



Herrera's Temptation

By

Samara King

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Herrera's Temptation

Copyright© 2007 Samara King

ISBN: 978-1-60088-163-3

Cover Artist: Croco Designs

Editor: Susan Greene

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews.

Cobblestone Press, LLC

www.cobblestone-press.com

Chapter One

Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight...will be at my mercy!

Detective Larisa Vega looked at the evidence bag in her hand. Inside was a torn, half sheet of notebook paper, wrinkled as if it'd been folded a hundred times. She tossed the plastic bag onto her cramped and overcrowded desk.

She wanted this psycho behind bars. Four B-list actresses had been stalked with phone calls, usually hang-ups, and strange deliveries, from dead roses to a dead rat. All had inevitably been raped during mysterious screen calls for roles in varying movies.

Larisa sighed as she leaned back in her chair. This was L.A.; everyone was out for their big break. No one was heeding the blatant warning the news media had feverishly blared every night for the last two months.

Her stint in the anti-stalking/violent crime unit, First Defense, had shown her the crueller side of mankind. She didn't believe humans were basically good—just greedy.

As the only woman on the squad, her job was even more difficult. She'd never made it a secret that she wouldn't bow down to the overwhelming testosterone that flowed in and out the doors of the LAPD.

Deep down, Larisa knew that she would never have chosen a

different profession. Being a cop was all she knew. She'd walked in her late father's footsteps, much to her mother's chagrin. Janice Vega wanted her daughter to be something more prominent. A doctor. A ballerina. A model. They would never see eye to eye on her career, especially once she'd been promoted into First Defense two years ago. Her mother believed that matters such as rape were not to be discussed, as her own hadn't. The subject had caused a well-trodden trench between them.

Larisa glanced at the small frame on her desk, a picture of her parents taken during a trip to Hawaii several years ago. Her mother had gone to college and then med school, where she'd been raped by another student. She'd never reported the incident, a fact that to this day caused Larisa to flinch. Personally, Larisa would have rearranged the bastard's anatomy!

She'd learned to steel her emotions from victims when they refused to prosecute their abusive boyfriends or husbands. She knew the depth of human pain was different for everyone, and the process by which that pain was handled was as varied as the victims themselves.

"Plotting global domination, Vega?"

She looked up into the hazel eyes of Detective Martin Stubbs, fellow First Defense team member and long-ago lover. She used to get lost in him, until they had decided to cool things when he'd wanted to get married and she hadn't. Now, they were friends—good ones.

Larisa chuckled. "Not quite." She straightened in her chair. "Word is someone is going to be assigned to the Estes case. Any idea as to who that might be?"

"No, the briefing is later this afternoon. I hear the mayor has been all over this." Martin sat down at the desk opposite her, winked and said, "Be careful what you wish for."

"Could that be because Estes and the mayor have been rumored to be fucking around?" She crooked her eyebrows.

"Woman, you don't hold anything back, do you?"

"Why should I? It's a waste of damn time."

"Vega! My office!" Sergeant Kellerman stuck his head out of his office and within seconds, disappeared again.

Larisa met Martin's questioning gaze. "Looks like you weren't invited to the party." She swiped the evidence bag off her desk and sauntered toward the sergeant's office.

"Yep, some of us get all the luck," Martin said.

As soon as she walked through the door, Curtis Kellerman started in on her. "I need you for a case."

"A case?"

"We're getting pressure to get the Starlight Rapist off the street."

"One guess," Larisa drawled, despite the excitement racing through her. She'd finally get out of paperwork. "Maxwell Warner has chosen this case to rally behind—just in time for re-election."

The sergeant grunted, folding his hands on his desk. "Be that as it may, we're getting this bastard. You've heard of Dara Estes, the actress?"

"Yes." Larisa thought of the beauty that had starred in smaller-budget movies until she'd been nominated for an academy award. She hadn't won, but her name was gaining recognition. On several occasions, Larisa had been told that she bore a striking resemblance to the woman.

"I need you to go undercover as Estes."

"Excuse me?" How was she going to get away with acting like a celebrity? "How long?"

The sergeant glared. "As long as it takes. We've already moved Estes to a secured location." He pushed a file toward her. "Familiarize yourself with this."

Larisa picked up the file and skimmed through it. She tried to keep her wits about her, aware that every move she made had been judged from the moment she'd walked into the room. "Estes is the only victim that escaped the rapist?"

"Yes, and just like the others, she was lured by the casting call. The psych tells us that this animal will try again. I want us to take him down when he does. So far, we've kept the media out of this, and it has to stay that way or our advantage will be wasted. Today's press release is simply to toss them a bone."

He paused.

She looked up from the documents, her eyebrows raised. "What is

it?"

The sergeant removed his tortoise shell glasses, his pensive brown gaze zeroing in on her. "Are you sure you're ready for this?"

"Are you questioning my capabilities, Sergeant?" she asked, standing perfectly still. "Why?"

"Your father hasn't been dead three months, and you're back on active duty."

Larisa folded her hands over her chest, gritting her teeth. "I hardly call paper pushing 'active duty'."

He ignored her quip. "Look, I was there to see you grow up, and your old man happened to be my closest friend." Kellerman sighed. "You're like a daughter to me." His eyes bored into hers. "So, I'll ask again, can you handle this?"

"If you didn't think I could handle this, I wouldn't be standing here right now," Larisa answered, titling her chin defensively.

"True. But then, you didn't answer my question."

"My father is gone, and as much as I want him to be here, there's nothing I can do to bring him back. He would want me to get on with my life."

"Are you?" Kellerman asked.

"Taking it one day at a time, just like everyone else." She walked closer to his desk. "I can do my job, so let me do it."

"Fine, the Estes case is yours." He cleared his throat. "One more thing, Larisa. I've called in a favor."

Her eyebrows arched. "A favor?"

"Yes," Kellerman replied, looking away from her questioning gaze. "Nicolas Herrera will be joining you."

Nicolas? The man was a walking orgasm for any red-blooded woman other than Larisa, with his hard-body physique, rugged, dark looks and smoldering eyes. He moved like a big cat. Wild. Fluid. Or at least that's how several other co-workers had described him to her while she'd pretended not to listen to their preposterous claims of his moves in and outside of the bedroom. All former victims of his, she guessed.

What the hell did Nic have going on, a user satisfaction poll?

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

Larisa didn't doubt that Dara Estes was another of his casualties. The fact remained that due to Nic's carelessness, her father was dead. That was the way she saw it. Now they were to work together on the same case! She had never put a witness' life at risk over her personal feelings, and she wouldn't start now. She had a job to do, with or without him.

She tried to look unfazed and not display the contempt she had for the man. She was fully aware that any mention of her objection to Nic being on the case could be the sergeant's way of testing her ability to put her personal vendettas aside.

"Why?"

"Herrera knows Dara Estes personally, and he will be able to assist you on this case." Kellerman tapped his fingers on his desk, watching her. "I know you think that he's the reason Rodrigo is—"

"That's beyond the point now, isn't?"

"Now, listen, Larisa. There is no way in hell I would let Nic in on this if I didn't trust him. He loved your father. He would have given his life before letting any harm come to Rigo or you."

Breathe.

Larisa gripped the file in her hand, clenching her teeth so hard she'd probably have to see the dentist for a chip. "What does good ol' Nic think about having me on this case?"

"He recommended you, and frankly, I think it's a good idea to have him aboard, seeing that this is a big task for...well, I mean, it's not like you have experience parading around as a celebrity."

"What?" She felt her blood reach boiling point. "Are you saying I don't have the goods to double as Estes?"

A rap at the door made Larisa turn, her gaze colliding with a pair of wicked, chocolate-brown eyes.

Nicholas.

"I believe you do." He filled the door with his powerful presence, his gaze silently assessing her. His deep voice filtered through the room, commanding every nerve of hers to take attention.

Larisa felt the chip on her shoulder slip firmly in place and grow another inch thick.

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

"Perfeito! Meu Knight no armor brilhando chegou!" Her Portuguese words flew across the room at Nic.

Her knight in shining armor?

Saving her was the last thing he wanted to do at the moment, Nicolas Herrera reasoned silently as he entered the office, his gaze stalking her. His blood sizzled. He'd always walked a thin line when it came to Larisa Vega. Right now, he'd settle for kicking the image of licking her taut nipples with the tip of his tongue out of his mind. He didn't doubt that her flesh would give under his ministrations, but only time would tell just how much.

Would she taste as sinful as she tried not to look? Nic looked away from her then. The woman had represented trouble since the moment he'd met her several years ago, when he'd joined her father in forming their private security company, Vega, Herrera and Associates. He'd wanted her then, but not as much as he lusted after her now. Now the intensity of his emotions threatened to boil over, especially when there was no way to avoid being near her. He wanted to touch her, taste her. She gotten underneath his skin, and somehow she'd stayed there.

Larisa's fluent words flew over Sergeant Kellerman's head, but not Nic's. He stifled a chuckle as his gaze wandered again over every inch of her. She was fire and ice, a combination that he'd learned long ago not to mess with, yet couldn't avoid when it came to the fierce woman in front of him.

