liar."

Her lips pursed at his assertion. "Let's not open that can of worms, Heath."

"Touché," he granted with a small smile. "That doesn't change anything. I still love you. You *do* love me." She *had* to love him, he was certain of it. He could feel it radiating off her. Her mouth said no, but her body language said yes.

"Heath, I can't love someone I don't trust. I don't love you," she said firmly. "Please, don't try to contact me. It ends here, now. Good night."

She would have inflicted less pain if she'd simply stabbed him through the heart.

Very slowly, she pivoted and headed back to the front entrance. Numbed by her rejection, Heath climbed back into the cab, steeling his expression so as not to reveal the full extent of his absolute heartbreak to the driver.

Eyeing him via the rear-view mirror, the cab driver offered Heath a surprisingly concerned smile. He'd obviously heard everything. "If she turns around, she loves you. You just wait and see," the driver said, nodding sagely.

Desperate for some shred of proof that he hadn't been entirely wrong, that she was lying, he glanced toward the entrance of the hotel.

Luz had just reached the doors. Holding his breath, Heath watched as she paused momentarily, and then—wonder of all wonders—she looked over her left shoulder.

Their eyes met for the briefest of moments, but it was all Heath needed. His heart swelled in his chest as relief and hope and determination filled him.

He would do exactly as she asked. He would leave her be for the time being. He would show her that she could trust him.

He would earn her love.

Chapter Eight

Luz shivered and drew her cable-knit cardigan tighter around her shoulders. Any other day she wouldn't have hesitated to call in a technician to work on the heater servicing her small congressional office in San Antonio, but it was Christmas Eve. Even *she* didn't want to work today, but the mountains of correspondence on her desk had been teetering dangerously.

She wasn't expected at her parents' house until eight so there were still at least four hours of work ahead of her. Hopefully she could make a sizeable dent in her piles by then.

As she sifted through the mounds of paper, Luz's gaze occasionally bounced to the window. After years of unseasonably warm Christmases, a frigid cold front had swept through the area. It wasn't quite cold enough for snow, but a wintry mix of sleet and rain pelted the glass. Luz hated driving in such dismal conditions. Even in the best weather she was a terrible driver. She hated that she proved the cliché of women as bad drivers, especially since she was so controlled and commanding in every other aspect of her life. She took comfort in the fact that one couldn't possibly be perfect at everything.

Lately she found herself considering just what her so-called perfect existence cost her. Maintaining her squeaky-clean image had never bothered her before but after Heath, that had all changed.

Honestly, before Heath, she'd never had occasion to question her choice of safe, boring lifestyle. Doing what was expected of her came naturally. She assumed that character trait had been ingrained during her strict childhood. Thinking back on it now, she realized how incredibly sad it was that she'd wasted all those years being, well...*good*.

The fact that her first real fling outside of college had occurred just shy of her forty-first birthday was disconcerting.

Moreover, Luz had finally realized that in the great scheme of things, a two-night fling with a younger man was hardly the death knell she had considered it. Granted, during the election cycle, it would have been a serious liability. Conceivably, it could have cost her a successful reelection.

But now that the election was finished, now that she'd won by the largest margin in her career, now that the candidates she'd supported for president and vice president had been elected, she found herself wondering if maybe, just maybe, a relationship with Heath could work.

Of course, there was still the issue of his occupation as a journalist. The ethics of political journalists and politicians dating were murky. She could count on one hand the number of married couples in similar situations—and all of them had suffered scandals at one time or another. It was an ugly fact of that particular type of mixed marriage.

And now that he'd been outed, they wouldn't be able to hide behind his anonymity...

She recalled the morning Hilda had called her with the news that a rival political blog had sussed out Heath's true identity after the two national conventions. Luz had been shocked. That he'd managed to hide his real identity all those years but had suddenly been found out perplexed her. Sometimes she wondered if he'd deliberately opened himself up to discovery. She wasn't quite sure what he had thought to gain from it, but obviously it had been worth it. He'd been a good sport about the whole thing and had posted an eloquent explanation of his reasons for maintaining a pseudonym.

