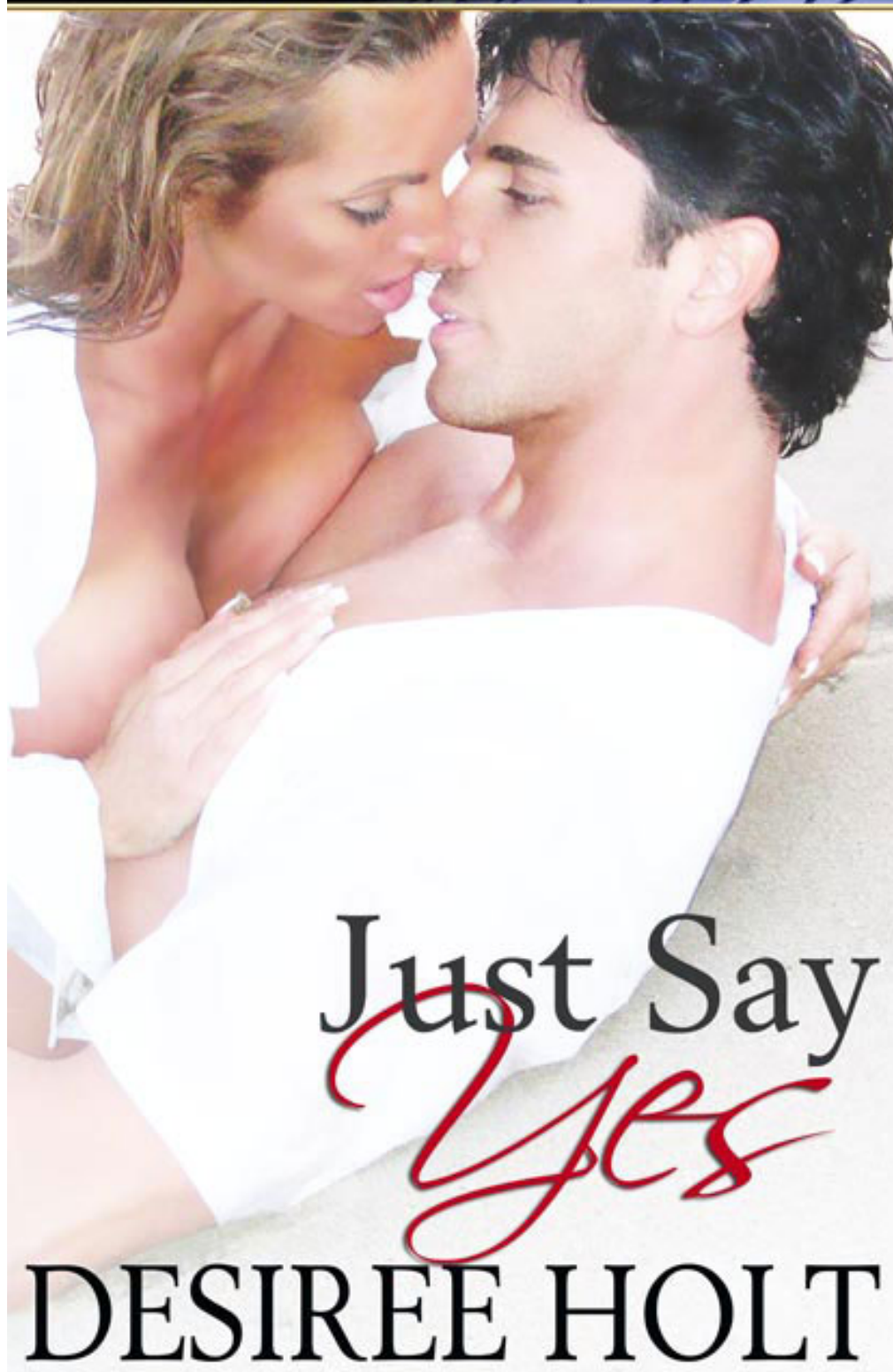


ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



Just Say
Yes

DESIREE HOLT

Just Say Yes

Desiree Holt

Shea Prescott is astonished when millionaire Cruz Castillo chooses her to design his new home on his ranch. They hardly travel in the same circles. But Cruz had been hot for Shea since he first saw her and when they meet, the chemistry between them ignites. Cruz coaxes her deeper and deeper into a whirlpool of erotic sex, awakening latent sexual desires and bringing her orgasms beyond her wildest imaginings. Her body screams yes at his every touch, but will she say yes to the most important question?

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Just Say Yes

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JUST SAY YES

Desiree Holt

Dedication

To my children, who always support their mother's unexpected career, and of course, as always, to my beloved David, who has always been my source of strength and support.

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Chapter One

Shea Prescott tugged on her short jacket—power red, of course—to straighten nonexistent wrinkles and brushed imaginary lint from her black skirt. Glancing around her office yet another time she assured herself that everything was in place, the client chairs properly placed, her pad for note-taking centered on her desk with freshly sharpened pencils and her computer set to produce her standard Power Point slide show with the touch of a button.

It wasn't as if this was her very first appointment ever. No, Shea Randolph Prescott had acquired quite an impressive list of clients, not just in San Antonio but throughout Texas. But it wasn't every day a man worth millions and known as much for his sexual prowess as his business acumen walked into her office.

Miguel Cruz Castillo was definitely a legend. Descended from Castilian Spaniards who had come to the New World six generations before, he had grown up in wealth and privilege. Yet once he'd gotten his college degree, he'd walked away from it all to build his own empire. He'd purchased land in both the Hill Country and central Texas before the big land boom and developed them into parcels for smaller ranches that sold for seven figures. The latest article she'd found on him discussed his recent purchase of a software company and an electronics manufacturer.

Two years ago he had added a cattle ranch south of the city that spread over ten thousand acres and was hugely profitable despite dips in both the economy and beef prices. The golden touch, everyone said.

He also appeared regularly on the society pages, a different woman on his arm each time. And in the cocktail lounges and on the party circuit the story of his conquests could almost fill an encyclopedia.

She was curious as to his reason for choosing to meet with her. Surely there were architects used by his friends and associates who would be more logical choices for him. She'd needed two days just to get over the shock of the call from his secretary. Word had it the man was dangerously sexy but Shea planned to put on her invisible armor and keep things strictly business.

She hoped.

As she looked at her watch yet again, the intercom on her desk buzzed and the voice of Marta, her secretary, said, "Señor Castillo is here."

Willing herself to calmness, she pressed the talk button and said, "Please show him in."

When Marta ushered him in, Shea rose to greet him but on very shaky legs. "Dangerously sexy" didn't half begin to describe him. Miguel Cruz Castillo was the ultimate alpha male, power surrounding him like a cloud. But it was the aura of rich masculine sex appeal that turned her legs to water and set every pulse in her body to thrumming. His lean runner's body was expensively clad in dark linen slacks, a cream-colored silk shirt and a light grey blazer. Dark hair like a thick pelt swept back from an olive complexion accenting an aquiline nose, high cheekbones and a sensuous mouth. And eyes a woman could drown in. She felt her armor melting away.

Taking a deep steadying breath, Shea leaned across her desk to extend her hand, hoping her smile didn't look as frozen as it felt.

"A pleasure to meet you, Señor Castillo."

He moved forward and took her hand in a warm, firm clasp. The electric jolt that shot through her arm and spread heat throughout her body stunned her and she did her best to conceal her reaction. As politely as possible she withdrew her hand but the flare of light in his eyes told her the same reaction had hit him.

"Please." He gestured with his hand. "Call me Cruz."

The smile he flashed her made everything tingle from her nipples to her cunt.

Not good, Shea. This is business. And besides. You are so far out of his league.

"After all," he continued, "if we're going to be doing business together, I find it always helps to be less formal. Especially since we'll be working so closely."

"About that." Shea sat back down in her chair and gestured for Cruz to take one of the client seats. "I'm very curious as to how you happened to pick me for whatever project you have in mind, rather than an architect recommended by one of your friends."

His eyes studying her face were like liquid pools of melted chocolate that she could easily fall into.

"Are you saying you don't want to take me on as a client? I know you are a busy person," he said in a mild tone, "but surely not so busy you have no free time, especially for someone who is prepared to spend a great deal of money."

Shea did her best to return his stare, folding her hands in front of her on the desk. "I'm not saying that at all. I'd just like to know what made you choose me. I don't travel in your circles, nor have I designed homes for any of your friends. So I'll ask you again. Why me?"

Cruz took his time answering, his eyes still watching her carefully. "I saw the new wing you designed for the library," he said at last. "I was impressed with your ability to adapt the architecture to the original style. And I think after that *fait accompli* you are more well-known than you imagine."

"I think you may be exaggerating a little." The library had been her best work so far but she was still young and earning her stripes. Getting that contract had been a major step forward.

"Someone pointed you out to me at the opening," he continued. "I would have offered my congratulations but you were swept away by your admirers."

Shea allowed herself a small self-deprecating laugh. "I think you exaggerate," she repeated, "but thank you for the compliment. I did work very hard to maintain the

historic feel of the building. The committee didn't want the new wing to stick out like a sore thumb."

"And that brings me to why I'm here." He uncrossed and recrossed his legs. "That night, seeing your work, I could tell immediately you would have the vision for what I want to create."

"And that is?" she prompted.

"Some time ago I purchased a large ranch about three hours south of San Antonio. The ranch is thriving, the pastures are very fertile. But the buildings..." He shook his head. "Serious victims of neglect. Even the buildings that house the hands. I've made temporary repairs and upgrades so everything is more than livable but what is there does not suit my needs."

"And you think I'm the person who can produce the designs you want?"

He nodded. "Without a doubt." He looked around at the framed sketches on her office wall. "Everything I see here only convinces me more."

If I have a sane thought in my head, I'll turn him down. This man is dynamite on the hoof and more than I can handle. Without a doubt.

Shea kept her hands folded in front of her, as much to still their trembling as to give herself some measure of control. Cruz Castillo made her very nervous with his blatant sexuality and his confident manner.

"At a first meeting I usually like to talk my clients through what they have in mind." She pulled the yellow pad of paper and a pencil toward her. "Let's start with some basic questions."

"I'd rather show you," he said in his warm drawl.

Shea put her pencil down slowly. "Site inspection usually comes later, Mr....Cruz. After I get some idea of what you're looking for and agree to take the job. Also, I'd better warn you, I don't come cheap."

Cruz uncrossed his legs again and leaned forward, arms resting on his knees. "As I indicated earlier, price is not a problem. And whatever I'm doing, I always go for the gold. The best. As to the site inspection, I'd prefer to do that first, so you can get a real idea of what I'm looking for. As a matter of fact, I am giving a party there this weekend to celebrate an unusually successful year. It will be a perfect opportunity for you to tour the ranch and get a feel for what I want."

"A party?" She raised an eyebrow. "I suppose you had this all planned out before you came here today. That's why you wanted the appointment now."

One corner of his full mouth turned up. "Are you accusing me of being devious?"

"Are you?" she fired back.

He placed a hand over his heart in a dramatic gesture. "You wound me, señorita. This is a business situation, is it not?"

"Yes, it is. But a party isn't the best time to discuss business of this kind. Not to mention it would be a long drive back and forth for me. No, I'm not sure that's such a good idea."

No, definitely not a good idea to spend an evening under a Texas moon in a seductive setting with this man. The only business we might get done is monkey business.

But apparently Cruz Castillo had thought this all through carefully. Maybe too carefully, she thought.

"No problem." There was that killer grin again. "I invite you to be my guest for the weekend. That way we will have plenty of opportunity for discussion before and after the party."

"The weekend?" Three days with this man? Already her pussy was weeping with need and all she was doing was having a formal discussion with him. Her breasts ached so she wanted to rip off her jacket and pinch the nipples until they darkened. No way could she spend one night under his roof and keep her act together.

"Afraid, Miss Prescott?" A knowing look sparked in his eyes. "I assure you, nothing will happen that you don't want. And what better opportunity to get a sense of the

flavor of the land." He rose and placed one of his warm hands over both of hers. "Just say yes, Miss Prescott. Or may I call you Shea?"

"Yes, of course." As soon as the words left her mouth she realized he'd take that as an acceptance of his invitation.

Sure enough, his warm chocolate eyes darkened. "Excellent. I will pick you up at your home Friday at nine o'clock in the morning."

"Nine o'clock?" She hoped her voice didn't sound as squeaky to him as it did to her. She swallowed hard. "Isn't that a little early?"

"It's a long drive, *cara*." His voice rolled over her like warm molasses, just the hint of an accent enough to give it an erotic tone. "We'll arrive at the ranch in time for lunch. Do you ride?"

"Ride?" She stared at him.

He smiled. "Horses. Do you ride horses?"

"Oh. Well, yes but not for a long time."

"Then I'll give you a gentle one. Like a rocking chair. And I will take you to where I want to build the new hacienda."

Bees seemed to be buzzing in her stomach as she thought of all the possible things that could happen in three days with this man.

"A-All right." Why did she suddenly feel so tongue-tied with him? She was not unused to sophisticated men. But Cruz Castillo was a whole different ball game. "I'll write down my address for you."

"Thanks but I actually have it." He lifted one of her hands and pressed a kiss to her knuckles. "Friday at nine. We're pretty casual at the ranch but bring something special for Saturday night."