"Nice to see you again, Sergeant." He turned to look the haughty expression on her face. "Larisa."

She nodded that pretty little head of hers. "Nicolas."

"Great to have you aboard, Nic." Kellerman stood and shook his hand. "I was just informing Vega of your involvement in the Estes case."

Nic cringed at the impenetrable look on his new partner's face. Any more excitement and he'd have to handcuff her. He ignored the thrill that having her at his complete mercy would render. Maybe he'd be able to break through the icy wall she'd perfected for the last five years. Then again, Larisa would walk through fire before she left that happen.

"I'm sure we will be able to work together," he replied.

"Are you?" She cut her eyes at him. "I'm *not* my father."

Kellerman looked between the two, his brow furrowed. "This had better be a smooth transition." He glanced pointedly at Larissa. "If there is anything anyone needs to say before we get started, now is the time to do it."

Nic stared at her, unable to look away. He'd always known that she was beautiful. Her features were exotic; her heritage was a mixture of her Brazilian father and African-American mother. "I think we are both committed to the task at hand, Sergeant."

Dios mio!

Fortunately, his business relationship with the late Rodrigo Vega, Larisa's father, had stopped him from ever giving in to the temptation to touch every inch of her beautiful body.

Untouchable.

That was just one of the words that flitted through Nic's mind as he examined the stubborn angle of her chin and the don't-fuck-with-me rigid line of her back. There was a natural grace about her. He knew she was a dancer and moved with the agility of a professional. What a contrast from the tense picture she presented before him today.

"I can assure you both that my only objective is to catch the Starlight Rapist," Larisa declared, her jaw set.

"Good," Kellerman said. "Now we can discuss some specifics before the press conference takes place this afternoon. Larisa, I want you to stay behind."

"But—"

Kellerman raised his hand. "No buts. We can't take a chance of tipping off the press and the Starlight Rapist."

Larisa folded her arms around her waist, her lips tight. "Fine."

Although Nic listened to what the sergeant was saying, he privately assessed her.

Controlada.

Out of respect to Rodrigo's memory and friendship, he had never acted on the impulse to see just how out of control his daughter could get. Though he'd thought about it. Often.

At five feet, eight inches, Larisa stood about seven inches shorter than his six-three height. Her lithe body was covered in black, body-fitting slacks and a bland, white short-sleeve shirt. Her face was tawny brown, smooth and sweet like honey, and she wore no makeup. The slight gloss to her full lips made his gut clench and his cock stir. Yet, he knew he wouldn't cross that line. His hands longed to touch her silky, long black hair. Today it was bound in a tight knot. On other occasions, he knew the ebony locks looked luscious in the natural curls she usually favored. But he wouldn't sift one strand through his fingers.

If it were any other time or place, Nic probably could've forgotten that he was a man who'd been without the company of a woman for far too long, but they would be working on the Estes case—together! If there was one thing he didn't like doing, it was mixing his professional life and private one. He and Larisa would mix like oil and water. All he wanted to do was get this animal off the street and help his friend Dara get on with her life.

He noted the differences between the two women. Dara wore clothes to accentuate her sensual flare; he doubted Larisa cared much if anyone saw her sensual side, although it was there under the surface, simmering and waiting to be tapped. Dara also loved the spotlight and attention that it afforded her, while Larisa would probably flick off the paparazzi any chance she got—after feeding a camera down a photographer's throat. Both women had an independent spirit, cared about their communities and were stubborn as hell. And even though Larisa had a mouth sharper than a machete, he wanted to kiss her lips, suckle their flavor until she whimpered for more.

Nic brought his attention back to the conversation.

"So as you can see, it is absolutely vital that you two put personal feelings aside. Estes' townhouse has three levels. I will leave it up to you two to arrange sleeping arrangements. Estes also has a housekeeper, Helene, that comes in once a week."

"Who else is aware of my infiltration?" she asked.

"Dara's agent, Dirk Sumner, and Olivia Perkins, her publicist," Nic rattled off.

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

She tossed him an affronted gaze. "Need I ask how you know Estes, or do the rustled bed sheets speak loudly enough?"

Nic turned to face her. "Is that jealousy I hear, Vega?"

"Hardly."

"Good, then understand this: *my* private life is just that. Mine."

"Well, at least we agree on something," Larisa said.

Nicolas frowned. "There is a first time for everything."

"Well, while we're on such agreeable terms, let's get something else straight."

"What's that?"

Larisa leaned toward him. "You won't be calling the shots on this one. So don't even waste your time with your vigilante heroics."

"Vega! That's enough!" Sergeant Kellerman barked, raising his thick eyebrows at her, and then turned to look at Nicolas. "There's work to do. The conference starts in fifteen minutes. Let's go."

Nic caught her hand, waiting just long enough to see that the sergeant's attention was held by the mayor's arrival. "You think you have me all figured out, don't you?"

"Yes." Larisa pursed her lips. He resisted the urge to steal a kiss, to catch her off guard before she could whip out a sassy retort that would surely set his pulse to racing. "This is my case. You were the one invited in. I don't need you flying to my rescue, given your previous track record."

"I'm not the cause of your father's death, and you know it."

"Do I?" Larisa glared. "All I know is that my father put his trust in you. I will not."

Nic smirked, brushed past her and tossed over his shoulder, "A wise ass like you doesn't need to be rescued. The poor soul who flies to your defense, on the other hand, does."

* * * * *

Larisa did everything in her power to stay out of sight and away from Nicolas, though she was aware of everything about him. The smell

of his spicy cologne. The way his dark, bluntly cut hair spiked into multiple directions, unrestricted in its design. His dark gaze wandered about the room, cataloguing the members of the press and the irritating behavior of female members of the press whom blatantly sent ravenous looks his way. She wasn't blind by his sexual aura. The man could have his pick of any woman in the crowd, married or not.

His face was chiseled, more rugged than the pretty boys that graced magazine covers. A roman nose, sharply hewn cheekbones and olive-toned skin were as distinctive as the Latin accent he sported. She tried not to take in the way his powerful muscles strained against the linen shirt he wore, or the charcoal suit pants.

He was lethal in every sense of the word, but nothing defined that word more than the fierce pounding of her heart every time she sneaked a glance in his direction. He made her body react with just one look; the strained tension between her legs only intensified. Her pussy ached to feel his cock inside of her. Deep and hard.

Larisa shook her head. Now was definitely not the time to be thinking of Herrera ending her dry spell in the bedroom. His wariness made Larisa's chest tighten. To think that the Starlight Rapist would actually show his face, here at the room, and the fact that she hadn't thought of it first, only made her angrier. She had better keep her mind on what was important—the case. She knew there was no competition between them. She went on facts. Nic went by his gut. If he truly cared about Dara Estes, he would leave his Machiavellian antics be and play by the book.

Again, Larisa's thoughts roamed to the starlet and the possible relationship he might have had with her. Was she the kind of woman he normally preferred?

Larisa bristled at her ponderings. She should leave well enough alone. She didn't want to know anything more than she already did about Nicolas Herrera. The knowledge that her panties were wet anytime he was near was enough.

Damn it!

Now if she could stop imaging him gyrating underneath her cotton

sheets and above her writhing body, she'd be even better off. She cut her eyes at him. A strange jolt swept over her body. She forced herself to ignore it.

As long as he stayed the hell out of her way and didn't mess up her case, they would get along just fine.

Once the press conference had concluded, Larisa raced back to her desk before Nic or the sergeant could witness her disobedience. She quickly dialed her mother's cell phone and was actually disappointed when Janice Vega answered on the second ring. She hated confrontations like this.

"Hi Mom."

"Hi sweetheart, how are you? Coming over for Sunday dinner? You know, one of my colleagues has a son who is a lawyer and—"

"Mom, please don't start."

"Larisa, at the rate you're going, I'll be a grandmother in my second life."

Or longer. She shook her head at her mother's antics. "Actually, I won't be able to have dinner with you on Sunday. I'm working a case."

Larisa felt her mother's discontent before one word was uttered out of her mouth. She braced herself. Like always.

"Larisa Jeanette Vega! What mother wants her daughter going undercover, to be put in dangerous situations?"

Larisa closed her eyes and willed the conversation to be over. It was the same argument every time. "It's my *job*. What could be more dangerous than having someone's life in your hands? Someone depends on me, just like they do with you at the hospital."

Silence.

"It's not the same, young lady. I don't have to worry about possibly being killed."

"Mom, why can't you see that my job is important to me?"

"Because that same job can take you away from me, just like it did your father," Janice Vega whispered into the receiver.

Larisa felt her heart clutch. Her mother still mourned her father, and Larisa doubted she would ever stop. "I'm sorry, Mom. But I know

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

Dad would want me to go on with my life. I can't live my life in fear, and neither can you."

"And you can't live your life for Rodrigo, either."

Larisa thought about her mother's words long after she'd hung up the phone. She'd always wanted her father to be proud of her and her accomplishments. Had always wanted to be in his presence but his preoccupation with his work or some pressing case deterred her from having the father-daughter relationship she'd wanted with him..