Imagine Luz's surprise when Heath had scored a series of candid interviews with some of the election's most prominent candidates and, later, its winners. He'd consistently continued to churn out the scoops.

And he'd never printed a word of their affair, not even the tiniest hint. She'd accused him of malicious intent, of tricking her for his own gain—and she'd been terribly wrong. However, she had a sneaking suspicion he wouldn't hold that against her.

But none of that really mattered. He'd taken a huge risk to confess his feelings to her that night at the Radisson, and she had stomped on his heart. At the time it had filled her with a sense of vindication to know he was hurting as badly as she had that night in Mazatlan, but now she understood that her need to wound him had been as misguided as his successful seduction of her. She supposed they were even now, but that was little consolation.

The phone on her desk rang, pulling her back to the present and away from her meandering thoughts. She shifted around the piles of letters and envelopes in order to find her phone. "Senator Luz Hernandez speaking, how may I help you?"

"Luz, it's Hilda. Are you going to be at the office for a while?"

"Unfortunately," Luz said with a grimace. "Why? Do you need something?"

"I'm on my way over to look at some things, but I can't find my keys."

Luz rolled her eyes, not at all surprised. Hilda was notorious for losing her keys. "I'll unlock the door so you don't have to wait in the rain."

"Gracias, nena."

"No problem."

Luz hung up the phone, grabbed her mug and pushed away from the desk. She unlocked the front door of the office and then made her way to the small kitchen in the far corner of the building. After refilling her mug of spiced tea, Luz returned to her office and resumed her letter reading. She'd just started to make some research notes for a proper response to a concerned constituent when she heard the front door open.

Pen scratching against her notepad, Luz called out, "Hilda, there's hot tea in the kitchen."

"Thanks, but I prefer coffee."

Her pen streaked across the yellow paper as her head snapped up. Jaw slackened, Luz stared at Heath.

Grinning boyishly, he leaned against the doorframe of her office, looking quite the prep in his slate blue sweater layered over a white oxford shirt. A plastic sack dangled from his left hand but she couldn't see what was in it.

Her stomach trembled and she swallowed nervously. *Calm, Luz, stay calm.*

"Hilda's not with you, is she?" Luz asked as she reached for her mug of tea and took a nonchalant sip.

"Nope," Heath replied. "I hope you're not angry with her."

"Of course not," Luz said, returning the mug to the desk. She decided remaining aloof was the best course of action. "I wasn't aware that you're one of my constituents."

"I'm not—at the moment," he added with a meaningful glance. "I'm considering making the move and thought I should come straight to the source to learn about the perks of the Lone Star State."

Another shock of surprise shot through her tummy. "I see. Any specific reason for the move? I'd have thought in your line of work, location is of the utmost importance. I can't see that you'll get many scoops if you live outside the D.C. area."

"That might not be an issue for much longer."

She gripped her pen tight enough to snap it in half. "What do you mean?"

"I want you, Luz. But I won't put your career in jeopardy, not after how fucking hard you've worked all these years to build it. So if you want to be with me, I'll sell the site." His hand slashed the air. "I'll walk away."

"For me?"

"For you."

He was serious. This wasn't some dramatic, empty gesture.

Upon that realization, a giddy smile tugged at her lips. She fairly flew out of her chair and into his arms. His mouth crashed down upon hers in a kiss reminiscent of their first on that sultry night in Mexico. Waves of familiarity and a sense of belonging engulfed her.

"God, I've missed you," he whispered against her cheek, his right hand cradling the nape of her neck.

"I've missed you too." She stroked his cheek then rose on tiptoes to press a gentle kiss to his lips. "And I'm sorry for —"

His fingertips grazed her lips. "Don't. I understand. Let's just move forward."

"I'd like that." As they shared another kiss, Luz became aware of something cold penetrating her cardigan and chilling the small of her back. Confused, she broke away from the kiss and twisted around to see the plastic sack hanging from his left hand hitting her back. "What's in the bag?"

"Blue Bell Buttered Pecan ice cream," he answered with a playful smile.