He winked at her and before Shea could find her voice again he tipped his head and was gone.

He'd barely left before Marta was in front of her desk, eyes avid with curiosity.

"Okay, give. You forgot to tell me he was king of the hunks." She fanned herself with both hands. "Lordy, lordy. He can put his shoes under my bed any time at all."

Shea busied herself straightening the items on her desk. "This is strictly business, Marta. The client just happens to be an exceptionally good-looking man."

"Good-looking?" Marta threw back her head and laughed. "Honey, he's way past good-looking. Did I hear him say he's picking you up Friday?"

"We're going to his ranch so I can get a feel for the site." Shea kept her eyes on her desk.

"Mm-hmm." Laughter bubbled in Marta's voice. "That's a long trip for one day."

"He's invited me for the weekend," Shea mumbled, unwilling to meet the other woman's eyes.

"The weekend, huh? Well, woman, we've known each other long enough for me to tell you to take down your hair and let it all hang out. You don't get three days with a hunk like him very often. Don't screw it up."

"I told you," Shea insisted. "This is business."

"Uh-huh. You know what they say about all work and no play." Marta was laughing again as she headed back to her desk.

Shea took off her jacket, hung it over the back of her chair and seated herself on the tall stool at her drafting table. Usually no matter what was crowding her mind she could lose herself in creating a design. Today it just didn't seem to work. After an hour of trying to concentrate she gave up and put everything away.

"I'm sneaking out early," she told Marta. "If anyone calls tell them I had an appointment out of the office."

"Going home to start getting ready for the weekend?" Marta teased.

"Ha ha ha," she said in a slightly sarcastic tone. "See you tomorrow."

But despite her good intentions, she couldn't seem to get Cruz Castillo out of her mind. What was he like as a lover? Was he bold and demanding? Kind and considerate?

Somehow she was sure he was all of that and more. And she had no business even entertaining thoughts like that. He was way out of her league in every way she could think of.

Still, images of him danced in her brain all the way home. And when she stripped off her clothes and stood naked before her mirror, she couldn't help cupping her breasts and wondering how Cruz's hands would feel holding them. She pinched her nipples and wondered if his fingertips were rough or smooth. Sliding her hands down her body she followed their path in the mirror until she reached the soft curls covering her cunt.

Shea closed her eyes and imagined Cruz's fingers working their way through those curls, slipping between the pouty lips of her cunt and sliding into the welcoming liquid of her pussy. Before she realized it she was plunging her own fingers into her waiting channel, stroking them in and out, feeling the slippery slickness. She moved her other hand so her thumb rested on her clit, pushed on it, rubbed it faster and faster.

As the orgasm rose within her she gritted her teeth to stay on her feet, her body shuddering with the convulsions. She kept her fingers inside until the last spasm had died away. Too bad it wasn't Cruz Castillo's cock inside her. She'd bet her orgasm would have a lot more punch to it. When she opened her eyes to look at her image in the mirror, she saw her face was flushed and her eyes slumberous. Was this how she always looked after sex?

She jerked her hand free of her body. And why the hell was she thinking of sex and Cruz Castillo? She was simply presuming something that might not even happen, despite his reputation. Maybe this *was* just a business deal. After all, he could have his pick of any woman in the state of Texas. She'd be no more than a toy to him, cast aside when he'd had his fun. Right?

Shea mentally slapped herself. *Get over it, she told herself. You don't mix business with pleasure, anyway.*

But a little voice whispered, *This could be the exception.*

* * * * *

Cruz Castillo fed just a little too much gas into his engine as he sped away from downtown San Antonio toward his headquarters at the northwest end of the city. Shea Prescott was everything he'd expected and more. Much, much more. He hadn't expected the visceral punch her presence delivered to him, or the electricity that crackled around them from the moment he stepped into her office. She literally took his breath away.

She wasn't the classic model figure, with straight hair and long legs. No, Shea Prescott was a tiny package, he guessed barely five foot three, with voluptuous curves that he wanted to run his hands over and deep blue eyes that reminded him of the ocean in summer. The connection between them was unexpected and instantaneous.

He knew she'd felt it too, the way she'd snatched her hand back as politely as she could but unable to conceal the heat that flared in her eyes. He'd had all he could do not to strip off her clothes and fuck her on top of that huge desk of hers. But from all he'd been able to learn about her, Shea didn't do one-night stands or quickies. Which was good since he wanted more than that from her. Much, much more.

Cruz thought of himself as the perennial bachelor, sometimes in extended relationships, sometimes not but always making sure each woman knew there was an end as well as a beginning. Once he had made a near-fatal mistake and that had been a permanent cure. He thought. Because Shea Prescott could make him break his own rules. From the moment he spotted her at the opening of the new library wing he knew he not only wanted her but wanted to keep her. He hoped he wouldn't live to regret it.

Finding the right approach to her had taken some time. He was aware that just asking her out on a date would get him a big fat no. He'd asked enough questions—discreetly, of course—to know that she was very selective in the men she spent time with and seldom if ever accepted invitations from strangers. Therefore he would have to become someone she was familiar with.

The perfect opening presented itself when he decided to do some serious building on the *finca* – the ranch. He could have chosen one of the architects used by his friends but this was his entrée to Shea Prescott and he leaped at the chance.

When he walked into her office today, he was stunned once again by her presence. Honey blonde hair swept up into a twist emphasized the startling blue of her eyes, the delicate structure of her face and the graceful column of her neck. Her outfit, while completely professional, couldn't help but accentuate the roundness of her body, a sight that almost literally made his mouth water.

When he extended the invitation for the weekend he'd been hopeful she'd accept it but hadn't been too optimistic. He was pleasantly surprised when she said yes. A party was a good excuse to get her down there where he could court her with music and food and atmosphere and would also give her a chance to see exactly where he wanted to build.

Go slowly, he told himself and he didn't mean his driving.

He didn't want to rush this and ultimately lose the prize he sought. He'd never been in love before. In lust many times but nothing with strong emotions attached. But with Shea Prescott he knew he could make that emotional commitment. She was a woman of grace and elegance and outward cool that concealed banked fires. A woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with.

So despite the painful bulge of his straining erection and the desire boiling in his veins, he would do something with Shea Prescott he'd never done with a woman before. Court her. And in a way that would make sure she would say yes.

Chapter Two

Shea changed clothes five times Friday morning before she was satisfied with her outfit. *Casual* meant a lot of different things to different people. They were going to a ranch, so she finally settled on jeans, a soft cotton blouse and sandals. Rather than pin her hair into its usual twist, she pulled it into a high ponytail and, in a touch of whimsy, tied it with a ribbon matching her blouse. Too frivolous, she wondered?

She'd been just as indecisive in choosing what to pack. Her bedroom looked as if the clothes fairy had thrown up all over it. At last she just threw in what she thought would be appropriate and hoped she'd made the right choices. She'd even dug into the back of the spare closet and found a pair of western boots she'd worn to a fundraiser. Hopefully they'd be as good for riding as they were for showing.

At least a dozen times she'd picked up the phone to call Cruz and tell him she'd changed her mind. She had this unshakeable feeling that she and Cruz Castillo would end up in bed together before the weekend was over. But that wasn't what worried her the most. Sex with Cruz dangled before her like fine chocolate, to be relished and enjoyed.

And then left behind while she got on with their business. She'd made up her mind she could keep them separate, maintain her professional distance. Because lordy, the more she thought about it the more she wanted it.

What really worried her was the fact this was a man she could fall in love with. And that would be a disaster, because Cruz Castillo didn't seem like the marrying kind. He'd said that often enough in public.

Okay, she was a big girl. She could handle this. She hoped.

Promptly at nine the doorbell rang. When she opened it she could hardly keep herself from drooling. Somehow she'd expected him in expensive slacks and shirt, his

version of casual. But Cruz stood there in faded jeans that outlined every muscle in his legs and barely concealed the impressive bulge behind the whitened fabric of his fly. The black t-shirt stretched across the muscles of his broad chest and accented the warm olive of his skin.

I am in such big trouble.

"Ready?" he asked, giving her that slow grin.

"Oh!" She shook herself from her erotic imaginings. "Yes. All set."

She went to reach for her suitcase but he slipped smoothly into her hallway and took it from her hands.

"I never permit ladies to carry their luggage," he told her. "My mother would smack me with a ruler."

"Do your parents live around here?"

He nodded. "Right now they have a beautiful home here in San Antonio. But my father is only semi-active in running his business anymore and my mother has never really liked the city. I want to build them one on the ranch, like where my mother grew up. That's part of the project."

Shea didn't know what she'd expected Cruz to drive, maybe a flaming red sports car, but certainly not the hybrid SUV parked in the driveway.

"What? I can't be environmentally conscious? You wound me."

She shrugged. "I just figured you for...something else."

"What else did you figure me for?" he asked as he backed out of the driveway. "Do you believe everything you read in the newspapers? That I'm a playboy who drinks, carouses and is never without a woman?"

"I'm sorry, I just..."

"That wouldn't leave me much time to conduct business, would it?" he chided. "Perhaps I can show you the real Cruz Castillo this weekend and change your mind about how you see me."

Shea was having enough trouble with herself in the SUV without worrying about what would happen when they reached their destination. Cruz's erotic aura of masculinity filled the space inside the vehicle, surrounding her and teasing her hormones into overdrive. The scent of his woodsy cologne drifted across her nose, tickling her senses.

Funny. She'd been worried from the moment he stepped into her office that he'd make a move on her. It shocked her to realize *she* was the one who needed to maintain control. To keep herself from giving in to the sensual urges that swept through her just by sitting so near to him. Not only was it totally out of character for her, it also would be completely unprofessional.

She clasped her hands in her lap, tightening them in an effort to maintain control of her body, which seemed to have a mind of its own.

Cruz pulled smoothly onto the Interstate, then slid a glance in her direction.

"Something bothering you, *cara*?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because you look as if you're afraid to breathe and if you tighten those hands any more you're liable to break your fingers."

Damn.

With a conscious effort she drew in a long breath and let it out slowly. But her state of mind wasn't helped when Cruz reached over and stroked her arm. Tiny shivers skittered over her skin and she was aware of the sudden rush of fluid in her crotch.

"Don't worry, Shea." His voice was soft, warming. "Nothing is going to happen unless you want it to. I promise you."

She jerked a glance at him. "What's that supposed to mean? I thought this was a business weekend."

"And would it hurt so much if we snuck in a little playtime?" His voice held a hint of amusement.

"Let's get something out on the table right now," she snapped, irritated at both him and herself. "I'm not one of your pieces of eye candy throwing myself at you and I don't mix business with pleasure. I have too much respect for myself."

"And besides, my reputation precedes me, right?" His words held just a hint of resentment.

Didn't he *enjoy* what was whispered about him? The persona he'd created? He seemed to enjoy maintaining it. Or was it as he'd indicated, the gossip mill grinding away while he was simply a businessman doing what was necessary to sustain a position of power?

"I'm sorry," she said at last. "I'm really forgetting my manners. And you're right. I'm prejudging you based on rumor." She turned her head and gave him a tiny smile. "Not so good for business. Can we just start over again?"

He laughed, a full-throated sound. "Absolutely. Señorita Prescott, I am Miguel Cruz Castillo. Please call me Cruz."

"And I'm Shea Prescott."

"Shea." He rolled the name around on his tongue. "Very nice. I like the sound of it. And I am looking forward to hosting you at my ranch this weekend so we can discuss an enormous project for which I need an excellent architect."

"Well, then. I think you've come to the right person."

With just that little exchange she relaxed and the rest of the ride passed without incident. But the sexual tension that Shea had felt the moment they were both buckled into their seats didn't diminish. Rather it continued to snap and sizzle around them. She wondered again how she would handle the next three days. And if she really wanted to keep him at arm's length.

After a time they left the interstate for a two-lane country road.

"All of this is ranchland," Cruz told her.

With one hand he indicated the vast acres of pasture rolling away from the road. Much of it was dotted with trees. And while some stretches of land had no livestock visible, others were filled with cattle ambling slowly along, stopping now and then to graze. Here and there Shea saw tall metal cylinders that she knew were stock tanks that held water for the herds.

When they made another turn onto a graveled road, Shea caught her breath in wonder. On either side of the gravel, lined up like sentinels, were live oaks, sweetgum and mimosa trees. It was obvious they'd been there before someone cut through to make the driveway. Through the trees she could see pastures, dotted with more trees and cattle. It was like a scene from a western novel.

But then the house came into view and she wanted to weep at its elegance. It was old, probably hadn't been well-maintained but the graceful lines of the traditional Spanish hacienda were still evident.

"Oh, Cruz." She stared. "It's just beautiful."

He laughed, that low sexy sound that made her body tingle. "It will be when we're finished with it. I've made sure the plumbing and electricity are all in working order but the house itself would take massive work to make it the way I want."

"You wouldn't tear it down!" She looked at him shocked.

"No, *cara*. You and I will discuss how it fits into the overall plans. Meanwhile let's take your suitcase inside and you can meet Safina. She really runs the show here."

A slender Mexican woman, her graying hair pinned up in a twist, stood in the open doorway, the smile on her face welcoming but tentative.

"*Buenas dias*, Señor Castillo," Her voice had a warm musical quality. "Is this our honored guest?"