She could be honest enough with herself to say that she'd entered the police academy because of her dreamy-eyed dedication and admiration to her father's decorated career, but things had changed. She'd forged her own way. She loved her job, and putting away the bad guys that they could capture. One day at a time. It wasn't always easy. But it was her life just the same.

* * * * *

Larisa pretended to organize some files on her desk just as Nicolas walked up. "Pow-wow over already?"

Nic nodded. "Get your stuff. We have a lot to do in little time."

She raised her eyebrows, feeling anger bubble up inside of her. "I don't take orders from you, Herrera."

"You do now," he responded, not taking his gaze off her. "Would you care to call the sergeant into this? I'm sure he wouldn't mind straightening things out."

She looked beyond Nic and saw Kellerman shake his head at them. She glanced into her new partner's triumphant gaze. "Where are we going?"

"It's time to make you a star."

Chapter Two

Three hours later, Nicolas was ready to shoot himself just to be put out of his misery. Making Larisa into a star was taking more energy than he thought he had, mentally and physically. She'd complained, whined and had managed to give one of her stylists a breakdown.

He hadn't expected anything less from the hellion!

Although there was nothing little about Larisa, there was plenty of hell, he noted as his gaze ran over her squirming body. Each time her eyes bored into his, he swore his body enflamed with heat.

A slow smile grazed his lips as he'd watched the hair stylist dye and cut Larisa's inky waves into rich chestnut brown and blonde-streaked layers that framed her face. The new hairdo brought out her beautiful brown eyes, the soft contours of her face and those plump lips.

"Don't you have other things to do, like go guard someone's body?" Larisa asked, folding her arms over her breasts.

Nicolas chuckled, his gaze following her movement before it refocused on her face. "I am. Yours, at the moment."

She scowled.

He shook his head. The woman was just aching for a fight, and normally he could give as good as he got, but there was too much at stake. If anyone were to look at Larisa, they would think that she was Dara, but he knew the difference. The main distinction between the two women was their body language.

The way Larisa gripped the chair and sat rod straight spoke

volumes. She wasn't comfortable not having power over even the slightest matters. He was certain his presence only made things worse. Had she ever given herself over to a man? Completely? A lover who had so utterly broken her mastery and become the master?

Ella tiene miedo. Larisa? Fearful?

He wondered what she was so worried about. Did she think she'd lose control?

Nic felt his cock harden. His body's reaction only intensified the more he watched Larisa bite her lips and cut her almond-shaped eyes up at him. He wanted to feel that mouth on him. Suckling him. Teasing the head of his cock with her tongue. The image was so clear and sharp, the sweet intensity urging against the fly of his pants nearly sent Nic over the edge.

He looked away from Larisa. He wasn't supposed to think about her like this. He wasn't supposed to want to fuck her, to watch her writhe in his arms. He shouldn't want to grin smugly as her steel wall caved, and know that he'd caused its demise. Again, he found his gaze on her. She'd taste as sweet as candy, and hot and spicy like the habaneras he favored.

Nic felt that he owed loyalty to Larisa's father. They'd been good friends. Screwing his daughter should be the last thing on his mind. The visions flittering before his eyes had nothing to do with loyalty and everything to do with lust.

Nic turned to look into Larisa's burning gaze. If it were just the two of them in the shop, he'd have her straddling his lap as he plunged into her moist heat from behind, gripping her ass as he filled her over and over again. He was a big man, but he'd be willing to bet that Larisa's sweet pussy could accommodate his size.

Once the hair stylist stopped coiffing her hair, Larisa stood, thanked the woman between clenched teeth and practically tossed the plastic cape at her. "I hope your satisfied, Herrera."

Not even close. He grinned, folding his arms over his chest. "Turn around, and you might be, too."

"Hmm." She turned and gasped at her reflection in the mirror, her fingers touched the thick strands of her hair. "It's true."

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

Nic stepped up behind her, inhaling sharply as her clean feminine scent splintered over him. "What is?"

"Dara and I."

He nodded, careful not to let his gaze linger on her longer than necessary. "Yes. You favor each other." Yet, the insecurity of her own sexuality called to something deep within him, as did her inner strength. She was one hell of a complex woman.

Larisa nodded her chin at him, watching him in the mirror. "Does that bother you?"

"Should it?"

"Do you still have feelings for her?"

"Are you trying to ask me a question, Detective?" Nic gritted his teeth as she turned to face him, her breasts brushing against him. He kept his hands at his side to keep from reaching out and touching her. He watched as she tried to look unfazed by the brief contact, but the rigid points of her nipples and the throb of her pulse at the base of her throat gave away her secret.

She felt it too!

"I think I just did."

He stepped closer, enjoying the brief surprise in her eyes. He'd caught her off guard. He liked it. His gaze swept slowly over her. The tension between them threatened to explode. "You may look like Dara..." He focused on her breasts, her nipples extended against the cotton fabric of her shirt. He smiled, looking back at her. "But there is no way I would ever confuse you with her."

The beautician cleared her throat, forcing Nic to step away from Larisa as she was whisked away for a pedicure, facial, manicure, and not a moment too soon. He'd been seconds away from pulling her into his arms and kissing her senseless.

* * * * *

"I pray to God that that was the last stop." Larisa sighed two hours later as she climbed into Nic's SUV and shut the passenger door.

"Most women would love a day of pampering." Nic chuckled.
"Especially if they look as you do right now."

Larisa looked away from him then, despite the slight smile on her lips. "You should know by now—" She shot him a look as if he were simple-minded. "I'm not most women, Herrera."

He nodded. "I never said you were."

"Most women aren't parading around as someone else."

"This is L.A." He watched as her lips twitched but no laughter emerged. "Are you up to the task, detective?"

"You would love that wouldn't you? For me to fail?" Larisa turned in her seat. Her gaze wandered over him. "I'm not afraid of you, Nicolas."

"I didn't know you were supposed to be, and if we fail, we fail Dara. I can't have that happen." He pulled the truck out onto Beverly Boulevard.

The fierce protection she heard in his voice spoke volumes. If she'd learned one thing about Nic, it was that he was loyal in his own right.

"Aren't you the type of man who barks and expects everyone to run?"

"Don't worry, I don't expect you to run," he answered.

"Good," Larisa said, turning back around in her seat.

"Maybe a dash or jog." He laughed.

"Ha, ha. *No!* Where are we going?"

"Shopping."

"You have to be along for this...excursion?"

"I can't let you out of my sight."

Larisa leaned back. "Just what I was afraid of."

* * * * *

Nic shifted in his seat for the hundredth time. If Larisa did any more sashaying or swishing with those lush hips of hers, he'd erupt right in his chair. He wasn't a fool; she knew what she was doing, and the gleam in her whiskey-brown eyes proved that she liked doing it.

He enjoyed watching her, too. A little too much, as the erection in his pants clearly demonstrated. The boutique was one that Dara often

visited. The clerk had agreed to close the shop while Larisa and he shopped around. Of course, the clerk had immediately thought Larisa was Dara, and had only too happily worked around her schedule.

Nic ran his hands over the short spikes of his hair. It took every ounce of strength within him not to go behind the curtain.

He was only a man, and she was playing with fire!

Dios mio!

His curiosity got the better of him—again! His gaze riveted back to the silhouette etched through the curtain. Her breasts were high and round. He imagined how her soft flesh would feel in his hands. Her torso was long, her abdomen flat, and the rigid line of her back curved into a luscious ass and long legs.

Larisa's body was made for a man's loving. Curvaceous. She was a slightly more voluptuous than Dara, but no one would be able to tell the difference. Frankly, Nic liked her shapely body. A man needed something to hold on to. She had the kind of legs he wanted wrapped around his waist as he fucked her, burying his cock into her slick heat. He'd trail a path of hot kisses up her shin to her calf, until he made his way to the crevice between her legs and...

Nic shot up out of the chair, his gaze never leaving the curtain. He watched, tortured as Larisa shimmied into a dress. Her breasts bounced, and he held his hands in fists rigidly at his side.

The sound of the curtain parting open made his blood sizzle, and she slowly emerged. Nic's mouth went dry. He stood up, silently walking to the dressing room. Just who was control of whom?

* * * * *

"Well?" Larisa twirled around in the red strapless dress, avoiding Nic's laser-like perusal. The small dressing room made it impossible to avoid contact with him. "How do I look?" The words sounded more confident than she felt, but he didn't have to know that. This was her show, and he was along for the ride. Nothing more. Nothing less. She told herself that she didn't care that it only took one dark look from him, and

she visualized him fucking her. No, she'd save that little tidbit of information for herself. Thank you very much!

Within a blink of an eye, he was at Larisa's side. She watched as he took in the side slit of the dress and the way it crept up her thigh. She twitched under his blatant stare. His gaze rested on the rise and fall of her breasts at the deep, plunging neckline that left little to the imagination. Normally, she wouldn't have been caught dead in this getup. She was a jeans and T-shirt woman.