Unable to help herself, she giggled like a teenager. "You brought me ice cream when it's thirty-six degrees outside?"

Abashed, he explained, "I didn't know your favorite flower. I knew it was a dumb idea."

"No! It's sweet, Heath. Really, I'm touched."

With a licentious grin, he bent down and whispered, "I can think of a few places I'd like to touch you."

"Behave," she warned. "This is my office. We're not going to cross that line."

"My hotel?"

"My house."

* * * * *

Heath's hand rested atop Luz's on the center console of her hybrid SUV as she navigated the wet streets of San Antonio. Although surrounded by dreariness, Heath was ready to explode with happiness. His fingers shook slightly—whether from nervousness or overexcitement, he didn't know.

Luz turned her hand beneath his, laced their fingers and gave his a reassuring squeeze. They paused at a red light and she smiled lovingly at him. It stoked the fire burning in his belly.

By the time they reached her beautifully renovated historic home in the King William district, Heath's hand had snaked its way beneath the layers of her warm clothing and was caressing the silky skin of her stomach. He nipped at her neck and massaged an earlobe between his thumb and forefinger. Soft sighs escaped her lips as she pulled into the detached garage, and had it not been so uncomfortably cold, Heath would have coaxed her onto his lap right then and there.

Instead, they hopped puddles dotting her backyard and skipped up the wooden steps leading to the idyllic back porch. Arms wrapped around her waist, Heath licked and sucked upon the exposed curve of her throat, causing Luz to fumble with her keys.

He followed her through the mud/laundry room and into the kitchen. Another day Heath might have marveled at the craftsmanship of the renovations, but at that moment, he couldn't have cared less. He wanted her. He *needed* her. He didn't care if it was propped up against the fridge, bent over a couch in the living room or kneeling on the staircase.

After popping the ice cream into the freezer, she grabbed his hand and dragged him out of the kitchen. Like a smitten puppy, he happily trailed her through the dining room and into the foyer. Chasing her upstairs turned into something of a game, with his fingers sneaking out to goose her every few steps. Her surprised squeals filled the house, as did her playful slaps.

Once they reached her bedroom, clothes started flying. Rather than wasting time undressing one another as foreplay, they focused on themselves, fingers tearing

through buttons and zippers. He was down to his boxers when he realized he'd forgotten condoms.

As if reading his mind, Luz pointed to her bedside table. "Bottom drawer."

Heath crouched and yanked on the drawer's handle. His eyes widened at the kinky contents he discovered. Beyond the condoms and a bottle of lube were an assortment of vibrators, from a simple, slim silver vibe to one of those bright pink numbers with pearls that rotated around the vibrating shaft and clit massaging feelers sprouting from the top.

But it was the set of blue anal plugs of varying widths and vibrating capabilities that caught his eye. The silicone plugs had flared bases for safety and tips shaped like the head of a penis. A slim, cylinder-shaped vibe could be slipped into the base.

Whistling, he picked up the mid-sized anal plug. "My, my, my, Luz."

Blushing, she shrugged and removed her bra. "It's your fault."

"My fault?" he asked, intrigued.

"After you showed me how good it felt, I couldn't stop thinking about it," she explained as she stepped out of her panties and tossed them onto the pile of clothes at her feet.

"Do you mind if we play with this now?" *Please say yes*, he pleaded silently.

"I insist," she replied huskily, crawling across her bed to reach him. Her fingertips hooked the waistband of his boxers and she drew him closer. On all fours atop the mattress, she nuzzled his cock through the thin fabric and teasingly darted her tongue inside the open placket, licking the side of his shaft. The anal plug dropped from his hand and landed on the comforter. His hands cupped her cheeks as she pushed down his boxers, freeing him for her attention.

When her wet lips locked around the head of his cock, he gasped and tensed. The surge of excitement was almost too much. Not wanting to embarrass himself like some teenager groping in the backseat of a car, he sucked in a deep breath and tried to get a

grip. He planned to enjoy every second of the heavenly sensation her lips and tongue provided.