Shea looked at Cruz, eyebrows raised. He smiled, the look of a little boy who'd been caught at something. "But you are a guest and a most honored person, are you not?"

She shrugged and looked at Safina as if to say, *What can you do with him?*

The woman frowned at Cruz, then her mouth turned up in a warm smile.

"Welcome to Rancho Castillo. The señor will bring in your suitcase. I hope you will find your room satisfactory."

"I'm sure I will," Shea told her.

Cruz lifted out her suitcase with one hand and put the other at the small of her back, guiding her forward. She could feel the outline of each finger as if he were branding her with them, the heat traveling through her body to take up residence in her cunt. She was already thinking about the night ahead with a mixture of dread and anticipation.

The inside of the house was cool, with open rooms flowing into each other but Shea could see that the impression of space it gave was an illusion. She knew Cruz would want something spacious and rambling, a house that would make a statement. Already she was marshaling her arguments to keep to the time-honored Spanish architecture.

"I had Safina prepare this room for you, Shea. I hope it is to your liking."

"How could it not be?" she asked.

The walls were adobe, painted a soft peach and the floor was tiled in terra cotta. The antique carriage bed had a thick quilt of peach, mint green and pale yellow, with matching curtains at the wide window. A carved wooden dresser stood against one wall. The room was not large but again, the colors gave it a feeling of space.

"The bathroom is through that door." Cruz nodded at a door on the far side of the room. "Even though I knew this would not be my permanent residence, I made sure each room had its own bathroom with modern conveniences."

"An extravagance if you don't plan to live here."

"But someone will, *cara*. Not to worry." His hand trailed down her spine and rested on the curve of her buttocks. "Would you like to see my room?"

Shea cocked an eyebrow. "For what purpose?"

He stroked her back again, lightly as if petting a cat. "Perhaps to round out your picture of my personality. I told you. Nothing is going to happen, now or ever, unless you want it to. That's not my style."

She wanted to ask him what his style really was, underneath all the bullshit but then they were standing in his bedroom and all she could focus on was the huge, carved wooden bed in the center of the room. Because this room was on the same scale as the others, the bed, covered with a hand-stitched Mexican quilt in vivid shades of blue and grey, dominated the area. She tore her eyes away from it to take in the carved wooden chest of drawers and bedside table. Sliding doors led out to an enclosed patio.

Cruz's warm hand was on her back again as he led her toward it, opening the doors and ushering her outside. She stopped, again her eyes widening at what she saw.

"You had a hot tub installed."

"Indeed. I am a man who likes my comforts." He brushed his fingers against her cheek. "Perhaps we will make use of it after our ride. Something to ease the sore muscles."

Get into the hot tub with Cruz Castillo? She didn't think so. But then his lips were close to her ear, his breath warm against her skin and as he whispered, "A pleasure I would like to share with you, *cara*," she felt her control slipping away. She knew she should move away from him but when he turned her to face him she was simply pliant in his hands.

"This has nothing to do with business," he murmured. "I too, keep business and pleasure separate. But sometimes they collide, no? Your talent is remarkable. Which is why I want to hire you. But make no mistake. I also want you in my bed. But only if you agree."

His lips moved over hers, a feathery kiss that set every one of her pulses to throbbing. Almost effortless he pulled her against his body so his thick erection pressed against the soft flesh of her belly. She was so mesmerized by his kiss she didn't even realize she was moving her hips back and forth against his cock.

His hands tightened on her shoulders and he took a step back. His eyes had darkened almost to black but they were lit with sexual heat.

"I think we may use that hot tub after all." He set her away from him. "Come. Let us have some lunch, then a ride. Do you have proper boots?"

She laughed. "I have boots. You'll have to judge if they're proper or not."

Shea could not have said what she ate for lunch, she was so preoccupied with Cruz's words. Nor did she retain much about their ride, except to realize how vast and how beautiful Rancho Castillo was. She did take note of the site where Cruz told her he wanted to build his new house and when they returned to the barn he indicated where he wanted to expand the quarters for the hands.

"And small houses for the married ones," he told her. "It is the tradition of the *fincas*—ranches— in Mexico. But we will get to that later. Much later."

"I look forward to it."

He walked her through the house to her room. "Why don't you meet me at the hot tub? I had Safina leave a bathing suit and towels for you. I keep extra suits in the house for guests who come...unprepared."

"I assumed you'd think suits an unnecessary evil," she joked.

He brushed her cheek in that casual way that was becoming a habit but that drove her thermostat into redline.

"Only if you want to, *cara*. The choice is yours." He winked. "Come. Let's unwind and soak our weary muscles." He leaned closer. "Just say yes, Shea. Unwind a little."

"A-All right. Just give me a minute."

Her hands were shaking as she stripped off her clothes and tugged on the unfamiliar bathing suit. It was a one-piece and should have been modest but it was cut so high at the thighs, so low in the back and front she felt as if she were wearing nothing. No matter how much she tugged at it, a large amount of skin was still exposed.

"Sissy," she chided herself. "You wouldn't be doing this if you didn't want to."

And it wasn't just the tempting thought of the hot, bubbling water after the hours on horseback that made her agree to this. No, it was the image of Miguel Cruz Castillo half naked, waiting for her. She couldn't put this all on him. From the moment he'd walked into her office she and her libido had been waging a battle royal. If she weren't drawn by his blatant sexuality, by the erotic promise in his eyes, by the way her body reacted to him again and again, she wouldn't be here at all.

With a sigh and still striving for some semblance of decorum, she wrapped one of the big towels around herself sarong style before heading to the patio.

* * * * *

He was moving too fast and he knew it. He'd told himself this was not to be rushed, yet he couldn't seem to keep from touching her, from seeking opportunities to put his hands on her. Lunch had been wonderful. Safina, as always, had prepared just the right menu and he'd kept up a running chatter about Rancho Castillo and his plans for it. But the kiss... Too soon. Business first, then play, he chided himself.

Let her get to know you as a person. You're a good cattleman. Don't rush your fences.

He'd been saying that right along. Still he didn't regret the kiss for one minute. Her lips were like the softest velvet, her mouth a wet, delicious cavern. And she hadn't pulled away as he'd expected. Quite the contrary. She'd pressed that body with its rounded curved against his, making his cock stand at attention and try to break free of its restraint.

And now he waited for her in the hot tub. Why the hell had he been so stupid as to suggest it? The tub was nothing but a big, wet playroom which he'd often used for fun and games. He was sure that thought would go through Shea's mind. And with wine iced in a bucket and two goblets beside it, what he'd created was a scene for seduction if he ever saw one and he was afraid that was exactly how she'd see it. He'd just have to grind his teeth a lot and show her that he was a gentleman who could control himself.

Yeah, right!

* * * * *

Cruz was already in the hot tub and just as enticing as she'd imagined. His naked chest and shoulders were exposed above the froth of the bubbling water. Hair as dark as the thick pelt on his head covered his chest in tiny whorls. His muscular arms relaxed along the edge of the tub, glistening with moisture. His full lips curved in a smile but the heat in his eyes would have melted the polar ice cap.

At one corner of the tub, resting on the concrete, was a bottle of wine nestled in an ice bucket and two filled goblets next to it.

"I never drink until the lady arrives," he told her. "Come. Unwrap yourself and we'll drink a toast. To our shared venture."

Feeling suddenly foolish and immature at her stupid attempt at modesty, Shea unknotted the towel and dropped it on a nearby chair. She did her best to ignore the rising look of lust in Cruz's eyes as she stepped backward into the hot tub, immersing herself to the neck. She stretched her arm out to accept the goblet Cruz extended to her and moved with it to the far side of the tub.

"Afraid of me, *cara*?" He chuckled. "All we're doing is relaxing. Sip some wine, then come here so I can rub the tension from your shoulders."

She lifted her wineglass and took a fortifying gulp. "I'm fine here. Just where I am."

And I don't trust myself close to you.

"Then I'll come over there to you."

In an instant he was beside her, his thigh brushing hers. He sipped his own wine, then set the glass on the rim of the tub and slid behind her. The moment she felt his hands on her shoulders, kneading the taut muscles, she began to relax. She had to admit there was magic in his touch, as the tension slipped from her body and her muscles became loose and limp. She closed her eyes and leaned back, fully relaxed until she felt his hard cock pressing against her buttocks.

She tensed and immediately he moved his hands and backed away.

"I could make you feel even better, Shea and I think you know it. But only if you want me to. Only if it would please you too. Turn around and look at me."

Slowly she turned, mesmerized by the sound of his voice.

"You want it too. I know you do. You feel the same thing I do. Say yes, Shea. Please. Just say yes."

Wondering if she was making the biggest mistake of her life, Shea wet her lips with the tip of her tongue, let out her breath and whispered, "Yes."

Chapter Three

Cruz cupped her cheeks in his hands, studying her face for the longest time before bending to touch his mouth to hers. This was no brief kiss, no glancing touch. This was a full-blown predatory taking of her mouth. He shifted her head this way and that to find the best angle. When his tongue probed then slipped inside she opened for him, welcoming the feel of him. His tongue was a flame, lighting nerves wherever it touched, sending messages to other nerves in her body.

He drank from her like a man dying of thirst and she gave him back as good as she got. Somehow she'd known kissing this man would be an almost mystical experience, lifting her entire body to another plane. When his lips slipped from her mouth to slide down the column of her neck, she tilted her head back to give him better access. He nibbled, nipped and licked until he reached the hollow of her throat where he placed a hard, open-mouthed kiss. The tip of his tongue pressed against the erratic pulse beating there.

Shea clutched Cruz's shoulders, neck arched, breasts thrust against his chest. Above the very low-cut suit she could feel the soft, damp curls covering his rock-hard chest. Her nipples were so hard she was afraid they'd poke through the flimsy fabric. When she rubbed herself back and forth a low moan echoed from Cruz's throat and his hands tightened on her arms.

He thrust his lower body against hers, pressing his hard cock against the mound of her pussy. The thin material of their swimsuits might as well have been nonexistent. She could feel every bump and ridge on the engorged shaft between Cruz's legs, even the faint touch of the swollen sac of his testicles. When she lifted her eyelids, heavy with desire, she saw answering molten desire in Cruz's deep pools of melted chocolate.

“Do you know how badly I want you, *cara*?” His voice was thick and raspy. “How I want to run my lips and hands over every inch of your body? To drink your delicious nectar? To suck those rosebud nipples into my mouth?”

She didn’t know how to answer him, afraid anything she said would give away her true feelings. Instead she tightened her arms around his neck, tilted her head and drew her tongue along the line of his chin. His hands slid down her back to cup her buttocks and pull her more firmly against him. When Shea lifted her legs and wrapped them around his waist, only the porous material at her crotch prevented his penis from pushing its way into her pussy. She could already feel the tiny muscles inside her pulsing with the need to grip Cruz’s hot shaft.

She opened her eyes to stare into his and realized with a start that they were actually out in the open. Sure, there was the tall privacy fence but what if Safina came into Cruz’s bedroom looking for him? Or one of the hands opened the side gate, even though he was sure to knock first?

Abruptly she dropped her legs and pushed herself away from the hard male body. Her heart was still hammering against her ribs and her breathing was ragged. Without a doubt and despite her good intentions she wanted this man. Badly. But not like this. Especially not *here* where he’d probably fucked enough women to fill the Alamodome, in San Antonio.

She tightened her ponytail, smoothing stray hair back from her face.

“Cruz,” she began.

“It’s all right,” he interrupted, a dark flush staining his cheeks. “I tried to play the romantic and came off as a lecher. I truly apologize.”

She shook her head. “No. I’m the one who should be apologizing. I did nothing to discourage you. More than that, I responded to you. It’s just that...” She waved her hand at the space around them.

Awareness lit his eyes. “You think someone will see us.”

She nodded.

"We are very private here, *cara*. I assure you we are safe from everyone's eyes."

Quit thinking and do what you want, her brain shrieked at her.

"Still..." She nibbled on her lower lip.

Cruz heaved himself out of the tub, then reached down for Shea's hand. "Then let us move to a more private place." He paused. "Unless you've changed your mind?"

She kept nibbling on that lip, knowing she should say no but realizing just how much she wanted this man. She'd practically attacked him in the water, after all. Was she killing a large commission for a romp in bed?

"Shea?" he prompted.

"All right." She grasped his hand for leverage as she climbed the few steps.

As if afraid to release her for fear she'd change her mind and bolt, he kept a tight hold on her hand until they were in his bedroom.

"Stay right here," he told her, leaving her next to his bed. "I'll be right back."

In seconds he returned with the wine and goblets, setting them on the nightstand. He also carried over one arm the towel she'd left behind. Hastily blotting himself dry, he slowly patted away the moisture on her skin, touching every part of her body. Shea stood compliant, fully aware of what was coming next and trembling with anticipation.

Cruz tossed the towel to the side and with slow, careful movements rolled her swimsuit down her body, revealing first her breasts with the hardened tips, then her slightly rounded belly and wide hips and finally the bush of curls covering her mound. In seconds the suit joined the towel and he simply stood before her drinking in her nudity.

"Magnificent," he breathed, his nostrils flaring and fire burning in his eyes. "A vision of perfection."