It was a good thing that this charade wouldn't last forever. How would she be able to resist the temptation he presented anytime he was within arm's reach?

Her mind zipped to the present as Nicolas's warm breath caressed the nape of her neck. Her eyes closed. It felt so good and purely decadent for him to be allowed in the privacy of her dressing room. She blamed the love-struck sales clerk for being fooled by his "good boyfriend" ruse.

The man was lethal. Larisa knew that one touch of his lips would be tantalizing. Scintillating. For a moment, she wanted that kiss, wanted to feel his hands on her. His body against hers. She wasn't the type to indulge in affairs. Maybe that was what made Nic seem so tempting.

She had to remember the reason she couldn't go down this route. The reason she couldn't let her libido loose around him.

"Undress."

Her eyes fluttered open. "W-What?"

Nicolas leaned into her. His pelvis to her spine. His hard cock pressed against her ass. Damned if she didn't want to feel him inside her, stretching her to the brink.

He whirled her around to face him. His eyes blazed with lust. "I said, undress, Detective Vega." He grinned slowly. "You do realize I am your superior on this case, don't you?"

"You're a civilian on *my* case! I'm running the show here, Herrera." Larisa lifted her chin stubbornly. "And if I don't undress?" The words came out her mouth before she could stop them. She knew the gauntlet had been thrown. She was treading dangerous territory.

Pull back! The voice deep inside of her shouted. *Before it's too late!*

"*Tu quieres jugar?*" Nic whispered softly.

Did she want to play?

"We don't have time to play games." Larisa swallowed hard. For the first time, she felt fear. Not of Nicolas, but of herself, and what she might actually do. She took one step back. He stepped forward.

"Oh, no? You've been teasing me all afternoon. Did you think I didn't notice? Did you think I wouldn't collect on what your body is clearly offering, *querida?*"

It was true. She had thrown an extra strut to her stride, but she hadn't meant to take it to this level, had she?

Larisa's gaze roamed over him slowly, and she licked her lips. She'd never seen a sexier man! The hollow planes of his cheekbones, the slight flare of his nostrils, and the curve of that arrogant smile lingered on his mouth. He was daring her, wondering if she would take the challenge and jump.

Nic brought her closer against the hard length of his muscular body, and before she could utter a word, his mouth was on hers. Vibrant and bursting with a flavor she'd never known could exist. He smelled of spearmint and masculine heat. She tried to remain unaffected, tried not to respond to his taste, but gave in as she wrapped her arms around his neck, urging him closer. His tongue dallied and served gentle licks against her lips. His hands cupped her ass as he ground against her.

A sharp grasp escaped Larisa's throat. She became a woman she didn't know, wanton and desperate for Nic's touch. This was the woman she'd locked up for far too long, and he held the key. The thud of their bodies colliding into the dressing room wall did little to slow down the frenzied pace of kneading hands and hot caresses.

"Is everything okay in there?" the clerk asked from the entrance curtain.

"Everything's fine, Janet." Nic's eyes burned into Larisa's, daring her to say different. He pushed the strapless bodice down, his fingers reaching out to touch her bare breasts, and pinched her taut nipples. He bent down to taste them, smoothing his tongue over the tight buds, and then grazed her tender flesh with his teeth.

"A-ah, okay," the clerk said, and her footsteps moved away from the curtain.

"You lied to that poor woman." Larisa said huskily; her voice sounded like a stranger's. "Maybe you're lying about other things, too." Her eyes went wide as her fingers trailed down the front of his pants, caressed the well-formed bulge pressing against his zipper.

Nic smiled, masculine pride shining in his eyes. "Not about that, *querida*." He picked her up, wrapping her legs around him. He placed his knee beneath her ass, her weight rested against him. He inched his fingers up her thigh through the slit of her dress and cupped her moist sex.

Larisa felt the shudder as he made direct contact with her bare flesh. The hiss that escaped his lips made her grin as their eyes met.

"Pantyless. You tempt me."

"Do I?"

"Hell yeah!" Nic kissed her lips, suckling her bottom lip. He slipped one finger between her dampened folds, massaging her clit in slow circles with his thumb, and then dipped one finger into her hot pussy.

"Hmm." Larisa moaned, twisting closer to him.

"You're so wet." He whispered against her ear, licking her lobe, while thrusting another finger inside her slick center.

"You had nothing to do with that."

"I don't believe you." He grinned against her, nipping her neck with his teeth. "For that little comment, you will pay, Vega."

The heat threatened to suffocate Larisa as sanity edged further away and desire swiftly replaced it in the midst of his ministrations. Her skin was on fire from his touch. Her body quickly adjusted to his erotic play, greedy for more.

Before she could answer, Nic sat her on the little built-in seat in the dressing room, dropped to his knees and pulled her forward. He leaned inward until Larisa could feel the warm heat of his breath on her inner thighs. She shivered. The anticipation too much to bear.

He looked up into her eyes. "I've been wanting to do this for a long time." He inched closer, his mouth touching her inner lips.

Larisa groaned. "What are you going to do to me?"

"Everything,"

Nic inhaled deeply and moaned. His tongue swept upward from her slit to her clit, sampling her pussy as if she was as sweet as ice cream. "You taste so good, baby," he murmured against her trembling flesh.

"Mmm." She moaned, gripping the back of his head, her legs straddling his broad shoulders as he quickened his pace. His teeth teased her clit, causing Larisa to buck. She gripped the wall to keep from falling off the narrow seat. "Shit." The hard edge of desire swept through her so fiercely, it shocked her and thrilled her at the same time.

Nic's tongue twisted and twirled in and out of her. Spirals of ecstasy spasmed over her body. She was so close to climaxing, but to do so would give over control to him. She gritted her teeth. Could she do it?

Nic pulled her closer, his fingers pressed into the soft flesh of her ass. She was so intimately exposed to him that she couldn't hide a damn thing. She'd never let a man this close before, not even Martin.

Larisa tried to move away from Nic, but her body wouldn't listen. Her hips undulated. Her nipples were hard, her breathing labored, and her pussy muscles convulsed with a force beyond her rein as he fucked her with his tongue. "Oh! Nic."

He gripped her hips, licking and laving every drop of her essence as she rocked against him until the sweet tide of pleasure washed away, and reality dawned brightly in its wake.

Larisa broke away from him, standing on shaky legs as he collided against the other side of the dressing room. "Damn it!" She righted herself, looking away from the surprise in his eyes.

"What the hell?" Nic straightened.

"Did you really think we're going to have sex here?"

"No, but then I didn't know you were playing hard to get." Nic stood. "Not exactly the response I was expecting."

Larisa sneered at him, pulling the dress up to cover her naked breasts. "Well, you know what they say about expecting too much." Her body throbbed for him to finish what he'd started. "Don't worry, Herrera,

you have a real talent." The words were crass, but there was no other way. He'd left a hunger she'd have to deny if she wanted to keep her sanity and her job. "You wanted to play, remember?"

"I'm sorry." Nic stood tall and angry, his dark eyes simmering with rage. He wiped the remnants of her juices off his lips with his fingers. She stood mesmerized as he brought his fingers to his mouth and licked them. His eyes blazed into hers. "It'll never happen again."

He retreated from the dressing room, leaving Larisa to deal with the hypnotic traces of his touch. An odd sense of disappointment shattered deep within her. She tried to shake the emotion off. She made fast work of redressing into her pants and shirt. She suppose dealing with the emptiness now was a hell of a lot better than facing the guilt that was sure to keep her up later that night.

Larisa left the red dress on the hanger in the dressing room; her breath caught just looking at it and thinking about what could have happened. She had to stay in control, or she could blow the case, and the last thing she wanted was to have the sergeant thinking that she wasn't ready for a real case. No, she had to stay one step ahead of Nic, or she could lose everything she'd worked so hard for.

"Damn, so much for being a starlet."

* * * * *

Did she really think that she could hide from him? He'd have to teach her a hefty lesson. He'd made her into the star she was today. Who the hell did Dara Estes think she was? Did she think that she could just forget him as if what they'd shared hadn't meant anything?

He'd given her a piece of himself, and she'd tossed it back in his face.

The man gritted his teeth. Rage speared through his veins as he thought of Dara. Did she think he couldn't have her? He could. Anytime he wanted. He could make or break her. A decision he'd make when they were face to face.

The man held a photograph of Dara tightly in his hand, crushing it

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

in his palm. He would have her. After all, she was the whole reason he'd come to Los Angeles.

It angered him to think that she wasn't aware of him. Didn't give him the accolades he was due. The sex he'd settled for with the others had paled in comparison to what he wanted to do to Dara.

And he wasn't leaving until she was his again.

* * * * *

The next morning, Nic was caught off guard as he parked his SUV in the back entrance to Dara's townhouse, got out and slammed the door. Desire hit him like a sledgehammer as his gaze roamed over the shapely backside of Larisa. Her rich brown hair was piled up atop her head, held by some clip, and tendrils caressed her cheeks. He slipped his sunglasses back on his nose. His arrival didn't stop her fussing with the luggage she was trying to remove from the backseat of her Mustang convertible.