As she bobbed up and down, he ran his fingers through her hair then caressed the soft, warm skin of her shoulders and upper back. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the velvety, swirling tongue and hot suctioning mouth giving him such intense pleasure. Luz sucked him all the way into the back of her throat, and his eyes flew open. He loved watching his cock sliding between her slick lips, her nose bumping his dark, coarse hairs.

She gazed up at him and his heart leapt into his throat. What an indecent vision of love and intimacy! Desperate to reciprocate, he gently pulled free from her mouth and bent to kiss her. "On your back," he whispered, and she complied.

He retrieved the small bottle of lube and a condom from the bedside drawer and tossed them onto the mattress next to the plug. Sinking to his knees beside the bed, he placed his hands on her knees and slowly opened her thighs. He stared hungrily. For months he'd dreamed of burying his face in her cunt, of tasting the salty cream that coated the lips of her sex after an orgasm. Finally the opportunity to make that dream a reality had arrived.

He couldn't wait to hear her scream his name.

Grabbing her ankles, he hooked her knees over his shoulders. He traced her slit with his forefinger, eliciting a shudder from her aroused body. Musky heat filled his nose, stimulated him like a potent aphrodisiac.

Teasingly, he petted her glistening sex, purposely avoiding her clit in hopes of working her into a frenzy. His left forefinger prodded her entrance and slid inside easily, its path lubricated by the slippery juices oozing from her core. Turning his finger up, he rubbed the front wall of her vagina in search of that most sensitive spot. When he found it, she inhaled sharply and arched off the bed.

With a Cheshire cat smile, he added a second thrusting finger to her channel and trained the pads of his fingers on her G-spot. As his fingers massaged, he lowered his

head. Just the tip of his tongue contacted the stiff nub hidden at the apex of her dusky folds.

Keening, she lifted her hips, pressing her pussy against his lips. Not one to disappoint, he lapped her clit, alternating slow, broad licks with pointed flicks. Luz bucked and moaned, her thighs flexing and fingers gripping her comforter. Knowing that he could make her squirm like this, make her behave so wantonly, was such a turn-on. His dick was almost painfully hard and begging to be buried in her wet cunt, but he forced away his primitive impulses and concentrated on giving her ultimate pleasure.

While his tongue swirled around her clit, Heath's right hand moved toward the anal plug and lube resting on the comforter. It took a few pats before he located them. He picked up the lube and flipped the cap on the small bottle.

Very slowly, he removed the fingertips from her pussy but kept his mouth on her, trying to allay the groan of protest at the sudden loss of sensation. He squeezed lube onto the fingers of his right hand and dropped the capped bottle on the floor. His left fingers returned to her canal and instantly found the engorged tissue of her G-spot. He pumped against the area, making her cry out and tense.

As if sensing that he wanted her wide open, she lifted her knees from his shoulders, scooted a few inches away from him and placed her heels against the mattress. In this position, her anus was exposed – exactly what he wanted.

He abandoned her clit for a moment, and while his left hand continued fucking her pussy, the slippery fingers of his right hand circled her exposed anus. Her shuddery breaths of anticipation filled the room. Ever so gently, he prodded her puckered hole. She was so fucking tight, squeezing his finger as he worked it deeper inside her. Images of his cock sliding between her ass cheeks filled his mind. God, how amazing that would feel! He wondered how she would react if he asked for that most precious of sexual gifts. Not today, of course, but someday...

Another finger joined the first and soon he was moving the fingers of both hands in tandem, stroking in and out of her cunt and ass. Luz panted heavily as she fisted the comforter, her knuckles white. When he added his tongue to the mix, she went wild.

It took quite a bit of coordination to maintain his triple stimulation but Luz's guttural growls and sharp shrieks were all the motivation he needed. Her passages started to flutter around his fingers, heralding her fast-approaching orgasm. He sucked her clit between his lips and twirled his tongue around the little pleasure pearl...