"You're a magnificent liar, Cruz Castillo." She knew she was blushing, self-conscious as his eyes took in every inch of her flawed figure.

"Liar?" One eyebrow rose. "I don't think so. What makes you say that?"

She tried to cross her hands over herself and wished heartily it was nighttime and there were no lights on. "Come on, Cruz. I know exactly what I look like. I'm definitely no competition for the gorgeous women that hang on your arm."

His face tightened. "Faceless pieces of cardboard. A wind would easily blow them away and good riddance."

"But—"

He stepped closer to her and reached out both hands, skimming the curve of her hips, the slight swell of her belly, slipping behind her to trace the slope of her buttocks.

"You are a real woman, Shea Prescott. One a man could sink into and get lost in. One he could wrap around himself to keep away the cold. Do not *ever* let me hear you denigrate yourself again. I wouldn't trade you for one hundred of those artificial females."

She didn't know what to say. She actually felt tears gathering in her eyes and she blinked hard. The last thing she needed was to turn into a sobbing mess when she was on the verge of having what she expected to be stupendous sex with Cruz Castillo. When he stripped off his swim shorts she automatically dropped her gaze. Her eyes fastened on Cruz's erection, pointing straight at her, rising from a thick nest of dark curls.

"You aren't so bad yourself, Miguel Cruz Castillo." Her voice was unsteady as she stared at his thickly swollen penis. A pearlescent drop of moisture sat atop the slit on the darkened purple head. She ran the tip of her tongue slowly over her bottom lip, wishing she were tasting something else.

"I'm glad you like what you see." Cruz's voice was rough with need. "But I want to do more than look."

He lifted her in his muscular arms and laid her gently on the bed, stretching out beside her. His mouth took a journey over her cheeks, her forehead, her jawline, her neck, to that tender place where neck and shoulder join. As he bit gently on it one palm cradled a breast, thumb and forefinger pinching the nipple.

Moisture pooled between her thighs, coating them with its slickness and the quivering in her pussy began again. The beat of her pulse thrummed throughout her body. She reached up a hand to caress his cheek but he grasped it gently and placed it on the pillow beside her head.

“Uh-uh, *mi amor*. I don’t want anything distracting me while I learn every curve and swell, every place of slickness and heat that your body offers.”

He returned the hand to her breast and she felt the heat of it against her skin. Her nipple ached to be touched again, to be teased and tormented but instead Cruz bent his head and captured it with his mouth.

The surface of his tongue was rough against the tender bud, igniting miniature nerve endings. The more he swirled his tongue around it, the more sensitive it became. She wanted to cry out to him *Bite me!* And had no idea where the words had come from. Sex with the partners she chose had always been fulfilling but somewhat...genteel. Yet with Cruz Castillo she wanted to be a wild woman, a she-cat, to try anything and everything.

Am I losing my mind?

If she was it was already gone, because the moment he drew the nipple taut into his mouth and scraped it with his teeth her hips arched off the bed and a low cry rolled up from her throat. She couldn’t help herself. She reached for Cruz’s head and ran her fingers through the dark silk of his hair, pulling his head more tightly against her. He shifted to move his head to the other breast, affording that nipple the same treatment, while the fingers of his free hand continued to tease at the one now wet and throbbing.

She moved back and forth, sliding her hips, arching up, wanting his lips *there*. Wanting his hands *there*. Wanting his cock *inside her*. He moved his head down her body, tongue marking his passage through the valley of her breasts and down across her navel to the top of her mound. Sliding one of his legs between both of hers, he nudged them open and moved his body to give himself better access to her cunt.

His breath was a warm breeze against her pubic curls, his fingers tender as he opened the lips of her pussy to fully expose her hot flesh. When he placed an open-mouthed kiss full on the entrance to her vagina, chills skittered along her spine and her hips jerked in response.

He looked up at her, the slickness of her moisture glistening on his lips. "You taste better than the finest wine, *cara*. Better than champagne or cognac. I could get drunk on your juices alone."

"Please," she moaned. "Please, Cruz."

"Don't rush me," he told her. "I want to take my time."

He moved his mouth to her hip, his tongue tracing the line where hip and thigh joined. He lifted one leg and licked the back of her thigh to just behind the knee. Sensations raced through her, an erotic mixture of hot and cold. When his tongue reached the flesh of her buttocks and he nipped at it with his teeth little cries of need burst from her throat.

She tried to urge him to the center of her body, to her quivering pussy but he was doing exactly as he'd promised...taking his time. Drawing it out.

He began on the other leg, sweeping his tongue over every inch of her thigh and sliding his mouth down to nip at her buttocks again. Then it was back to the wide-mouthed kiss on her pussy but this time he ran his tongue the length of her slit, pausing at the top to swirl it around her aching clit.

Shea felt as if she'd fallen into a bottomless pile of black velvet, with nothing to catch her and nothing to hold onto. She tossed and turned but all that happened was the feeling wound itself around her more tightly, caressing her as Cruz did with his hands, his mouth, his tongue.

And that tongue was so educated. It thrust in and out of her cunt in a steady rhythm, while the thumb and forefinger of one hand pinched and rubbed her cit. She arched her body, her hips urging him to penetrate deeper, to take her higher. But the

black velvet kept her suspended, aroused but unsatisfied, as Cruz took her body from one plane to the next.

His shoulders pressed against the inside of her thighs, pushing them even wider. Shea tried to wrap her legs around his neck but he had her thighs too wide apart. All she could do was lie there helplessly while his mouth plundered her, sucking the lips of her cunt, his tongue thrusting in again and again to arouse all the little nerve endings.

Her breath was shallow and her heart beat erratically as she reached again and again for the elusive peak of orgasm. Cruz was skilled in knowing just what to do to hold her at the edge. She fisted her hands, grabbing handfuls of the sheets. The strange noises she heard seemed to be coming from her mouth.

Then he slid first two, then three fingers into her hungry channel, fucking her in earnest as his teeth grabbed her clit and scraped it again and again. The velvet unrolled, a rocket exploded, she shot into the sky and poured like a vessel in his hand. Again and again she gushed, as her cunt continued with spasm after spasm.

She cried out in protest when he withdrew his fingers but when she glanced down between her legs she saw him rolling on a condom, then shifting himself into position.

He took one of her hands and wrapped her small fingers around his thick shaft.

"Show me the way, *cara*," he murmured. "Bring me into your body."

Shea lifted her hips and drew his long, heavy cock toward her until the broad head was pressing at the entrance to her vagina. Cruz moved with her, following her lead. The more she tugged the more he moved forward, until he was at least halfway in. Then he brushed her hand away.

"The rest of the trip is mine," he told her in a raspy voice.

Bracing himself on his hands, he rolled his hips and drove himself completely inside her. Shea felt stretched beyond reason yet somehow she accommodated his tremendous size. He held himself still while her body adjusted to him, then began a slow in and out motion, his cock stimulating the walls of her pussy as he moved back and forth until she could focus on nothing except that steady thrusting in and out of her

body and the curls of sensation that spiraled outward, taking her on yet another wild, carnal ride.

Now she could move her legs and she lifted them to wrap around his waist, digging her heels into the small of his back as she arched upward against him, meeting him push for push. She was mindless in her arousal, wanting nothing more than his plundering of her body to continue on and on. He leaned down slightly and her sensitive nipples grazed against the fine hair on his chest.

Her hands clutched at his shoulders, nails digging into the taut skin and another climax consumed her, rockets exploding, body shaking. She hung onto Cruz for dear life, as if she needed him to anchor her to the earth.

He rode her through the aftershocks, then began the steady motion again. His balls slapped against the edge of her buttocks, his chest abraded her nipples, his cock felt as if it pierced her very soul. She couldn't believe another orgasm could hit her so soon but it broke over her with sudden force. And as she shook and shuddered she felt Cruz stiffen and find his own release.

Then she was falling into the black velvet again, tumbling back to earth, her body completely wrung out. Cruz fell forward, catching himself on his forearms and the only sounds in the room were their labored breathing and the booming heartbeats.

She had no idea how long they lay there like that, arms and legs entwined, Cruz's cock, although softened, still inside her in the grip of her cunt. If she had her choice, she might never ever move again. Finally Cruz kissed her, a long tender kiss that spoke of emotion rather than lust. Then he rolled to the side, slipping from her body and went to dispose of the condom.

When he returned to the bedroom he lifted her in his arms.

"I think we should shower before dinner, *cara*," he told her with a twinkle in his eye. "We wouldn't want Safina to suspect anything, now, would we?"

Shea buried her head against his shoulder. "I'm afraid she already has a pretty good idea. We've been in here a long time. And all my clothes are across the hallway."

He sat her on the vanity bench in the bathroom and turned on the shower.

"Nevertheless, at dinner we shall be a proper couple. I will get your clothes for you. Wait here."

Wrapping the big towel around himself, he disappeared from the room, only to return moments later with her suitcase.

"I told myself not to take this too fast," he said. "I didn't want you to think all I had in mind is sex."

"Isn't that it, though?" she challenged.

"Not at all." He shook his head. "I have much more in mind for you, *mi amor*. But this afternoon...I could not keep my hands off you. If you regret it, please tell me now."

She lifted her head to look into his melting chocolate eyes, studied the sharp planes of his face and his lean body. She had been more than a willing participant in what happened. She too, realized something more than lust was happening between them. She just wasn't sure how to handle it

In the thick silence she realized he was still waiting for an answer.

"No," she told him in a soft voice. "I regret nothing."

"And if I asked you to spend the weekend in this room rather than the one across the hall?"

She bit her bottom lip, a nervous habit she kept trying to break. "But how will it appear to the staff? To your guests?"

"My staff stays out of my business and my guests will have no idea where you sleep." He cupped her chin and tilted her face up. "Shea, I would never do anything to put you in an embarrassing situation. If you'd feel more comfortable in a separate room, by all means I will accommodate your wishes."

Somehow Shea felt as if she were stepping off the edge of the cliff but her brain seemed to have vacated her body. She nodded her head slowly.

"Your room is fine."

* * * * *

Dinner was served on the patio at the rear of the hacienda. Scones on the two walls bracketing the door cast a soft glow along with the candle flickering on the table. Cruz again wore jeans and a t-shirt – “My at home outfit,” he joked – and urged Shea to dress just as casually. She pulled on cotton slacks in a dark navy with a light blue tank top that she knew emphasized the color of her eyes. Her hair was once again pulled up in a ponytail and tied with a ribbon that matched her top. She’d shooed Cruz out of the bedroom while she dressed and her efforts were rewarded by the heated look of admiration in his eyes.

Chilled glasses and a pitcher of margaritas were waiting on the table when she took her seat. Cruz poured, then as he’d done earlier in the day, raised his glass to her in a toast.

“To a successful collaboration,” he said. “I know you are the right person to make my dreams for this place come true.”

They clinked glasses and Shea sipped slowly from hers, watching Cruz over the rim.

“You haven’t even told me what you want,” she reminded him. “Or given me a hint as to what you envision. How do you know I can do the job?”

“I know you are a passionate woman with the soul of an artist. How can this not succeed?”

Heat crept up her cheeks at the compliment. “You make my head spin with your flattery.”

“Not flattery, *cara*. The truth. I knew you would be right for this.”

Over dinner he talked about his plans for the *finca* and what he hoped to create – a house similar to this one but much, much larger, with a light, airy feeling but a traditional Spanish style. This hacienda he wanted to remodel for his mother and father. And he briefly described the living quarters he wanted for the hands, especially the married ones.

"That's a very expensive undertaking," she told him. "Not even counting my fee for designing."

"Haven't you heard?" He grinned. "I am a man of untold wealth. Besides, I trust you not to cheat me."

"I hope that's a joke," she said. "My reputation for honesty is unblemished."

"A little tease. Uncalled for." He lifted her hand to his lips and ran the tip of his tongue across the knuckles.

Shivers danced up and down her spine and moisture dampened the crotch of her thong.

"You seduce me so easily," she pointed out. "This afternoon was...a shock for me. Not my normal behavior."

"I know that. And this afternoon was amazing." He leaned forward. "More than amazing. You make love with your heart, Shea. And so it reaches mine."

She had no idea how to respond to that. Things were moving along at a rapid rate. A bullet train had carried her from hiding behind invisible walls, professional walls, to having uninhibited sex with a client. This *thing* between them was becoming more complex by the minute and she wasn't sure she knew how to handle it.

Unlike many of the women she knew, she wasn't the kind to just go along for the ride and have a good time. Sex had to mean something to her. This time she was afraid it was beginning to mean too much.

"Come. Let us take a walk," Cruz suggested, when the table had been cleared. "Let me show you the beauty of Rancho Castillo at night, when the stars are crystal clear in the sky and the only sounds are the horses and cattle. Then you will understand why I want to live here permanently. And how you can make that happen."

He took her hand and led her off the patio onto a gravel path that wound around the house.

"My mother grew up on a *finca* much like this in Mexico," he explained. "When I was a child she often took me there to visit."

"I'm surprised you didn't want to live in that one, instead of buying your own."

Cruz held her hand as they walked and now he gave it an involuntary squeeze.

"When my grandparents died it went to my uncle Jaime. The eldest son and all, you know. Right of primogeniture."