Despite the erection in his pants, Nic schooled his face to remain expressionless as Larisa finally looked up and caught his gaze. He witnessed the wariness on her pretty face, and the message was stated loud and clear. Things would be strictly business between them.

As they should be, Nic thought.

In all his thirty-four years, he'd never been so off-kilter around a woman, and he wasn't proud of the fact that he'd possibly ruined the case before they even got started. From here on out, he would remain professional. Dara's life depended on it, and he couldn't let her suffer because of his mistakes.

"Let me give you a hand with that." He tried not to soak in her beauty, but that would be like trying to find a needle in a haystack—impossible. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched her step back abruptly as he leaned forward, careful not to let their bodies touch. "I thought we agreed that I would pick you up this morning."

"I left you a message, explaining that I could drive myself," Larisa grumbled, placing her hands in the back of her blue jeans pockets.

Nic hefted the luggage out of the car seat, his gaze resting back on

her. "If we are going to catch this bastard, you and I need to come to understanding."

"Such as?"

"Such as, you are no longer able to go where you please, when you please. If something were to happen to you, I'd..." Nic's voice trailed off. He didn't even want to think about what he'd do if Larisa were hurt. Emotions from the past surfaced. The night of her father's death crystallized before his eyes.

"You'd what?" she asked.

He shook his head, pushing the unsettling memories aside and said, "You are now Dara Estes, and I want you to view some DVDs of her today."

"You have that much confidence in me, huh?"

Nic turned away from her. "Physical aspects aside, there are many elements to Dara."

He heard Larisa's footsteps following behind him as they walked away from the garage. Nic extracted a key from his back pocket, opened the door and held it open for her.

"I guess you would know."

Nic blocked her entry. His eyes bored into hers. "If you want to judge me, then do so, but do not force your rude assumptions on Dara. She's depending on you and I to regain her life, and I'll be damned if I'll let her down." Nic turned away, letting the screen door slam shut, leaving Larisa staring after him.

Chapter Three

Larisa closed her mouth. To say that she was taken aback by Nic's outburst was putting it mildly. The fierce protectiveness exuded from his lips whenever he spoke of Dara took her by surprise. Did he love her?

She opened the door, again wondering just what had transpired between the two of them. The strange twinge that settled in the pit of her chest had nothing to do with jealousy. It was mere curiosity.

How can you be jealous of something you've never had? But hadn't she? She could still feel Nic's lips on her skin. She hadn't been surprised by all the twisting and turning she'd done in her bed last night. She couldn't get him out of her mind.

Larisa walked into the brightly decorated kitchen. It was fully equipped with faux granite countertops, sub-zero, double-door fridge, and a large pantry. Dozens of pots and pans hung overhead the table-sized island. Several diner-style stools surrounded the area. Along with the bright green paint, it all spelled out retro.

Larisa felt as if she'd stepped into one of the houses on MTV Cribs. She walked out of the kitchen, following the wood-floored hallway to a large living room, accentuated with white carpet, white leather and sporadic splashes of mauves, roses and pinks. Ultra-feminine, she decided as she gazed up at the pictures lining a stone-faced mantel and the huge fireplace.

Larisa shook her head in wonder; the room was bigger than all the rooms in her apartment put together. Her eyes wandered over the

pictures of Dara, family members and friends. Her attention specifically focused on the platinum frame of Dara and Nic, their arms locked around each other. She walked over to it.

They looked so happy, Larisa thought, her fingers idly running over Nic's face. Gone were the tight lines around his lips, and the frown that furrowed his thick brows whenever they were in each other's company. He looked like a completely different person, one she would rather be on this case with.

Perish the thought, Vega!

"That was taken several years ago, when Dara first arrived to L.A."

Larisa jumped at the sound of his deep voice. She turned around, a slight grin on her face. "You two look very happy."

Nic walked toward her. Larisa felt everything within her respond. She inhaled as he stopped in front of her, looking so sexy in his black jeans and T-shirt displaying *Navy* in white letters. She tried to focus on anything but the muscles bulging underneath.

"I care deeply for Dara. I want this animal off the streets, and then maybe she can get on with her life."

The shadows that displayed across his face made more questions arise in her mind. She had no business wanting to know any more than she already did about Nic or his personal life, besides the fact that he was good at oral sex. She wanted things to remain structured between them.

Larisa nodded her head. She knew if someone she cared about had been attacked, she would want them to be vindicated. She could at least admire that about Nicolas.

"We'll get him."

"You sound very sure," he said.

"I'm not used to taking no for an answer," Larisa said, looking away from the boldness of his gaze. Despite herself, she felt her pulse race. Felt him trying to figure her out. What did he see?

Nic placed the picture frame on the mantel and then turned to her. "Come on, I'll show you the rest of the townhouse and where you'll be staying."

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

* * * * *

"This is Dara's room. Go in and take a look."

Larisa grinned. "I think I will."

After a ten-minute tour, Larisa could fairly assess that Dara Estes was on her way to the top. Her home was gorgeous. The second floor boasted a master suite and a smaller room, which was used as a home gym. On the third floor was Dara's room.

Larisa found that the woman had exquisite taste. The room had double French doors, opening to an entryway with two burgundy and tan pin-striped chaises on either side of the warm beige walls. Built-in enclaves housed paintings and miniature statues.

Larisa walked further into the room, a gasp escaping her mouth as her gaze captured the king-sized canopy bed. Cream-colored sheers shielded the bed, and multi-toned pillows lined it.

She chuckled. "Wow, her bed is big enough for an army." She wondered how many times Nic had visited Dara there.

Stop it!

Larisa caught Nic's inquisitive gaze but said nothing. Instead, she continued to look around. The room had a walk-in closet and a private balcony with a bistro table. Another set of double doors led to a bathroom which had a sunken tub made for two and a double vanity.

Maybe if she was real lucky, she could sneak a bath in later. Her body ached in response to the treat.

Larisa turned to find Nic watching her quietly. "Dara has a beautiful home."

"Yes. She hasn't had many beautiful things in her life. It does my heart good to know that her life is...*was* turning around."

Larisa felt his worry. "And it will again, Nic."

He nodded his head. "I've set up some tapes of Dara's appearances. You aren't expected to make that many, but just to be prepared in case anything should happen where you will need to interact with others. And while you're doing that, I'll prepare dinner."

Larisa stopped in her tracks. "Dinner?"

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

Nic's eyebrows rose. "Yes, dinner. Usually the meal that follows lunch."

She couldn't help but smile. "No, I didn't know you cook. Especially since you seem very traditional."

"Is that another way for saying that I'm boring, Vega?"

Larisa brushed past him. "No man who can cook is boring, Herrera." Her gaze wandered over him. "I guess that includes you, too."

* * * * *

Larisa stood up from the couch, and her leg muscles punished her by cramping. She limped to the TV and turned off the tape she'd been watching of Dara's varying appearances, from movie premieres to the TV interviews. She could see why Nic found her attractive. There was something about her ultra-sensual persona that left little to the imagination, but her demure smile always gave the impression that there was much more behind the skimpy outfits and her flirtatious manner.

Dara Estes was every man's dream.

Larisa's mind thought back to the dressing room with Nic. She could still feel his fingers inside her pussy, stretching her, teasing her sensitive flesh until she'd melted like butter in his skillful hands.

She blamed her lack of restraint on the fact that she'd always harbored a sexual fascination with Nic Herrera, a fact that she hadn't shared with a soul.

Larisa thought of the first time she'd met him. She'd been late to a lunch date with her father and had walked right into an interview he'd been having with Nic.

How could she ever forget those sensual brown eyes that seemed to stare into her soul? Her first thought had been that he was so very big. Muscular to be sure, but by chance, she'd glanced down at his perfectly polished shoes.

Hell, all women knew the saying that a man with big shoes had an equally big dick. Her pulse jumped as she recalled the feel of his cock pressing against her palm as she cradled it in her hand. Heat swept down

into her underused feminine core. She wanted him. Not for what tomorrow would bring. She didn't need promises. She needed the sensual pleasure his eyes teased her with anytime they were in the same room.

Larisa shook her head. She scurried out of the room and up the stairs where a bubble bath was calling her name. Ten minutes later, she eased her body into the warm, sudsy water, and a sigh escaped her lips. This was one guilty pleasure she didn't indulge in enough.

She slid deep into the water until the bubbles tickled her chin and closed her eyes. She knew that she would be less tense if she could get the image of Nic slipping in behind her. What the hell had happened to remaining professional, especially since there was nothing professional about wanting to have sex with him?

She thought of the terrifying moment Nic had shown up on her doorstep to announce that he'd found her father dead.

Larisa shuddered. She'd tried to block that night out of her mind. The way his eyes had been red from tears, the desperation in his voice, hadn't registered with her then. She'd been angry. Angry that her father had been murdered, angry that Nic hadn't been there to save him. Angry that her father had never really acknowledged her as his daughter.