A string of shouted expletives rushed forth from Luz's mouth as she suddenly came, her entire body pulsing and convulsing. Heath released the suction on her clit but continued licking tight circles around it while his fingers were rhythmically squeezed and released. Her fingers threaded through his hair, holding his head in place until she'd had enough. She loosened her grip on his head and idly stroked his temples while she huffed and trembled with aftershocks.

He placed kisses upon the insides of her thighs and bare mons. He carefully removed his fingers from her slick passages but replaced the two fingers probing her anus with the lubed tip of the anal plug. She moaned softly as he inserted the blue silicone toy into her loosened rosebud, not stopping until it was buried to the hilt in her ass. He retrieved the vibrator from the drawer, twisted it to a medium setting and placed it inside the base of the plug.

"Oh!" Luz gasped as the vibrating waves rippled through her.

Heath stood, stretching his knees and allowing blood flow back into his tingling feet. He ripped open a condom packet and applied the latex sheath before crawling onto the bed and stretching out beside her.

Luz clasped his cheeks and drew him close. Her warm mouth met his in a lazy kiss, their moist lips sliding and tongues darting back and forth. He palmed a breast and rubbed his thumb across a hardened peak. One of her hands left his face and traveled down the length of his arm before settling on his hip for a moment. Sighing, she opened

her mouth wider, allowing his tongue fully inside. Her hand left his hip and encircled the head of his penis. She stroked his stiff length, rotating her hand on the upstroke.

“Ride me,” he begged.

Nodding, she pushed against his shoulders, forcing his back to the mattress. When she started to throw a leg over his waist, he shook his head. “Facing away,” he instructed. “I want to watch your ass.”

Eyes flashing with lust, she obeyed, settling her dripping sex over his upper thighs and playfully wiggling her voluptuous cheeks. Appreciating the view, he slapped both cheeks simultaneously, gripping and kneading the brown flesh. He watched as her hand slipped between her thighs and grasped his quivering cock, holding it steady as she guided it into her pussy.

“Uhh!” she moaned as his penis disappeared inside her.

He could only imagine what delicious sensations she must be experiencing at that moment, her pussy and ass stretched by his cock and the plug. He was delightfully surprised to feel the subtle vibrations that radiated from the plug and spread to her pussy.

Hands on his thighs, she rocked back and forth, ass cheeks flexing with each movement. His fingertips danced across the expanse of her back, caressing up and down with sweeping motions. Goose bumps prickled her tan skin, no doubt an effect of the double penetration.

Neck taut, Heath lifted his head and stared at his cream-coated cock. The sight of it sliding in and out of Luz’s bouncing cunt was maddeningly arousing. Her fleshy globes just begged to be smacked, and he happily obliged. Luz yelped and rode him harder, hips gyrating, inner muscles tensing. While one of her hands fondled his tight sac, the other worked its magic against her clit. Desperate groans emanated from her throat as her hips swiveled and circled.

Although he’d planned to run Luz through a variety of positions, it now seemed his prick had other ideas. She felt so good and looked so amazingly sexy that it was futile to

try to contain his speedily building climax. When the depth and length of her breaths changed, he grabbed her waist and started pounding into her, his stomach muscles burning with exertion.

Luz shrieked like a banshee and pulsed around his shaft. His orgasm rushed through him, knocking the breath right out of his lungs. Jerking and grunting, he spilled his cum into the condom's reservoir. His fingertips bit into her flesh and he knew that she'd soon sport bruises, but she didn't protest.

Overwhelmed, he closed his eyes and tried to catch his breath. Luz lifted herself off his deflating erection and collapsed beside him, her cheek against his chest. Heath lost track of time as they cuddled atop the comforter. They traded occasional kisses and traced random shapes on one another's skin.

Eventually, Heath found the strength to unwind himself from her arms and take care of business in the bathroom. When he emerged a few minutes later, Luz was nowhere to be seen. He was about to pull on his boxers and go investigating when she appeared in the doorway, bare naked and holding a bowl of ice cream and two spoons.

"I was hungry," she explained with a small shrug.