Was that bitterness she heard in his voice? Was there something in his history that had prompted his single-minded dedication to financial success? That had prompted him to buy this enormous spread in South Central Texas? She would love to ask him more questions about it but their relationship—or whatever one could call what was happening between them—was so new she felt she'd be intruding.

"But obviously it's something you always wanted to get back to or you wouldn't have purchased this place."

He stopped walking and turned to look at her. "I wanted to do something for my mother," he said in a soft voice. "She was cheated out of something she loved. I can't give it back to her but I can do the next best thing."

"And you won't mind them living in such close proximity?" She wondered if that would put a serious crimp in his social life.

"We will be far enough apart," he told her, "that we will each have our privacy when it's necessary. Sunday we will ride again, to the spot I have chosen for my own home. It's about a mile from here and will have its own driveway in from the road."

"Well, I guess that will work for you. No one around to stick their nose in your business."

His smile was as soft as his voice. "Are you worried about all the women I might have running in and out of here?" He brushed his lips against hers, light as the touch of a butterfly. "I think you may be the only woman I ever bring here, *cara*. Meanwhile, fill your heart and your eyes and your lungs with the scene here before you."

Shea had to agree it was a truly magical environment. Huge clay pots of vibrantly blooming bougainvillea and plumeria lined the walk, illuminated by the spotlights from the corners of the roof. Their fragrance drifted on the soft night breeze, tantalizing her nose. Before her eyes stretched the vast holdings of Rancho Castillo, the lowing of cattle a faint sound in the distance. From the barn came the rattle of horses' hooves as they stamped on the stall floors, now and then a whicker sounding from one of them. Above them, the sky was like a velvet canopy, the stars so crystal clear they seemed like precious jewels.

No one was visible except for the two of them.

"Where is everyone?" Shea asked, looking around.

"Not working this time of night. Except for those whose turn it is to ride the fences on the late shift."

Shea raised her eyebrows. "Are you expecting trouble?"

Cruz shrugged. "One never knows. The days of the range wars are certainly over but sometimes kids are out making mischief and will cut the fences. Or one of the cattle will get itself tangled up somehow and have to be extricated."

"Do...Does everyone live on the ranch?"

He nodded. "But the buildings are very old. Upgrading would cost more than rebuilding them. Besides, my foreman and three of the hands are married and should have their own places."

"Yes, you mentioned that." She drew in a deep breath, inhaling the mingled aromas surrounding her, then let it out slowly. "You chose an excellent place to buy. I already have some ideas running around in my head. I really need you to show me where you want the new buildings to be placed. That will help me settle my ideas."

"No problem. Tomorrow we will be busy getting ready for the party but Sunday I will answer all your questions." He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed her knuckle. "And now I think it is time for us to retire to bed, don't you?"

She suddenly felt shy again. "Bed?"

"Yes, *cara*. I can't tell you how much I'm looking forward to it. You aren't changing your mind again, are you?"

"You don't think we're moving just a little too fast here?"

"Not with what we feel for each other. *Carpe diem*, Shea. Seize the day." His mouth was now barely an inch from hers. "Just say yes, *cara*. You know it's meant to be."

As his lips pressed down on hers, she whispered her answer into his mouth.

"Yes."

Chapter Four

The night air was cool so Cruz had left the sliding doors open to catch the breeze. Overhead a ceiling fan turned lazily, drawing in not only the air but also the heady scents of the flowering shrubs and trees. Once again Shea was stretched out on the soft sheets of his bed, naked, his mouth and tongue and fingers making a slow journey over her body.

In the dim light of the bedside lamp she could see the taut planes of his face and the dark pools of his eyes, eyes that returned again and again to lock with hers. Her breasts ached from his gentle kneading while his mouth pulled at her nipples and his teeth grazed their pebbled surface. The flesh of his back beneath her palms, was warm and under the tight covering of skin she could feel the play of solid muscles.

His touch everywhere lit up her nerves and accelerated every pulse in her body. The swirl of his tongue at her navel. The nip of his teeth at the soft flesh below it. Those damnable kisses teasing at the backs of her knees and thighs before his teeth worked in a line up to her by now very moist pussy. The tip of his tongue traced a shivery line along each crease between her mound and her thighs. Cruz took his time on the sensual journey, not rushing his movements, his wide shoulders keeping Shea's legs spread so she was wide open to his carnal assault.

"Cup your breasts for me," he murmured, lifting his head just enough to look at her. "Yes. Like that. Play with your nipples."

With the magic Cruz's mouth and hands were working on her body and his remarks when they made love earlier, Shea was way past being self-conscious about what she still considered her flaws. But she was smart enough to know that Cruz could make love to any woman he wanted, that he didn't have to flatter her to get her into bed

and that he knew she was enough of a businesswoman that sex wouldn't cut him a better deal. Especially since money was no problem for him.

So she simply let go and enjoyed the process, aroused by his touch and the erotic things he kept whispering to her. Her blood was already heated and racing through her veins, her pussy dripping wet and her clit aching with need. She palmed her breasts as he asked and tugged at her nipples with thumb and forefinger. There was something so arousing about touching herself in a man's presence. Especially when that man was Cruz.

He was nibbling at the curls on her mound now, eyes still raised to watch her playing with her nipples. For a brief second he dipped his head so his tongue twirled around her clit, then traveled the length of her slit. Immediately the nerve endings in her cunt fired, aching for something to fill her needy channel.

But Cruz was definitely into teasing tonight. One last lick at that furled bud and he moved himself up her body, straddling her so his cock nestled between her breasts.

"Press those wonderful mounds together, *cara*," he told her in a hoarse voice. "Hard. Yes, that's it. Just like that."

He placed his large hands over hers so the valley between her breasts became a tight sheath for him and his hips began a back and forth rocking motion. Without thinking she opened her mouth and extended her tongue, so each time he rocked forward the head of his penis bumped her tongue and she licked its velvet surface. And each time the tip of her tongue touched him, his cock jerked as if hit by an electric wire.

She bent her knees and planted her feet on the bed, using her thighs to press against Cruz's buttocks and urge him to move faster. But as usual, he set his own pace, taking his time, drawing out every bit of pleasure for both of them. The more he rocked, the more her tongue caressed the head of his shaft, the more the throbbing in her pussy increased in intensity.

Cruz pressed harder on her hands, tightening the narrow valley squeezing his shaft. Now he moved faster, rocking harder and harder. His eyes bored into hers like lasers, holding her with his smoldering gaze.

“Open your mouth wide,” he commanded. “Now. Do it now.”

Shea opened her mouth wide, Cruz rocked forward one more time, his penis resting on her tongue, stiffened and with jet-like forces released into the cavern of her mouth. Spurt after spurt of warm liquid burst onto her tongue and slid into the back of her mouth. She managed to close her lips around him, tightening her grip on him and swallowing his semen.

Cruz held his position until the last twitch of his cock died away, his body rigid, the muscles in his neck taut and corded, his hands still pressing hard against Shea’s. Then he collapsed forward, rolled to the side and carried her with him, wrapping his arms around her.

“*Dios!*” His breathing was heavy and uneven. “Your mouth is like heaven, your body a temple. I think they both may ultimately kill me.”

She giggled a little, cuddling next to him, satisfied that she’d pleased him so greatly. If only she could ignore her own unsatisfied need.

As if he’d read her mind, Cruz rolled her onto her back and spread her legs wide.

“Did you think I’d leave you hanging, little one? That would be very rude of me. But again, we will do this together.”

He bent his head and took her clit between his teeth, gently shaking it from side to side, then once more running his tongue up and down her slit. One finger slid into her waiting cunt, then trailed down between the cheeks of her buttocks to her anus.

“Next time, *cara*,” he whispered. “Next time I will take you here. But only after I have driven you wild with need. Now. Give me your hand.”

She put her small hand into his larger one and he placed the fingers on top of her clit, moving them in a circular motion.

"Show me how you do it at home," he told her. "I know you masturbate. Most women do in the privacy of their bedrooms. But now I want you to do it for me."

Shea wasn't sure she could do it with Cruz watching. She could hardly do it at home with the lights on. But her pussy wept for release, so she began the familiar motion stimulating her clit, closing her eyes to let the warm feeling creep over her. As she did Cruz slipped first two, then three fingers into her vagina, scissoring them to rub her inner walls.

"Bend your legs, Shea." He moved one so it didn't block his hand. "That's it. And keep your thighs far apart. Keep those slender fingers rubbing that swollen little nub. One of these nights I'm going to tie your hands to the headboard, spread your legs wide and suck that little thing for all it's worth. Nothing inside you, not even my fingers. Just my lips and my tongue and my teeth, bringing you to climax with only your clit."

His words were ratcheting up the heat factor, sending hot shivers through her body and her hand began to move faster.

"Yes, like that. Faster. Harder. While I fuck you with my fingers. *Dios!* Your cunt is like a tight, wet fist, gripping my fingers so hard. That's how it feels around my cock. You give me so much pleasure I could lose my mind fucking you. More, Shea. Harder."

He increased the speed of his fingers as her hand moved harder and faster. She could feel the climax rising within her body, a tightly wound spiral uncoiling and spreading through her. She was almost there. Almost. Almost.

"Your face is flushed, *cara*. It looks beautiful. You may have to masturbate for me every time if you always look like this—total sexual arousal, a hunger in your eyes for the ultimate fulfillment. You're nearly there. Don't stop now."

The climax exploded and ripped through her. Cruz slipped a fourth finger into her spasming cunt and her hips jerked and jerked and jerked as convulsions racked her. She was on fire. She was cold. Shudders gripped and shook her. And Cruz never let her ride them alone, his fingers still fucking her pussy, her juices pouring from her body into his hand.

At last her body lay quiet, exhausted from her release. Cruz shifted so he lay beside her again and painted her lips with the slickness on his fingers.

"Taste yourself, my sweet. Nectar. Pure nectar. I could get drunk on it."

She licked her lips, savoring the tart sweetness of her essence. Cruz pressed his mouth to hers, sharing the taste, his tongue dancing across her lips. She threaded her fingers through the heavy silk of his hair and sighed into his mouth. She didn't think she could ever move again.

"Shower," Cruz said at last.

Shea moaned. "I can't move."

"Then I will carry you and bathe you with my own hands." He kissed her again. "And we will sleep and have very pleasant dreams."

* * * * *

Saturday morning Shea awoke to a multitude of noises and voices drifting in through the open glass door. Rolling over, she realized Cruz was no longer in bed with her. In fact, if the coolness of the sheet was any indication, he'd been gone for some time. Sitting up and pulling the sheet with her, she spotted a note on the bedside table.

Mi amor,

Supervising party preparations. Coffee is made in the kitchen. Safina will fix you whatever you'd like for breakfast. Or lunch if you sleep that late. Take your time and relax.

Cruz

The party. Of course. The excuse for getting her to spend the weekend.

She yawned, then crawled out of bed, wrapping the sheet around herself. She closed the sliding door and pulled the blinds shut. Cruz had insisted she unpack her suitcase, so she grabbed some clothes from the drawer where she'd stuck them along with her toiletries kit and headed for the shower.

In jeans and a plaid shirt knotted at the waist, ponytail swinging, she followed the heavenly aroma of coffee to the kitchen. Safina was directing a crew of people wearing

polo shirts that said Top Chef Catering where to put all their equipment and assigning spots at the big table or the stove. Shea swallowed a smile. These people might be professionals hired by Cruz but Safina still ruled the kitchen.

Politely refusing an offer of breakfast, she filled a mug with coffee and wandered out the back door to the huge yard. People seemed to be everywhere. Beyond the post fence dividing the yard from the actual working area of the ranch, cowboys in worn jeans and hats that shaded their eyes worked, cutting horses in the corral. From the barn she heard men calling to each other and the whinnying of horses anxious to be out and doing their thing. In the pasture closest to the house what looked like an entire herd of cattle milled around, adding their own voice to the mix.

Once again, as her eyes followed the land to the horizon, Shea was impressed with the size of Rancho Castillo, its magnificence and its iconic appearance standing as a symbol of what most people believed Texas to be. Cruz had chosen well. Already ideas for designs were swirling in her brain.

In the yard itself more than a dozen people were stringing colorful lights, putting the finishing touches to the erection of a tent that others were filling with tables and chairs. A crew was erecting a stage at one end of the tent and in front of it were the boards for a small dance floor. This was obviously a far more elaborate event than she had imagined and she wondered if the outfit she'd brought would be appropriate. Oh, well too late to do anything about it now.

Cruz was standing at the entrance to the tent in heavy discussion with an older man. He wore yet another dark t-shirt and jeans, accenting his olive complexion and dark hair, the sunlight beating down on him outlining the lean, muscular form of his body. His posture was that of a man very much in charge and very comfortable with that situation. The way everyone was scurrying around, she figured they'd gotten the message. She stood there sipping her coffee and watching him, enjoying the sense of power he exuded and smiling at the memories of how he used that power in bed.

At that moment he turned, spotted her and waved her over. When she reached his side he placed a soft kiss on her cheek, then slid an arm around her.

"Shea, meet Harley Bowen, the Rancho Castillo foreman. I was lucky he stayed on when I bought the place because he's forgotten more about ranching than I'll ever learn. Harley, this is Shea Prescott, who's going to design the new look for the *finca*."

She held out her hand. "Very nice to meet you."