Larisa opened her eyes. A sound at the glass bathroom door brought her head up. Her breath caught, and her gaze skimmed over Nic. She reached to cover herself, but stopped as she watched him standing outside the glass door, his hands at his sides. His eyes flashed with passion. He made no move to exit the bedroom, and she didn't want him to.

Her heart pounded fiercely against her chest, and her mouth parted. What would happen if he opened the door? As if he read her mind, Nic opened the heavy glass that separated them and stepped toward the tub, his eyes burning into hers.

Larisa licked her lips as he stood above her, devouring her with his gaze. "This is improper. Do you normally interrupt a woman's bath uninvited?"

"I called for you, and when you didn't answer, I came to find you," he replied.

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

She felt her body grow warm underneath the water. Her pussy convulsed at the smooth timbre of his voice. "And now you've found me."

"Yes, I did."

"Now what?" Larisa angled her head, daring him. He was the challenge she couldn't seem to back away from. She spread her legs, wishing he would fill the space between them.

Nic sat down on the edge of the tub. His eyes glittered with lust. "How wet are you, Larisa?"

She grinned. Her fingers trailed down her breasts, disappeared in the water over her navel and moved down between the coarse hair covering her clit. "Let me check. Mmm." She slipped a finger between her wet folds. Her pussy tightened automatically, instinctually. She met Nic's stone-hard glare.

"Very, very wet."

Nic clenched his fists. "*Querida*, I want to be inside you." He exhaled. "I need to know something first."

"Now isn't the time for a deep conversation, Herrera."

"Now is the perfect time." He leaned closer, his mouth almost touching her lips. "Your body is yearning for me. I can feel it because mine is doing the same. But none of it means a damn thing if you still believe I'm responsible for your father's death."

Larisa felt her desire tamp down with anger and surprise as she looked away from him. She couldn't find the words to battle him with, and that meant Herrera had the upper hand.

"Look at me, dammit!"

She looked into his handsome face reluctantly.

"You want to give me your body, but not the rest of you? Believe me, if I didn't respect your father and could deal with the guilt of just using you for my selfish reasoning, this situation would end differently."

"So how's it supposed to end, Herrera, huh? What do you want me to say?"

"That's for you to decide." Nic stood up, his gaze traveling over her. "I don't just want your body, *querida*. I want you to believe me." He turned and walked out the bathroom, leaving her a frazzled mass of

nerves.

Larisa leaned her head against the tub. When the hell had things gotten so complicated? She'd gone from not wanting Nic—or pretending not to—to wanting him with everything within herself. He confused her, and she wished he could be the man who could look past their differences for a little harmless sex.

She groaned inwardly, knowing deep down that her original thoughts of Nicolas Herrera were changing every time she was in his presence, and there wasn't a damn thing she could do about it.

* * * * *

"Dinner is served," Nic called from the kitchen. A growl erupted from her stomach.

Not a moment too soon, Larisa thought. "Just a moment." She scurried to the bathroom and hurriedly brushed her fingers through her freshly cut layers. She actually liked the sophisticated air it brought to the bone structure of her face. Larisa laughed, not remembering the last time she had cared about bone structure or her hair. She usually washed it in the shower, misted it with hair gel and let the California sun dry it naturally into the unmanageable curls she was accustomed to.

She licked her lips. Just because she was dining with Nic didn't mean that she couldn't look her best, despite the conflicting emotions raging within her. She decided to take an extra five minutes and change into something a little casual since it would only be the two of them. She went to her suitcase and pulled out a pair of pajama bottoms and a white tank top that molded to her breasts.

Larisa exited the bedroom, wondering what the hell Nic had concocted that smelled so damn good.

Larisa entered the kitchen, getting the sight of her life. There was Nic bent over the stove, and several pots and pans littered the counter. He had taken off his shirt, and she almost groaned in protest as he turned around to face her, a white apron tied around his marbled waistline.

Damn! He was so fuckable!

He smiled. His eyes lit up as he gave her an once-over, paying particular interest at the way her chest rose and fell.

"Hope you're hungry."

Hungry? She was starving, and what she craved had nothing to do with what was stewing in the pots and pans.

Larisa licked her lips. "Whatever it is smells wonderful."

Nic turned his attention back to the pot in front of him. "Sit down. Let me get everything together."

"I can help—"

He gave her a look of warning, pointing a spatula at her. "You sit."

Larisa grinned like an idiot. This must be what it felt like to have someone close to you. She wouldn't know, since the most intimate thing in her life was the energy she spent in her job.

She tried to shake off the feeling of loneliness. She was used to doing things for herself. She never assumed that that would have to change. She wasn't crazy enough to believe in the theory of forever. She'd learned that after giving her heart to a man who had forgotten to tell her that he was married.

Larisa shook her head. She'd been young and stupid and willing to bend over backwards for Jackson, and since their breakup a year ago, she hadn't bothered with finding a replacement.

Every time her path had crossed with Nic's, she'd secretly visualized him in her bed, pounding his cock deep inside her body. She'd never have to be ashamed with Nic. Everything about him exuded confidence and strength. He'd ask her to tell him what she wanted, and she would. She wouldn't have to tell him how she wanted to be fucked, touched, licked—he'd know. Just watching the way the man moved was enough to send her pulse soaring.

Larisa bit down on her bottom lip. She'd take his cock in her hand, wrap her fingers around the wide base of his shaft, and tease the head with the tip of her finger. Slowly, softly, she'd torture him. She'd take the tip into her mouth, savoring the salty taste of his flesh, engulfed by his masculine scent. It would be her name he'd whisper savagely on the edge of his ragged moans as he climaxed.

She looked up to find Nic's gaze on her as he placed a plate in front of her. Her nostrils filled with the smell of spicy chorizo, rice and stir fried vegetables of mushrooms, onions, broccoli and red peppers.

"Are you all right?" he asked, watching Larisa intently as he removed the apron.

Hell no! She wasn't okay! Far, far from it. She wanted to reach across the table and take what was within her reach. All she would have to do is touch him. One touch would multiply into something more...more than she could possibly handle.

Larisa cleared her throat. "I'm fine. This smells good."

Nic smiled, sitting down at the opposite side of the island. "For tonight's meal, you can thank Grace Herrera."

She picked up her fork, her mouth watering. "Your mother?"

A solemn look passed over his face, his smile disappearing. "My wife."

Larisa almost choked on her food. "You're married?" Her gaze swept to his left hand, but no band was present. Not even an indentation.

Nic cranked his head at her. "Do you find me that contemptible?"

"I'm sorry. I just never envisioned you being married." *Insert foot in mouth here. No problem.*

"I was. For five years, and then Grace was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. She died five months after, and I swore a part of me had, too."

Larisa watched him try to hide the emotion that crept into his voice as he spoke of his wife. She felt like an ass. "I'm sorry for your loss." She thought of her own father as she speared her fork through her rice. "How did you know when it was time to...?"

"Move on?" Nic asked.

Larisa looked into his eyes for a moment sensing that they could share something more than trading insults. She kept the tears that threatened to fall from spilling down her face. This wasn't the time to develop a Hallmark moment. "Yes."

"You just do." Nic was quiet as he chewed his food and then replied, "One day the pain doesn't seem as if it will swallow you whole,

and you move from minute to minute, day by day."

"She was a lucky woman," Larisa said finally, seeing him in a different light. Was it possible that Nic was more than the playboy she imagined? She knew that rumors got started and often stained the persona of an individual. She just wasn't sure if she could trust the man sitting across from her.

"I was the lucky one. She put up with me." Nic chuckled.

She grinned. "Yes, I suppose that would take some doing."

"Hey!"

"Did she have to put up with your many female admirers?" Larisa asked, taking a sip of her water. She looked up to find his gaze on her.

"When I had Grace in my life, no other woman existed." Nic turned away from her then and shoveled food into his mouth.

Larisa felt her throat tighten as she wondered if a man would ever talk about her like that. The fact that Nic could about his wife touched her more than she thought it would. "Will you marry again?"

"Maybe." Nic looked into her eyes. "What about you? Ever thought of settling down?"

Larisa laughed.

"What?"

"Just that I never really thought of myself as getting married. My parents had a great marriage. They shared things, argued and made up. I just never assumed it would happen to me."

Nic leaned forward. "Why is that?"

Larisa dangled her fork. *Yes, why is that? Could it be because you don't know the first thing about relationships, or that you'll be found lacking, so you shelter yourself into your job and allow room for little else?* She cleared her throat. "I guess I never thought to wait for the right man to come along. If there is such a thing."

"Do you believe there is?"

"I don't know if there is for me. But I believe my father was a good man and my mother loved him."

"That he was." Nic said smiling at her. "Your father was proud of you, you know."

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

Her head came up, a frown on her face. "I guess you would know more than I would, since you two spent the majority of your time together."

"Surely you aren't jealous? I'm not blood."

"Call it whatever you want, Herrera. My father was often away on some covert case with you, and too busy to be worried about his marriage or me. You were basically the son I never could be."

Nic pushed his plate away, finished with his food. "So this is what holds you back."