Heath smiled and shook his head. He noticed the goose bumps on her arms and pulled down the comforter and top sheet so they could share their warmth under the covers. They climbed onto the bed and rested against fluffy pillows sandwiched between their backs and the slatted headboard. The bowl rested on the covers over Heath's thigh. As their spoons dipped into the sweet, cold dessert, they sometimes collided. The metallic clinks were the only sounds in the room for quite a while.

"I don't think you should sell the site yet," Luz piped up finally.

"Oh?" Heath was curious to hear her reason.

"If things don't work between us, I don't want you to regret selling it. I'm comfortable with full disclosure while we're dating."

"Are you sure? I meant what I said, Luz. That site is not worth what we have...what we could have in the future," he added. "I can make a living doing a lot of things."

"And I appreciate your willingness to make such a huge sacrifice," she assured him, fingers clasping his wrist. "But for now, full disclosure should be sufficient. We'll address the issue as our situation changes."

"All right," he said, nodding.

"Dating me won't be easy, Heath. I hope you realize that."

"I'm not naïve, Luz. I understand that the dynamics in a relationship like ours can be trying, but I don't think it's anything that a little patience and maybe a sense of humor can't fix. I'd rather not dwell on the negative possibilities though."

"We need to be realistic about some things, Heath. I'm forty-one years old. My prime baby-making years are long gone. If you're serious about having a family some day then I'm probably not your best choice."

Heath lovingly touched her cheek. "I want *you*, Luz. I love *you*. And yes, of course I realize that having a baby could present a problem, but Luz, there are a number of ways to have a family." He leaned forward and kissed her forehead. "We'll cross that bridge when we get there, okay?"

"Okay," she said, a smile brightening her face, his response seeming to calm her fears. "It's not just that I'm older than you, Heath. Dating a politician presents its own set of challenges. The public scrutiny is going to be intense, especially considering your site."

"You're not telling me anything that I haven't already considered. I'm ready to face down whatever comes our way."

"You make it sound so simple," she reproached. "It's not going to be easy."

He tenderly claimed her lips before replying matter-of-factly, "Nothing worth having ever is."

Epilogue

Christmas Eve, nine years later

Perched on the edge of her bed, Luz massaged vanilla-scented lotion into her calves and thighs. Her eyes skipped to the clock on the bedside table. It was a quarter past midnight.

Grimacing, she realized she'd be lucky to get six hours of sleep before the girls busted into the bedroom, clamoring to open their Christmas presents. That would most likely jumpstart an early morning tiff with the boys, who would no doubt refuse to roll out of bed at such a horridly early hour. The girls would then whine and wheedle until they managed to coax their brothers into the living room.

How could Luz be so sure this was the way things would go? Because it had happened last year and the year before that and...

She rubbed the excess lotion into her arms and rose from the bed. As she slipped into her robe, she switched off the bedside lamp and left the bedroom, intent on finding Heath.

Tying her robe's sash, she tiptoed down the hallway, pausing in front of the girls' garishly frilly pink princess bedroom to take a peek. When Luz noticed that six-year-old Bebe's bed was empty, she frowned and glanced at eight-year-old Clarita's bed. Sure enough, there were two bumps under the blush-pink comforter. The girls were inseparable, even at night.

Smiling, she moved across the hall and slowly turned the knob of the boys' door. A shaft of light from the night-lights lining the hallway illuminated the room. Eleven-year-old Cruz was sprawled atop his bedcovers, an open book resting on his chest. On the opposite side of the room, Zeke, thirteen, had an arm across his face, no doubt to shield his face from Cruz's reading light.

Luz's first instinct was to tiptoe into the room, turn off the light above Cruz's bed and remove the book from his chest, but she knew that he was such a light sleeper she would wake him. Since he had such a hard time with insomnia, she wasn't about to take that chance. She knew that Zeke didn't mind either, so she gently closed the door and retreated down the hallway.

As she crossed the living room, she picked up the plate of cookies and hot cocoa the girls had left for Santa Claus. Zeke and Cruz had long ago figured out that Santa was really Heath, but they still played along for their sisters' sakes. Luz carried Santa's snack into the kitchen and popped the mug of cocoa into the microwave. While the cocoa reheated, she nibbled one of the reindeer sugar cookies, amused by the wonky icing decorations that Bebe had applied.