Harley's hand was warm and calloused, his grip firm. "Pay no attention to all Cruz's flattery. I'm just an old cowhand who knew a good thing when he saw it. I've been here so long I don't think I could work anyplace else, anyway."

"I'm guessing you know about Cruz's plans for a new home and some other structures?"

He nodded. "Yes and I think it's a great idea. My wife will sure be happy to have something bigger than a horse's stall to live in."

"You and your wife live right here on the ranch then?" Shea took a sip of her coffee. Cruz had kept his arm around her and she could feel the warmth of it burning through the soft cotton of her shirt.

"On a spread this big the foreman has to live on the premises," he told her. "Otherwise I'd be spending my sleep time driving back and forth to put out fires before they turn into full-blown blazes."

"Safina is Harley's wife," Cruz told her with a little smile. "A nice surprise for me when I decided to buy the *finca*, don't you think?"

"Do you make as much magic with the cattle as your wife does with food?" she asked in a teasing voice.

"He'll say no but I say yes. Come. Let me show you what's going to happen here." He turned back to Harley. "We'll need to start branding and weighing the new calves next week. Be sure the chutes are set up and everyone has a handheld computer to record weight and other essentials."

"We're all set," Harley told him. "We'll be ready to go by six a.m."

"Excellent. And be sure I see you at the party tonight."

Harley laughed, a full hearty sound. "I'll just be sure to take a look at it but you know Safina won't turn over her kitchen to strangers. We'll be fine, Cruz. You take care of the real guests."

He walked away and Cruz urged Shea into the tent. "The food will be set up at one side on long tables," he explained. "All Spanish dishes. My parties are known for the finest Spanish cuisine."

She smiled. "I like a man who flaunts his heritage."

"The Castilian heritage is a good one to put on display."

She liked the fact that he was proud of his roots. It gave yet another dimension to this very complex man.

He took her hand and let her farther into the tent. "This area will be filled with tables and chairs but we'll also set some up outside for people who want to dine under the stars. It is predicted to be a beautiful night so many will want to take advantage of it."

"Oh, Cruz, that sounds so wonderful. Could we... I mean, do you have to stay in the tent all night?"

"Most of it," he apologized. "Many of these people are key clients of one of my companies or another. I give a party every year to thank them for their patronage. This year I chose to have it here." His mouth drooped like a little boy's. "Part of the job, *cara*. You know I would rather be spending every minute in your company."

"I understand." She took another sip of coffee. "Not that it's any of my business but exactly how many companies do you own?"

He chuckled. "If I tell you, will your fee go up?"

"Don't be ridiculous. I charge what I charge. I was just curious."

They had reached the stage by this time. Cruz sat on the edge of it and motioned for her to join him. "I could have walked into my father's business, you know. I'm sure you heard the story. But I've always had this obsession to earn whatever I got. So I took money I'd saved and began flipping houses."

She nodded. "Buying old ones, rehabbing them and selling them for more money."

"That's it. But other things began to interest me, so I went after companies that fit the bill. Now there are ten separate entities under the Castillo Corporation banner. Is that enough information?"

"I wasn't prying," she said hastily. "Just trying to understand the man you are."

"The man I am is busy getting ready to wow his clients tonight." He waved his hand behind him. "Besides gourmet food, we will have a band playing and a dance floor..." he pointed to where the pieces were stacked, "all calculated to ensure that every guest has a fantastic time."

"Do I fall into that category?" she teased.

"You are always in that category, *mi amor*." He brushed a stray hair from her face. "It is my mission in life to ensure that every day is a fantastic one for you."

"So far you're doing a great job." She grinned. She slid off the edge of the stage. "I know you have a lot to do before tonight. Don't worry about me. I'll be happy just to wander around and get the feel of this place. Maybe jot down some ideas."

"Lunch," he said. "I will find you at lunchtime and we will have a moment together."

"If it works out." She didn't want him to worry about her with so many other details on his mind.

"I will find you," he insisted. Then, ignoring the workers who slid curious glances their way, he cupped her cheeks and pressed his mouth to hers, his tongue plunging inside and stroking hers.

As always happened when he kissed her, she trembled with need, her legs shaky, her heartbeat speeding up. Moisture dampened her thong. She barely realized her mug had tipped and the liquid spilled onto the ground.

"I've wasted your coffee," Cruz whispered in her mouth.

"No problem. There's more where that came from." She stepped back away from him, aware of how easily he aroused her and cognizant of their surroundings. "Later, Cruz."

"And that is a promise."

By the time she reached the back steps he was already embroiled in giving directions to someone else. Shea smiled to herself. He was a man who focused completely on whatever he was doing. Last night he had certainly been completely focused on her. The memory of their lovemaking sent a surge of heat through her body.

She refilled her coffee mug as she passed through the kitchen, then grabbed her sketch pad and pencils from her suitcase and stretched out on a lounge chair on the patio off Cruz's bedroom. It seemed to be the quietest spot in the house and the best place to stay out of everyone's way.

Flipping the pad open to a clean page, she began to draw rough sketches of the ideas dancing around in her brain. As she'd ridden with Cruz yesterday and walked around the hacienda last night, inspiration had poured into her and she was anxious to have something concrete to work with. But even as she sketched with wild, broad strokes, she wondered what had happened to her well-ordered life that in two days she had let a man sweet-talk her into a weekend visit, fallen eagerly into his bed and now craved him as if he were the last piece of chocolate on the planet. His tender words of endearment could mean everything or nothing. She had yet to peel back all the layers to find the real Miguel Cruz Castillo. If she was riding for a fall, it was going to be a big one.

She was so intent on what she was doing, she never heard the door slide open behind her or realized she was no longer alone until she felt a hand on her shoulder. It startled her so she jumped and her sketch pad and pencil went flying.

She turned to see Cruz behind her, an apologetic look on his face.

"Ohmigod." She pressed her hand to her chest. "I think you scared me out of ten years' growth."

"Sorry, *cara*." His voice, like warm liquid, washed over her. "I didn't mean to frighten you. You were concentrating too hard, I think."

Shea scrambled to pick up her things, flipping the pad closed and gripping it firmly.

Cruz cocked an eyebrow. "Big secret? I don't get to see your efforts?"

She shook her head, smiling. "Not until I'm ready. You don't want to spoil my surprise, do you?"

He reached out for her free hand and lifted it to his mouth. His tongue traced the tiny lines and creases of her palm, sending shivers skating along her spine. When his teeth sank lightly into the fleshy pad of her thumb, streaks of sensation raced along her arm and spread through her body, directly to her cunt.

She wondered if she would simply melt into a puddle at his feet.

He lifted his head, rubbing his thumb across her palm and his eyes darkened to the color of burned chocolate. "I'll forgive you for the moment if you reward me with a kiss."

Like the earlier one, this one set her entire body on fire. His tongue plunged into her mouth, tasting every bit of her, mimicking the motion of his cock inside her pussy. Shea gripped his shoulder with one hand and pressed herself against him. His thick erection was hot against the soft skin of her belly. Instantly she wanted him inside her, plunging to the hilt, taking her to places no one else ever had before.

Apparently Cruz felt the same way, because he lifted his mouth from hers and took a step backward.

"Careful, *cara*, or I might not be able to control myself. Come. Put your things away. Safina is bringing us a light lunch. We can eat out here away from the banging and the shouting." He kissed her forehead. "And I will do my best to behave myself."

* * * * *

Cruz showered and dressed first, needing to be ready out front to greet his guests.

"Take your time, *cara*," he told her. "No rush. Look for me at the entrance to the tent when you're ready."

Shea took him at his word, soaking in the tub, then washing her hair and carefully blow-drying it. Tonight she left it long and loose, a riot of dark blonde curls around her face. She took extra pains with her makeup and sprayed herself from a new bottle of expensive cologne. Finally she dressed in the outfit she'd brought—a long printed skirt that swirled around her ankles and a white peasant blouse that she wore off the shoulders.

She'd had no idea what other women would be wearing and Cruz had been absolutely no help. She'd finally decided to dress for the environment and hope she wasn't laughed out of the place. Stepping into the sandals next to the dresser, she took a final look at herself in the mirror, fluffed her hair one more time and headed through the house for the backyard.

She estimated at least two hundred people milling around, some standing, some sitting, talking, drinking. She could hear the band in the tent playing Latin American music and wondered if anyone was dancing this early. She quickly checked what the guests were wearing. The men could have been in uniform—pressed slacks, western-style shirts, some with jackets, some without. The women wore everything from glittery cocktail dresses to peasant outfits like hers. She breathed a tiny sigh of relief.

Cruz stood at the tent shaking hands, directing people to the bars, nodding and smiling. He definitely had his game face on. As if sensing her there he looked up from his conversation, smiled at her and motioned her over to him. She picked her way carefully through the crowds, aware of the curious stares of people as she passed. When she reached Cruz's side he slid an arm around her drawing her close to him.

"Shea, this is Anne and Fernando Mesos. Fernando and I are longtime business associates." He tightened his hold a bit. "May I present Shea Prescott."

Anne's eyes opened wide. "The architect? I saw the work you did designing the new library wing. Excellent. Simply excellent."

Cruz shifted his gaze to her. "Did I not tell you? The library wing has pushed you to the forefront of the area architects."

"Thank you very much for the compliment." She shook hands with the couple. "It's a pleasure meeting you."

Anne eyed her speculatively but before she could make a comment, Cruz took Shea's hand and led her to a place at the side of the yard where one of the bars had been set up.

"A glass of white wine for the lady," he told the bartender, then handed the goblet to Shea.

"I don't think I should drink much tonight," she told him. "I'd hate your friends and associates to see me fall on my nose."

"Don't worry." He brushed a light kiss on one cheek. "I'll keep a tight watch on you."

Dinner was a blur. Shea tried to remember the names of everyone she was introduced to and her cheeks were stiff from smiling but she knew she more than held her own. She could see the unasked questions in the eyes of Cruz's friends but they were all too polite to question her. Especially with Cruz keeping a sharp eye on her at all times. He was up and down from his chair, circulating, shaking hands, checking on people. Yet she knew he was aware of her every single moment.

At last the remnants of the meal were cleared away, waiters served after-dinner drinks and people moved to the dance floor. Shea was sitting at a now-empty table, sipping the cognac she'd chosen, when she felt warm breath at her ear and heard Cruz's voice saying, "I believe this dance is mine."

She turned her head to look at him and smiled. "Are you off-duty?"

"At least for the moment." He held out his hand. "Come. Let's enjoy the music."

The tune was slow and sexy. Cruz led her to one corner of the dance floor, in the shadows of the lights strung in the tent and pulled her body against his. One arm wrapped around her while the other took her hand and pressed it against his heart.

"Feel that, *cara*? It's my heart beating for you." He curled his fingers around hers. "You smile. You think I'm making all this up?"

"I think you have the smoothest line of any man I've ever met," she told him, letting her body sway with his. "I just can't figure out if you've used it for so long you have it memorized or if you created this one just for me."

He put his mouth close to her ear. "No line, Shea. Not for you. I mean every word I say. In bed and out."

They barely moved, standing in the shadowy corner. His swollen cock pressed so hard against her through their clothing she thought for a moment it might break free from the force of the blood pulsing through it. Her nipples had hardened to the point of aching and the inner flesh of her thighs was damp with the liquid dripping from her cunt. She couldn't ever remember wanting a man as much as she wanted this one. She was afraid her desire had replaced her common sense. Yet when he whispered, "Just say yes," she found herself unable to refuse him.

The sultry night air, the colored lights and the sensuous music all combined to weave a magic spell around them. She was hardly aware of the other couples, some dancing, some just sitting and drinking.

She wanted to believe she wasn't just the next body on his list. But even if she was, she was going to hoard every memory she could. And she'd create designs for him that would impress all his friends.

"I feel your mind wandering, *cara*."

She laughed. "How can you feel someone's mind?" she teased.

"It echoes through your body." He kissed her temple. "I must see to my guests but I will be finished shortly." He lowered his voice. "I will hurry them on their way."

"Be a good host." She brushed her fingers against his cheek.

"Come with me to say goodbye." He took her hand. "You have made a great impression on everyone tonight. Give them a last look at what belongs to me."

Belongs to him? Belongs?

But he was already tugging her toward the path to the gate where people were heading for their cars. So she stood with him and smiled and shook hands until the last straggler had driven away. Then he swept her up in his arms, kissing her so thoroughly it took her breath away.

"Now, *mi amor*, the rest of the night belongs to us. And tomorrow we will have that discussion you are so intent on so you can begin to design the plans. I know you will create something spectacular."

Chapter Five

If they gave medals for kissing, Shea thought, this man would take the gold. His tongue swept in, tasting every inch of her, pressing against the roof of her mouth, running his tongue over her teeth then plunging it deep, deep, deep. He shifted the angle of his head to go even deeper, then dragged his tongue out and licked a pattern around her lips. By the time he moved to other parts of her body, she felt as slick and heavy as molten nickels.

Cruz's hands were warm on her breasts, squeezing them gently, licking the nipples and grazing his teeth across them.

"So beautiful," he told her in a thick voice. "So gorgeous. A man could feast on these forever."