Larisa tossed her napkin in her plate. "What are you talking about?"

"You resent me for the time I spent with your father."

"No, I resent you because you should have been there to protect him that night he went on the Smythe case, and he died."

Nic frowned. "I was out of town on the Garrison case. I had no idea your father was taking on Jeanne Smythe's obsessed husband by himself. The man was a lunatic, abusive to our client. Your father didn't stop to think that the husband would be at the residence. Don't you think if I could change the outcome of that night, I would have? I was the one to find your father, *querida*."

"Don't call me that." Larisa stared at him hard, tears shining in her eyes. "How do I know that I can count on you?"

"I'd give my last breath for you, Larisa, before I'd let anything happen to you. Your father was special to me, and no matter what you think of me, I know that Rodrigo was extremely proud of you. He was always bragging about his daughter, the police officer, and when you made detective. If you'd been there, you would know that."

Larisa rose from the table, unable to take the emotions running rampant within her. "But I wasn't, and if he'd truly cared, he could have told me to my face. Thanks for dinner." She turned and walked out of the kitchen.

* * * * *

Music was good for the soul, and right now Larisa's was in turmoil. Part of her knew that Nic would give his life for her father—for her. The bigger part of her was scared to admit it. Nicolas Herrera wasn't the type of man who went half-ass, and if they were involved, it would mean she couldn't either. It was a commitment she wasn't sure she could devote herself to.

She walked into the home gym, found the remote to the radio and the surround sound speakers brought the rhythmic sounds of Reggaeton to her ears.

Larisa smiled and danced around in a circle, placing a hand at her waist and the other flailed in the air. She'd been addicted to dancing since she was old enough to walk. Her fondest memory with her mother was dancing in the kitchen barefoot with flowers from the garden laced in her hair. She wasn't that little girl anymore, but she still used dance to free up her soul when the world was determined to weigh it down with its craziness. She angled her hips side to side, twirling around and collided into Nic.

His arms braced her against his chest. Larisa inhaled his clean masculine scent. Her hips were pressed intimately against the hard ridge of his cock. She could feel him take a clear intake of air, trying to find the control she could barely contain.

She tried to reign in her own breathing and went to move when Nic pulled her back against his body. "Dance with me."

Larisa bit her lip, anticipation coursed through her body. She thought of all the reasons she should turn away. Reasons that had seemed to hold more merit ten minutes ago—before he'd arrived.

"Are you scared?"

The words presented a challenge she wouldn't dare turn away from.

"What do you think, Herrera?"

"I think you're afraid to let go."

Larisa tensed in his arms. "You think you know me?"

"Don't I?"

"Hell no."

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

She felt him lean into her body. The air around them charged with sexual energy. Her hips rocked against the rigid bulge of his dick. She felt herself grow aroused, her pussy wet and aching for the completion she'd deprived it of in the dressing room.

"Then teach me how to move, *querida*." Nic said softly against her ear, his lips brushed against her lobe, sending hot pulses of heat soaring through her body.

Larisa let out a shaky breath. It took every fiber in her being not to turn around in his arms and beg him to fuck her. She bit down on her bottom lip to keep from crying out her erotic demands.

Larisa willed the vivid image away. She didn't have time to indulge in fuck fantasies about Nic. But dancing, that was a different story all together. She was sure she could teach him a thing or two.

What was she afraid of?

A dance never hurt anyone. She'd watched enough videotapes to make her eyes cross. She wasn't scheduled for any public appearances except for a small appearance at the Whitmore Theater, where Dara had gotten her start. Her job was only to pretend to be Dara. No one said she couldn't enjoy it.

Larisa knew this house would never be hers, but what harm could there be in pretending for just a little while?

"Fine." She turned abruptly, facing him. "Let's go then."

"Oh, Detective Vega, the way you talk to me." Nic winked, his eyes kindled with fire. His arm instinctively curved around her lower back, pulling her closer.

"Do you know what you're doing, Herrera?" Larisa grinned, finding his charm irresistible or maybe it had just been a long time since a man had held her as he was now. She liked it. A lot.

"*Señorita*, watch me work."

Chapter Four

Nic swirled her around, enjoying the feel of her lush curves against him. She fit him to perfection. He smirked. She thought him a novice. He'd just have to show her what he was made of.

Nic pulled her tight against him and began to move, swaying his hips. He registered the shock on Larisa's face, as he placed his hands on her shapely ass.

He looked into her eyes. "I think you're afraid of me after all, Vega."

He felt something within him sizzle as she angled that cute chin of hers up at him defiantly.

"Not on your life, Herrera."

She matched him step for step, swinging her hips and appearing unaffected by their closeness, a fact that ticked Nic off more by the second. He had lost the battle of trying to hide his erection long before he walked into the room. Larisa hadn't uttered one peep about the obvious signs of his arousal. He silently fumed.

Why did he care if she responded or not, when he saw the need in her eyes, felt it in the vibrations sparking from her body as he held her? He felt her desire raging out of control without one word exchanged between them. Still, he wanted to hear her say it. To break her.

Nic frowned. The woman in his arms would rather tear her hair out than admit to having any feelings outside of her normal discontentment for him. Yet, he ached for her. His cock needed to feel her hot pussy swell

and contract against him as she climaxed. He wanted to watch her give in to what was boiling under the surface between them.

He wanted Larisa.

At that moment, Nic's eyes found hers. He saw the lust rising in those brown depths and knew that she was feeling the chemistry. The undeniable, smoldering heat between them.

He hadn't felt this way since Grace. He simply hadn't allowed himself to cross that line with another woman, even if things had gotten physical. Sex was sex. He knew when to turn away, but not with Larisa. He didn't walk away as he should—like now. She had him by the balls. Whether either one of them admitted it was another story.

With Larisa, he wanted to know more than what was beneath her icy exterior. He sensed her resistance, felt it every time anger flashed in her eyes. He was going to know what it felt like to watch her anger turn into hot, molten passion.

Nic watched her smile in pleasure as she gyrated her body against his. The sensual beat of another song wafted through the room. The sexual charge in the air shifted intensely as Larisa batted those pretty brown eyes at him.

"What do you want from me, Herrera?"

Nic stilled their movements with his hands and lifted her against him, her sex pressing against the hard wall of his stomach. His fingers gripped her hips. "I'm not asking for promises, Larisa." He swooped down and kissed her lips.

"Then what?" she whispered against his hungry mouth, winding her arms around his neck.

Nic broke away from her, and stared deep into her eyes. "*Quiero singar.*"

Larisa couldn't help but smile. "I want to fuck you, too, but..." She pushed away from him and slowly stood on her feet. She preferred straddling him. "This isn't right."

Nic sighed, running a hand through his hair. "I'm not going to force you to do anything you don't want to do." He stepped closer, lifting her chin with his fingers, forcing her to look him in the eye. "But I'm not

going to deny that I want you." He leaned close and kissed her forehead. "Thanks for the dance. Now, I'm going to double-check the doors, security and check in with the sergeant."

Larisa watched silently as he exited the room. Good grief, it hadn't been a full twenty-four hours, and she couldn't keep her hands off of Nic. She ran a hand through her hair. Damn it! When had she lost control of this...*fever* he caused anytime he touched her?

The point was, how long was she going to run from him and herself? If tonight was any indication, it would not be long before she found herself in his bed. He hadn't asked for any promises, and she couldn't make any.

Larisa kicked at the floor, hands on her hips. This whole setup was based on pretending. She was supposed to be Dara Estes, glamorous, adventurous. If there was ever an opportunity to give in to the wicked sensations piercing every nerve in her body; now was it.

She smiled, her decision made, and ran to the stairs.

Tonight, she would have Nic anyway she chose to.

* * * * *

Nic turned off the lights in the kitchen and headed for his bedroom. The light shining under the doorframe caused his eyebrows to rise. Every muscle in his body went on alert. He specifically remembered not turning on any lights in his room. He knew that Larisa had gone to bed about an hour ago, while he'd caught up on some paperwork and made phone calls. He'd decided to call it a night after assuring that two officers were on surveillance detail outside the house.

He eased slowly to the door. His blood pounded through his veins in anticipation of what awaited him on the other side. He counted to three as he placed his hand on the doorknob, then pushed the door open. His gaze moved to the figure on the bed. "*Dios!*"

"Herrera! What in the hell? Is this how you treat all naked women in your bed?"

Nic was the one who froze. "Ah, no." He licked his lips, his gaze

taking in every bare, toasty brown curve of Larisa's body. The sultry gaze in her eyes spelled trouble. "Damn! You're beautiful, baby."

The scent of candles filled the air and mixed with the stirring aroma of Larisa's femininity. He inhaled and shuddered as if on a high. His gaze roamed boldly over her long legs, thighs and the triangle of dark hair that covered that sweet pussy he remembered tasting. His cock strained against his pants, wanting to join with her body fiercely.

He gritted his teeth, looking at her flat stomach and beautiful breasts. Her nipples were tight, ready to be licked and savored. He turned to slam the door and faced the hunger in Larisa's eyes. She walked across the bed on her knees, closing the distance between them.