Her mind wandered back to the somewhat rocky start of her relationship with Heath. God, those two nights in Mexico seemed so long ago and so far removed from where they had finally ended up nine years later.

After dating for almost a year, Luz and Heath had married in a small ceremony at the church she'd attended since childhood—they would celebrate their eighth anniversary in three days.

She'd been right. Their courtship hadn't been easy. Aside from the very loud and very painful protests from both sets of parents, Luz and Heath had been forced to confront the judgment of some of their friends and colleagues and, not surprisingly, the press. The latter had been soothed with full disclosure statements prominently displayed on Heath's blog, as well as the occasional interview.

Luz's stodgier colleagues had whispered behind her back for a few weeks, but eventually a much juicier political scandal found its way into the public arena and her relationship had been all but forgotten. Hilda supported Luz from the beginning, as had most of Luz's staff. Luz's seven siblings, along with Raquel and Katie, had voiced their worries in the early weeks of the relationship, but once they'd realized that Luz wasn't acting on some skewed impulse caused by a midlife crisis, they'd given their blessings.

Luz's and Heath's parents had been a bit slower to accept them as a couple, but with a little time and patience, they'd been able to prove to their parents that what they shared was real and true and deserved the same respect and acceptance as any other relationship.

Obviously Luz's constituents hadn't balked at her involvement with a younger man. She'd been reelected twice since marrying Heath and was now the senior Senator for the state of Texas. Her political clout was stronger than ever, and she wielded an immense deal of power on the Hill.

As soon as he'd proposed and Luz had accepted, Heath had sold BeltwayBlitz.net to the five contributing bloggers who'd been with him since the early days. He'd made a nice chunk of change from the deal and, although sad to see the end of that era of his life, he'd been utterly relieved to have the pressure lifted from his shoulders. He'd dabbled in freelance writing for a year and established his reputation as one hell of a witty topical writer. He'd accepted a position as a humor columnist with the *San Antonio Express-News*, and these days, his syndicated column could be found in newspapers across the nation.

They'd been married almost two years when Luz had stumbled upon a half-written mystery novel on Heath's desk while searching for sticky pads. She'd been sucked into the amateur sleuth tale from the first sentence. That Heath had chosen a close-knit, incorrigible and incredibly nosy group of elderly folks at an assisted-living home as his sleuths made the story different from anything she'd ever read in the genre, and she'd loved it.

When she'd asked him about it—actually, she'd begged him to finish the story—he'd been a bit miffed that she'd read his unfinished manuscript. Once she'd assured him that she liked it not *just* because she was his wife, he'd loosened up a bit. After that, Heath had started bouncing ideas off her, using her as his first critique partner as he worked to finish the manuscript.

What had followed the completion of his manuscript was eight months of disheartening literary agent rejections that sorely tried his patience and put him in quite the writing slump. Luz had done her best to encourage him, and sure enough, a top-rate agent eventually requested the partial manuscript, then the full...then called to offer representation.

The rest was history, as they say, and Heath was presently completing his seventh book in the acclaimed and much-beloved series.

The microwave beeped, drawing her back to the present. She popped the last bit of cookie into her mouth and retrieved the steaming cup of cocoa from the microwave. Placing it on the counter to cool a few degrees, she fetched a glass of water for herself. Sipping her water, she stood in front of the fridge and studied the numerous colored drawings and well-scored tests affixed to the appliance with magnets. A warm happiness spread through her as she thought of their children. Before meeting Heath, she'd all but resigned herself to being the spinster aunt to her brothers' and sisters' broods, and now she was the mother to four.

She and Heath had started trying for a baby as soon as they were married. Luckily, Luz hadn't started menopause yet so conceiving Bebe hadn't taken that long, only seven months. At forty-three, Luz had delivered Bebe at a birthing center in downtown San Antonio aided only by Heath and a duo of midwives. Quite a few people had scoffed at the idea of such an "old" first-time mom attempting an unmedicated birth, but Luz had stood her ground.