Every touch sent spikes of electricity through her, straight to her throbbing pussy. His tongue flicked and retreated, teasing her nipples into an even more distended state. Shea moaned, a low sound in her throat and shifted her body beneath his, trying to urge him to more aggressive activity.

"Don't rush me," he murmured in a hoarse voice. "I want to take my time so I don't miss one inch of this magnificent body."

And that was exactly what he did. If anyone had ever told her that her elbows and wrists were erogenous zones she'd have laughed at them. But when Cruz went to work on them with his lips and his tongue, licking and sucking, brushing the lightest of kisses over them, she felt heat rise through her body. Every nerve seemed to be on fire, every inch of skin quivering with need.

Every time he shifted, his swollen cock pressed against her. The liquid beading at the slit left a damp trail wherever it touched. She wanted to shift her legs to trap him between them, urge him toward her very center. Pull him inside her body.

But he was determined to prolong this, taking a sensual delight in her little sounds of pleasure and the movements of her body. When she tried to shift one leg between his, he held it in place with one hand and used his tongue on the crease of her hip until she thought she might come just from that alone.

He shifted again and lowered his mouth to her mound. She spread her legs wide in response to the shock of sensation, urging him to feast on her. And feast he did. His fingers parted her to expose the tender inner flesh and once more his talented tongue went to work, licking here, sucking there, everywhere but on her throbbing clit and her needy vagina.

“Do you want me to beg, because I will. Please, Cruz. Please.”

“Please what, *cara*? Tell me what you want.”

“Fuck me. Please fuck me.” She had never said those words to anyone else but she was willing to say anything at this point if Cruz would just satisfy the hunger pounding inside her.

Finally he took her clit between his lips and sucked on it. Shea writhed on the bed, digging her fists into the sheets and pushing upward with her hips. Then without warning he flipped her over and pulled her to her knees. He parted her again from behind and this time his tongue plunged into her cunt, licking her inner walls, massaging her clit with his thumbs.

He teased her, taking her up the spiral just so far, then backing off, leaving her so hungry for his penetration, for her release, that she was nearly in tears from frustration. But Cruz never wavered, his strokes with his tongue steady and even, calculated to elicit the strongest response from her.

When she was sure she would die from lack of fulfillment, he placed his hands on the cheeks of her ass, spreading them and ran his tongue over the tight ring of her anus. She shivered at the icy hot sensation that raced over her.

“Tonight,” he whispered against her opening. “Tonight I will take you here and then you will truly be mine.”

The bed moved as he shifted behind her, then his fingers were spreading cool gel on the hot opening to her rectum.

"You are so tight," he murmured. "And so tender. I do not want to hurt you. This will make things much easier. But first I needed to drive you to the point where you would accept this."

"I'm there," she cried. "Oh, god, I am there. Please."

Two of his fingers slid inside her rectum, smoothing the gel into her tissues, scissoring them to soften the hot flesh, spreading the cool substance deep inside her. At the same time his other hand reached between her thighs until he found her clit, two fingers manipulating it until she was ready to explode. She reached so desperately for that peak, the leap off the cliff that would thunder through her, shaking her to her very core. But Cruz knew just how to hold it out of reach.

She heard the snap of latex as he sheathed himself and at last the head of his dick pressed against her hole, his cock moving slowly but steadily inside her.

"Breathe, Shea," he told her. "Take deep breaths. In and out. Come on, sugar. You can take me."

Shea felt as if his cock filled her entire body, stuffing every inch of her. She drew in a huge, deep breath and as she slowly exhaled Cruz pushed a little harder, sank in a little deeper.

"That's my girl," he crooned. "Just like that. Is your pussy hungry? Does it want to be fed too?"

He somehow maneuvered one hand between them and two fingers slipped into her cunt, scissoring and stroking but then just as suddenly they were gone. His cock withdrew slowly from her rectum, leaving her in even greater need. But before she could protest he turned her onto her back again, lifted her legs and pressed them wide and back. Then his penis was probing at her opening again.

"Deep breath again, *cara*," he told her and with a steady plunge seated himself in her rectum so deep his balls slapped against the curve of her ass.

Finally he set up the motion she'd been waiting for, been craving. The steady in and out lit fires on nerve endings she didn't even know she had. He reached for one of her hands and brought it down to her pussy.

"Do it, *cara*." His breathing was choppy and uneven as his hips rocked forward and back. "Finger-fuck yourself. Now. Do it. You know you want to."

As if in a trance she moved her fingers between the lips guarding the entrance to her vagina, found the opening and slipped two fingers inside. The slickness of her own juices aroused her even more and without having to think about it, she matched the rhythm of her fingers with the thrust and pull of Cruz's penis. The tight muscles of her rectum clenched around him, just as her pussy muscles gripped her fingers. Then she lost all track of anything except the thick, swollen shaft plundering her ass and her fingers scraping the sweet spot that drove her wild. She was flying, she focused on nothing but the coil of heat rapidly unwinding inside her.

Cruz stiffened at the same moment her body arched and they came in a cataclysmic eruption that shook them like leaves in a summer storm. Her breath caught in her throat, her heart threatened to pound out of her chest and still the spasms went on and on and on. Cruz's strong hands gripped her hips, holding her tightly against him as he emptied himself in huge, thick spurts into the thin latex reservoir.

It could have been minutes or maybe hours when the last of the aftershocks subsided leaving them both weak and spent. Cruz slid his penis very slowly from Shea's body, lowered her legs and stumbled to the bathroom to clean himself up and dispose of the condom. When he returned he climbed into bed and wrapped his arms around Shea so they were spooned together.

She sighed, an exhausted, contented sound and let herself fall into the dreamless world of warm, dark sleep.

* * * * *

She sat at the small table under the umbrella Cruz had asked the hands to set up for her. Texas heat could be devastating and he worried that she spent too much time in it.

"Use the trailer," he urged constantly. "That's what it's for, *cara*. Please."

But now that she'd made the commitment she liked to eyeball everything personally.

Cruz had loved her designs, not only for the new hacienda set high on a hill but for the remodel of the existing one as well as the small homes for the foreman and the married hands and a modern new bunkhouse for the others.

"You really meant it when you said you planned to spend a lot of money," she'd teased him when he'd signed the contracts. "Exactly how rich are you?"

His face had tightened and an unfamiliar expression had come over it. "Is it important to you?" he'd snapped.

"No, not at all." She'd shaken her head. "It was just a joke, Cruz. I don't give a damn how much you have. Okay?"

His face had relaxed again. "Sorry, Shea. I just have a lot of things going on right now."

"Maybe you want to put this off for a while," she'd suggested. "It's a big undertaking, after all."

"No. It must go forward." He'd signed the last form, put down the pen and taken her in his arms. "But I need to have someone I trust in charge. That would be you."

"Me?" she'd squeaked. "That's impossible." She'd waved her arm around the office. "I have other clients to take care of. Other obligations."

"Easy enough to handle. You have two talented assistants and you can be here for the important meetings." He'd brushed his lips against her temple. "I will make it well worth your while, *cara*."

"Oh, Cruz, I just don't know." She'd nibbled her bottom lip. "I'd have to spend so much time on site. Make sure the general contractor and I have the same vision, the same goal. It's just...a lot."

"I know it is." He'd stroked her back. "But I can't allow some philistine to botch your beautiful designs. Come, *mi amor*. Just say yes."

So here she was, against her better judgment and ignoring all her internal warning flags, serving as the onsite supervisor for a man whose future plans with her continued to be a mystery. Oh, sure, he was good with the flowery words and great with the spectacular sex and hadn't done more than smile at another woman since that weekend at his ranch. Why couldn't she just accept it as a pleasant interlude and let it go at that?

Because you went and fell in love with him, you dumbass. Just the very thing you feared.

And now here she was, on the vast Rancho Castillo, still wondering how Cruz always managed to get her to "just say yes". The work was proceeding very nicely. She had worked with the general contractor, John Reston, before and was pleased with his work. And as the exteriors of each structure took shape, she saw the pleasure in Cruz's eyes and the smile seeing it always brought to his face.

No matter how long each day was, however, she was always rejuvenated in his arms at night. By now they were so familiar with each other's bodies they knew exactly where and how to touch to elicit the maximum response.

To give the most pleasure.

This week her bed was cold and empty. Cruz was in Europe on business for one of his companies and wasn't expected back for four more days. She drove herself even harder each day, exhausting herself so sleep would come quickly at night. But still she missed the warmth of his body and the strength of his arms around her.

Sighing, she finished the bottle of water she was nursing and pushed her chair back. Cruz had bought a gas-powered golf car to get her from site to site and she was about to visit the big hacienda on the hill. Today they were starting to lay the flooring and she wanted to make sure they got it just right. But as she rose a black Mercedes convertible

came down the temporary road, throwing up clouds of dust and wheeled to a race car stop just inches from the table where she had been sitting.

A long-legged beauty with the thinnest figure Shea had ever seen and thick clouds of raven hair unfolded herself gracefully from behind the wheel, stepped out and slammed the door.

"I want to know who's in charge here," she demanded, fists planted firmly on her hips.

When everyone looked at Shea, she stepped forward, wishing she didn't look quite so much like one of the construction crew.

"I guess I am." She held out her hand. "Shea Prescott. I'm the architect on the project."

The other woman's eyes traveled up and down Shea's body scornfully, a distasteful look on her face. She ignored the outstretched hand.

"Well, Shea Prescott, whoever the hell you are. I suggest you pack up yourself and all these other peasants and get the fucking hell off my land. Right now."

Shea's jaw dropped. "*Your* land? Just exactly who are you to be giving orders? This is Cruz Castillo's land and I'm not moving unless *he* tells me to."

The woman stared at her again. "Exactly what's going on here, anyway?"

But Shea wasn't about to give out information to a stranger. "I don't see that it's any of your business."

"No?" One perfectly shaped eyebrow lifted. "Now that's where you're wrong. It's *all* my business. I'm Lorena Castillo." She paused for effect. "Cruz's wife."

* * * * *

"She is lying," Safina said, placing a glass of iced tea in front of Shea.

John Reston had called a halt to all work until they could get this mess straightened out. Lorena Castillo had waved a marriage license under their noses and everything had shut down. Shea had hightailed it for the hacienda in the golf cart, barely making it

into the kitchen to give Safina a bare outline before she heard the Mercedes pull up in front.

High heels tapped on the terra cotta tiles as Lorena Castillo made her way to the kitchen. The look she gave Shea was a mixture of disgust and hate.

"What are you doing in this house?"

"Getting ready to leave. Don't worry."

"Please don't tell me you've been staying here," she spat. "I consider that an outrage."

Shea counted to ten before she spoke. "I have a question for you. If you're really Cruz's wife, where have you been all this time? Not anywhere around where people could see you."

"Where I've been is incidental. I'm back and you're out. Along with any other little tramps hanging around here."

Shea clenched her fists and bit her lip to keep from answering back.

Lorena looked at the housekeeper. "My bags are in my car. Please have someone bring them in and put them in Señor Castillo's room."

Safina glared at the woman. "Not until the señor tells me to. I will put you in one of the guest rooms. This mess is for him to sort out but he has certainly never mentioned a wife to me."

Lorena stormed out of the kitchen.

"Hurry, *nina*," Safina said. "Go and get your things. I will occupy her until you are gone."

"Did *you* know he had a wife?" She asked.

Safina shook her head. "No. But there could be many reasons he didn't mention her."

"I'll just bet." The longer she sat there, the angrier Shea became. She drained her iced tea and stood up. "Tell him he can get someone else to finish his damn project. Like maybe his wife. I'll be sending him a bill and I expect prompt payment."

"Don't you think you should wait to hear what he has to say?"

Shea shook her head. "I don't want to hear anything else from him. That woman had a marriage certificate and that's the only important thing here."

She hurried from the kitchen and around to the back patio, anxious to be away from here. Cruz wasn't due back for four more days but Shea was convinced this was one thing he couldn't talk his way out of.

She drove back to San Antonio like a madwoman, thankful she avoided any speeding tickets. Once home, she called Marta and without offering any explanation said she was back, she'd be in the office tomorrow and didn't want any questions. Then she opened a bottle of wine, filled the tub with lavender-scented water, poured the wine and indulged herself in a good old-fashioned cry.

The next morning, dressed and made up, enough to cover her puffy eyes and still cursing herself for her stupidity, she put in an appearance at her office. Marta, obviously bursting with curiosity took one look at Shea's face and simply handed over a stack of messages.

"Send Señor Castillo a final bill." She thrust a piece of paper at her secretary. "This is the amount."

Marta's eyes widened. "But—"

"No questions," Shea snapped. "And tell the others I want to see them in my office. We need to see where we are with all the projects on the schedule. I can take up the slack wherever it's needed."

With that she sailed into her private office and slammed the door.

* * * * *

Cruz Castillo was beside himself. He'd arrived home from his trip earlier than expected to discover disaster awaiting him. When he visited the main construction site and saw all work had completely stopped, he stormed into the trailer and cornered John Reston, who gave him a brief description of what happened.

"I give the orders," Cruz shouted. "No one but me or Señorita Prescott can call a halt to things."

Reston gave him a lopsided grin. "Then I guess you'd better take that up with your wife."

At the hacienda things were even worse. He walked in on Safina and Lorena in a heated discussion in the kitchen about exactly where Lorena was going to sleep.

"I can answer that for you," he bit off.

"Oh, Cruz. Sweetheart." Lorena's voice softened and a smile lit up her face. "I am so glad you're home. You need to tell everyone who I am. And explain to me what in hell all that building is going on out there?"

"First of all," he asked, "how did you find me?"

"Oh, honey," she simpered, "there was a big spread about you and Rancho Castillo that hit all the newspapers. You know how I love ranching. So here I am." She threw her arms wide as if to embrace Cruz but he neatly sidestepped her.

"Get one of the hands," he told Safina. "Have them take Miss Gordon's luggage back to her car."

"Don't you do it, Safina," Lorena raged. "Put my bags in Señor Castillo's room. Now that little tramp is gone there's plenty of room for me."

Cruz clenched his fist and made a supreme effort to control himself. He'd never hit a woman before but he was close to it now.

"Don't ever let me hear you refer to Shea Prescott like that again. *Comprende?* And you'd better get your ass to the nearest hotel before I have you arrested for trespassing."

She stood with one hip arrogantly cocked. "It wouldn't look too great in the media for you to have your *wife* arrested, now would it?"

"We're divorced, Lorena. Finished. Done."

"Look again, Cruz. Your attorney never filed the final papers. I never got my copies and it occurred to me the other day I ought to check into it."

"So you could hold me up for more money?" He couldn't hide the bitterness in his voice. "You can bet I'll clean this mess up. Pronto. But in the meantime, I don't want you anywhere near me or this place. Leave on your own or I'll have someone hogtie you and take you."

Lorena gave it her best shot but Cruz refused to budge. Finally she stormed out of the house to her car, where her luggage had already been returned. Tires squealed as she pulled away from the house.

Cruz ran his hands through his hair in frustration, dropped into his chair and pulled out his cell phone. In seconds he had his newest attorney on the phone.

"Jess? We have a big fucking mess here that your predecessor left. I'll be at your office in an hour. We need to clean this up yesterday."

By late Friday evening Cruz finally had things in hand. The papers had been filed at last, updated and with Lorena's new signature affixed. At first she demanded more money but Cruz threatened to have her arrested on extortion. Construction had resumed at the ranch and the crews would be working overtime on the weekend to catch up.

That left just one thing.

The most important thing.

Shea.

He tried alternately calling her home phone and her cell phone with no luck at all. He couldn't get anything out of Marta who still wasn't sure if the whole mess was his fault or not.

There was just one thing left to do.

Show up in person and get down on his knees. But he was afraid that would prove more difficult than he liked to think.

* * * * *

Although she buried herself in as much work as possible, even pulling potential clients out of the call-back file, the days seemed to drag by. Saturday was the expected date of Cruz's return. Before she went to bed Friday night she turned off her cell phone, unplugged the house phone and finished off a bottle of wine.

When she awoke late Saturday morning, for a moment she thought the pounding she heard was in her head, a present from an empty bottle of wine. But after stumbling into the bathroom and swallowing three aspirins with a glass of water, she realized the pounding not only continued but was accompanied by the furious ringing of her bell.

Pulling on a robe and pushing her disheveled hair back from her face, she went to the door and hollered, "Whoever you are, go away. No one's home."

"Open the damn door." Cruz's voice was loud and angry.

"Go away," she hollered again. "I have nothing to say to you."

"Well, I have plenty to say. Do you want me to stand out here and yell so all the neighbors can hear me?"

"Try it and I'll call the police," she told him. "One more time. Go away."

Shea hurried into her bathroom, shut the door and clapped her hands over her ears. In another moment, obviously tired of making a fool of himself, the noise died down and she heard the roar of Cruz's engine as he pulled away. She waited on edge all weekend for a return visit, wondering what she'd do if he actually came back. Once or twice when she peeked through the slatted blinds she thought she saw his car parked across the street but if it was him, he never approached the house.

Monday morning, with her phones still shut off, she turned on her cell and called the office to see what was happening.

"Not much, unless you count a very angry man who was waiting for me when I got here." Marta's voice held a hint of laughter.

"He's there?" Shea's hand trembled holding the phone. "Marta, you have to get rid of him."

"How do you suggest I do that? He's just sitting in the reception area, not bothering anyone."

"He's bothering me," she practically shouted.

Marta chuckled. "Then you should come down here and get rid of him. Personally, I like having a hot stud to look at."

"I don't ever want to see him again," Sea said through gritted teeth. "The man is a liar, deceitful, a...a...a...lothario."

Marta burst into a full-throated laugh. "Boy, that's a word I haven't heard outside historical romance novels. Listen, Shea, whatever the misunderstanding is, you need to see him and clear it up. The man is miserable."

"I'll say he is. The *man* has a wife he conveniently forgot to tell me about."

"Oops. Well, that's a little different. But if you come to the office you'll stumble over him. He says he's not leaving until he sees you."

"Then I guess I just won't come to the office." She'd go to any lengths to avoid this confrontation.

"Well," Marta sighed, "I guess sooner or later he'll give up and go away. But where will you be?"

"Not here. He'll just hound me like he did this weekend." She was silent for a moment, shuffling her thoughts around. "Maybe I'll go to the cabin. No one will find me there."

Shea's grandfather had left her a two-room cabin at the back end of the Hill Country. He'd used it during hunting season but for Shea it was the best place to escape life.

"And what about the office?"

"I leave it all in your capable hands. Everyone's got their assignments. I'll call in a couple of days."

"Listen, Shea —"

But Shea had already disconnected the call and headed to her bedroom to pack.

* * * * *

One of the things Shea had always liked about the cabin was the tiny stream that ran behind it. It wasn't deep enough for swimming nor did it produce much fish. But sitting on a flat rock at its edge and listening to the water bubble over the stones always helped her relax.

Not so much this time, she thought ruefully. She hadn't even been able to get a good night's sleep. And after four days she wondered if she ever would again. She'd gone against her own instincts and ended up being made a fool of. She could just imagine what John Reston thought.

She checked in with Marta once a day, promising that by the following Monday she'd come back to work, Cruz or no Cruz. She'd give herself the rest of the week to pull up her big girl pants and that was that. She had clients who needed her and she couldn't afford to throw away her practice, not even with the exorbitant fee she'd charged Miguel Cruz Castillo.

"*Dios!* Could you find a more isolated place to hide out?"

The deep voice behind her nearly made her topple into the stream. She jumped up and whirled to find Cruz standing less than a foot away. He'd been so careful she hadn't even seen him approach. Even as angry as she was, he took her breath away. His dark hair was ruffled by the breeze, his cream-colored sweater accented the olive skin tone and made his chocolate eyes look even darker. His jeans clung to his muscular legs, accenting his lean body. But no matter how just looking at him stirred the heat and

desire inside her, she knew if she let down her guard he'd have her stripped naked and in bed beneath him.

"Get the hell away from me," she told him. "This is private property. You're trespassing."

"After all the trouble I went to in finding you?" He lifted an eyebrow. "Aren't you going to at least offer me a cup of coffee?"

She made a face. "A cup of strychnine would be more likely."

She tried to push past him but he grabbed her by the arms.

"I'm not leaving here until we talk, so get used to the idea."

"In your dreams." She shoved at him but he ignored her efforts and picked her up, threw her over his shoulder in a fireman's carry and began tramping back to the cabin.

"Put me down, you Neanderthal," she screamed, beating her fists on his back.

Cruz ignored her and kept walking until they reached the cabin. Once inside he tossed her onto the bed, straddled her and captured her hands before she could hit him again.

"We are going to get all of this out," he told her, "so you might as well simmer down."

"Go to hell," she spat.

"Tsk ts. Such language from a lady. But I promise you, I'm not moving until I tell you the truth. The *real* truth."

"Answer one question for me." Her anger was so hot she wondered she didn't incinerate herself.

"I'll answer all the questions you want," he agreed, "if you promise not to hit me."

"Depends on your answers," she grumped. "Okay. Are you married to that witch?"

"Yes. And no."

Shea tried to struggle up but Cruz had her effectively imprisoned.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

He sighed heavily. "This is very embarrassing, *cara*. Ten years ago I was young and wild and horny and Lorena was the devil's temptation. I married her one weekend and woke up on Monday regretting it."

"And? Didn't you ever hear of divorce?"

"Of course I did," he snapped. "Do you think I'm an idiot?" Then he heaved another sigh. "Don't answer that."

Shea tried again to shift her body, at least to a more comfortable position. "So?" she prompted. "Divorce?"

"I had my attorney draw up the papers and it cost me a fortune to buy her off, the greedy little bitch." He looked into Shea's eyes. "But it was worth it. Now." He stared into her eyes. "If I let you up will you promise not to run until I finish?"

She closed her eyes and nodded. She might as well hear the rest of the awful truth. Cruz shifted, turned around and pulled her into his lap. One hand stole through her hair and caressed the nape of her neck as he talked. She tried to squirm out of his grasp but his caresses were so soothing and just being close to him like that set all her hormones to racing. Damn! It was hard to stay mad at a man when your body wanted him so much.

"In the middle of everything," Cruz continued, "my attorney had a heart attack. His office was in a mess. His secretary assured me all the papers had been filed and not being as smart as I am these days, I took her word for it and let it go. But it seems although Lorena signed the papers, my attorney never got them filed before he dropped dead."

"And you never followed through all these years?"

Cruz grimaced. "All my files went to my new attorney, I assumed the final papers were in a folder there and everything was all set. Besides, I wanted to put her out of my mind as fast as I could. And I never intended to get married again, anyway." His hand tightened in her curls. "Until you, *mi amor*. You came into my life and turned it upside down."

"Phooey." She tried to pull her head away. "You called me your love but I don't think you even know what love means. You made a fool of me, Miguel Cruz Castillo. Personally and professionally. I don't know if I can ever forgive you for that."

"Please, *cara*." He kissed the corner of her mouth. "Lorena is the last person I ever expected to show up in my life again. I would never have put you in that position. Surely you have to know that."

"So how did this happen?"

"She knew all this time the final papers had never been filed, because she never got a copy. I think she's running out of money and thought she could play her ace in the hole."

"So you're still married to her." Shea tried to move her head away from him.

Cruz looked at his watch. "Not as of a week ago Friday. The papers were filed and copies faxed to me. That's when I started out to find you in this backwater. Because I couldn't lose you. That is the honest truth."

"And Lorena?"

"Gone for good. My investigator managed to dig up enough on her that unless she wants some ugly facts exposed to the world she'll stay as far away from me as she can." He turned her head to face him. "I would never, ever do anything to embarrass you, *mi amor*. I love you. I have from the minute I saw you."

He cupped her chin and pressed his mouth against hers, his tongue tracing a line across the seam.

"Wait!" She tipped her head back. "How did you find me?"

"Not easily in this godforsaken place," he chuckled. "I confess I pleaded my case to the beautiful Marta, who adores a good love story."

"What a traitor. I'll have to speak to her."

"In fact, I think we should reward her. Come. Give me your mouth again. I want to taste every bit of you from your head to your toes."

Shea raised her eyebrows. "Just like that?"

"Just like that. Then we will finish your magnificent project, get married and live a long life together."

His hand had slipped beneath her sweatshirt where her breasts were unfettered by a bra. As he took her mouth again, he massaged each nipple in turn, pinching and rubbing until they stood up in swollen points. Beneath her bottom she could feel the growing thickness of his erection prodding at her.

"We have too many clothes on," he whispered, suiting action to words by tugging her sweatshirt over her head.

By now Shea was so aroused, just from Cruz's simple touch, she couldn't get the rest of her clothes off fast enough. And then they were both naked lying on the bed, caressing each other, relearning all the familiar spots. Remembering the sounds of pleasure each of them made.

"I wanted to take my time and feast," he told her in a thick voice, "but I've been too long without you."

He reached for his jeans and pulled a foil packet from one pocket.

"You came prepared," she teased, wishing he would hurry.

"Of course. Would you expect any less from me?"

Then he was sheathed, her legs spread wide and his penis plunged into her. She gasped at the intrusion, then wrapped her legs around him to pull him in even deeper.

"I love you, Shea." His mouth was barely an inch from hers. "Tell me you feel the same."

"I love you, Cruz."

"And you'll marry me?" When she hesitated he brushed his mouth against hers. "It's easy, *cara*. Just say yes."

She sighed and tightened her legs around him. "Yes."

Cruz moved and they tumbled over the peak together.

About the Author

I always wonder what readers really want to know when I write one of these things. Getting to this point in my career has been an interesting journey. I've managed rock and roll bands and organized concerts. Been the only female on the sports staff of a university newspaper. Immersed myself in Nashville peddling a country singer. Lived in five different states. Married two very interesting but totally different men.

I think I must have lived in Texas in another life, because the minute I set foot on Texas soil I knew I was home. Living in Texas Hill Country gives me inspiration for more stories than I'll probably ever be able to tell, what with all the sexy cowboys who surround me and the gorgeous scenery that provides a great setting.

Each day is a new adventure for me, as my characters come to life on the pages of my current work in progress. I'm absolutely compulsive about it when I'm writing and thank all the gods and goddesses that I have such a terrific husband who encourages my writing and puts up with my obsession. As a multi-published author, I love to hear from my readers. Their input keeps my mind fresh and always hunting for new ideas.

Desiree 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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