To be honest, it had been more painful and exhausting than she'd ever imagined, but there was no replacing the sense of accomplishment. Calling it a life-changing experience was the understatement of the century.

Not long after weaning Bebe, Luz had started menopause. Rather than undergoing fertility treatments, Luz and Heath chose adoption as a means of adding to their family. Just three years ago, they'd adopted Clarita, Cruz and Zeke, siblings who'd bounced from foster home to foster home for two years after being removed from their abusive,

drug-addicted parents. The first few months of adjustment had been extremely difficult. The kids were wary of forming attachments to Luz, Heath and Bebe. But showering them with love and providing them with the sense of security they'd so long needed helped the siblings to bond with their new forever family.

And what an extraordinarily happy family they were!

Setting down her empty glass, Luz picked up the cocoa and plate of cookies and left the kitchen for the garage. While she'd put the kids to bed and taken her nightly shower, Heath had gone down to the garage to put together the four bicycles that Santa would be leaving on the back porch.

She found Heath crouched in front of a purple bicycle, fumbling with a hot pink bow that wouldn't quite cooperate.

Just as handsome as ever, Heath still wore his hair a bit on the shaggy side and rarely shaved two days in a row. He'd never grown out of his jeans and T-shirts, but with his boyish charm, he easily pulled off the laid-back dad look, even though he was now in his late thirties. He still turned heads, especially at school events where Luz routinely caught the other moms – and a few dads – staring hungrily at her husband.

Luz gazed upon her husband's taut backside outlined in his blue-and-gray-striped pajama bottoms. Her eyes drifted up to the gray cotton fabric stretched across his muscular shoulders. Remembering those strong arms holding her up against the tile as he fucked her in the shower just that morning sent shivers through her tummy. Even after nine years together, Heath remained just as ravenous as always. Theirs was definitely a sexually insatiable marriage.

Sensing her presence, he looked over his right shoulder and sighed with relief. "Oh thank god, you're here. I'm crap at these bows, Luz."

Grinning, Luz extended the cocoa and cookies. "Here. Eat. I'll do the bows."

"Thanks." He accepted the snack and placed a noisy kiss on her cheek. "I love you, Luz."

"I love you too, Heath," Luz replied, amused by his random declarations of love.

He hopped onto the worktable. Legs kicking idly, he devoured the cookies and gulped his cocoa. Luz felt his heated stare as she expertly crafted big, beautiful bows on each of the bike's handlebars.

"No extra parts this year?" she asked, tossing a mischievous smile in his direction.

His eyes narrowed with annoyance, no doubt remembering the first Christmas that Clarita, Cruz and Zeke had joined the family. After Heath's hasty attempt to put three bikes together, he'd ended up with a handful of extra bolts and nuts. It had taken Luz most of the night to sort out where the extra bits went. "Hardy har har," he replied sarcastically.

Giggling, Luz gathered up the scraps of ribbon littering the garage floor and strode to the trashcan in the corner. As she walked, she felt the sash of her robe loosen and knew that Heath was getting quite a view of her bare legs and a glimpse or two of her upper thighs.

"Luz?"

"Yes?"

"What are you wearing under that robe?"

Clasping the lapels, she slowly turned to face him and revealed the gauzy red nightie with green ribbon trim. A matching green g-string with red side ties completed the slinky ensemble. The robe billowed as it fell to the floor of the garage. Heath's mug clanged as it met the surface of the worktable.

"I've been a very naughty girl," she purred sexily.

"Come here," Heath ordered huskily

And she did.

About the Author

Lolita has been writing naughty tales to entertain friends for years because, seriously, how else was she supposed to fuel her co-ed procrastination? Study organic chemistry or pen a quick story for her girlfriends? No surprise that she's on a sabbatical from college, eh?

A newlywed, Lolita lives in Texas with her paramedic husband. If not snuggling on the couch with her husband while tapping away at her laptop, Lolita can be found roaming her local bookstores, sipping cocktails with her closest friends, or carrying on conversations with her favorite plants.

Lolita welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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