She stopped at the foot of the bed and dangled a pair of handcuffs in her hands, a grin made of sin on her pretty face. "I don't care about tomorrow or the day after that. I want you tonight, Herrera. Do you think you can help me with these?"

Nic gripped the handcuffs and then tossed them to the side of Larisa. He rounded the bed and had her in his arms within a blink of an eye. The bed groaned in protest as he pushed her onto the soft mattress. "If you want to walk out that door; now is the time to do it."

He waited, felt his body tense. He didn't think he could bear it if she walked out on him. He wanted her so badly.

Larisa crushed her breasts against him, her heartbeat beat as rapidly as his did. She pulled him down on top of her. "I have no intentions of leaving this bed. I want you to make me scream."

Nic groaned, brushing his lips against hers. "Baby, you'll do that and so much more before the night is over."

"Sounds like an offer I can't refuse." Larisa moaned, and her breath caught as Nic's tongue melded with hers.

He broke away from her, stripping off his jeans and shirt. "First things first." He stood naked and big in front of Larisa, his eyes boring into hers. "Second, I won't do anything you don't want me to. But make no mistake, I plan to make love to you in every way a man does to a woman."

"I know," Larisa said. Her eyes ran over him, from his six-pack abs

to his thighs to his very large cock. She ran her tongue over her lips. "With a body like yours, I'm looking forward to it."

Nic caught her hands, kissing her fingers. "I am, too." He gazed deeply into her eyes. "Can you give freely of yourself without having control?" He laughed when she frowned.

"How much control are we talking here?"

Nic smiled sinfully. He pinned her arms together and placed them against the headboard. The steel closure of the handcuffs echoed through the room. He gazed down into Larisa's eyes.

"Do you trust me, *querida*?"

Trust him?

Larisa tried to focus on his question but was distracted by his fingers trailing slowly down to her breasts. She gasped when his mouth made contact with her erect nipples. He licked and nipped until she panted with need.

"God, you taste so good," Nic said, testing the weight of one breast in his palm while punishing the other with his kisses. He tongued the taut tip and then blew softly.

"Ah!" Larisa groaned. She squeezed her legs together only to have Nic's prying fingers pull them apart.

"No hiding, *querida*." He pinched her inner thigh while lavaging her other nipple. His moist breath was almost Larisa's undoing. "You didn't answer my question. Will you let me have you? All of you?"

At that moment she would have given him anything just to feel his lips on hers. To feel his cock inside of her. She closed her eyes as he trailed his fingers against her inner thighs. A fluttery feeling settled deep into her stomach.

"I—I don't know what you want from me," she whispered.

"Oh, I think you do." Nic traced hot kisses down her abdomen and made a quick path to her wet folds. He inhaled again. "Your pussy was made for me." Without warning, Nic placed one finger deep inside of her. "Tight. Don't you know your body was made for a man's loving? Maybe I need to convince you."

Another finger slipped into her core. Stretching, coaxing and

driving Larisa nearly insane. He plunged into her moist heat again and again.

"Nic, please! Oh!" Larisa lifted her hips, hungry for him. "I need you inside me."

"Not until you answer me. Damn it!" He parted her legs with his knees, bending her legs so that her sex was uncovered before his greedy gaze. "Want to play tough, huh?"

"It's the only way I know," Larisa said, smiling saucily up at him. She saw the gentleness in his eyes, knew that he would never hurt her, but she wanted to see just how they would play this little game.

"You'll pay for that little comment. Let's see if you can keep your resolve now, woman." Nic parted her legs further, hooking them over his shoulders as he crouched downward. "No mercy. Not even for you, *querida*."

"Nic, I-ahh!" Larisa's whole body bolted upward as his tongue caressed her clit in lazy circles. And just when she thought she'd die from the devil's torture, he slipped a finger into her pussy, and then another. He quickened his pace, working up a frenzy within Larisa that she'd never felt with another man. Something within her was budding, opening to Nic.

Larisa opened her eyes, her body a shuddering bundle of nerves. She was climaxing, and Nic hardly seemed to take notice as his fingers delved into her again and again. His mouth replaced his fingers, and he laved her with his tongue.

"Nic!" She cried out, gripping his hand, her fingers threaded through his black hair. She was losing her mind and loving every damn moment of it. "Shit!"

Her climax came violently and rapidly as Nic manipulated her body to his every whim. She'd never felt so vulnerable as he licked her until her body stopped quavering in its release.

He pulled back to look up into her passion-induced gaze. "Tell me, Larisa. Tell me now."

"You stubborn man." She pursed her lips. "I came, or didn't you notice?"

Nic smirked. "I noticed just fine, but that's not what I want." He got off the bed and stood next to Larisa, a warning flashed in his dark eyes. "Can I have you?"

Larisa grinned. "I thought you just did. Will I have to pay you *again*?"

"Yes." Nic replied, roughly. He stood naked and proud before her, his engorged cock jutting upward. He placed one knee on the bed, leaving his other foot on the floor. "Taste me. Now."

Larisa grinned, angling her body towards him. The handcuffs made it difficult, but she still managed to lick Nic from the base of his cock to the tip.

He hissed. "Mmm."

The power that one little uttering had on Larisa magnified. It did her womanly pride good to know that she could pleasure him as equally as he pleased her. She leaned closer, taking the head of his cock into her mouth, savoring the taste of him. He was so big, she doubted she could take all of him, but damned if she didn't try. The more he groaned, the more she licked and suckled him.

"Oh! That's it, *querida*." Nic clasped her hair into his hand, pumping his hips forward, his cock sliding in and out of her mouth. Larisa went faster and faster.

She could feel his release tumbling towards them like a crashing tide. She wanted to taste him, all of him as he crested. His orgasm was as powerful and forceful as Nic was. He clenched her tightly as his salty essence flowed freely. He pulled away from her, leaning down to kiss her forehead as Larisa licked her lips.

"Was I too rough on you?" Nic whispered kissing her lips.

"No. I like the way you taste, Herrera." Larisa grinned like an idiot as he chuckled and playfully bit her lips.

"Good."

"But I would like to take off these damn handcuffs."

Nic smiled. "No."

"No?"

Larisa lay on her side, gazing over her shoulder at Nic as he slipped

on a condom.

"No, stay as you are."

"Uh, okay. What are you up to?"

He slipped into the bed, his body aligned behind hers. His thigh nudged her legs apart. Before Larisa could ask any more questions, he eased the tip of his thick cock inside her from behind, thrust upward and paused as their bodies adjusted to their union. "This," he replied into her ear.

"Nic!" Larisa shook from the exquisite pleasure his cock was stirring deep within her. "I want more." He had the nerve to stay perfectly still. The shaking from his body belied the fact that he wanted to fill her with his cock as deeply as he could.

"Uh huh, not until you tell me I can have all of you." He retracted from her a fraction of an inch and slowly inched forward.

"Shit! Stop torturing me," Larisa hissed, grinding her hips against him. "All right, all right!"

Nic grinned. "All right, what, *querida*?"

"You can have me."

"All of you?" Nic pumped into her so hard it almost took Larisa's breath away.

"Y-yess!" Larisa arched her back, aiming her hips towards his hard, assured thrusts. "All of me, Nic."

"My little minx." Nic whispered, pounding into her wet heat slowly, measured and calculated. His fingers slipped between her legs, massaging the hard nub of her clit.

"Mmm."

"Do you like that?"

"Yes, oh God, yes!"

Larisa felt as if she were losing her mind. Every move Nic made brought her closer to the brink of insanity, tumbled her closer to edge of bliss that he had promised and delivered and then some.

She wanted him to feel what she was feeling and pressed her hips as close as she could to him. She met him thrust for thrust, moan for moan as she jumped over the edge and soared.

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

It was her name that Nic groaned as he arched into her deeply one last time and yelled out his release.

Sweat molded against their skin, and Larisa swore she'd never felt so close to another soul. She closed her eyes, feeling the thud of his heartbeat against her back.

Nic kissed the hollow curve along her shoulder as he reached above her head and unlocked the handcuffs. He turned her to face him, kissing her wrists that bore the brunt of their passionate lovemaking. "That was unbelievable."

Larisa felt a renewed sense of embarrassment wash over her, and the things that she'd said and done to him came flooding back in her mind. She broke away from him and reached for the covers. Nic stilled her, making her look into his eyes.

"No hiding."

Larisa smiled. "Yeah, I guess your right, after what we've done here tonight." She sighed. "I have something to tell you."

"What?"

"I believe you."

Nic rose up on his elbow, gazing down into her face. "Do you?"

"Yes, my father was everything to me." Larissa cleared her throat, her voice tight.

"I know," he said quietly, holding her in his arms.

"It's hard for me to believe in other people, especially those I get involved with."

Nic grinned, kissing her cheek. "And are we involved?"

Larisa ribbed him with her arm. "What's with you and all these questions, Herrera?"

Nic grinned, kissing her lips. "You have an appearance to be ready for tomorrow." He slapped her on her hip. "So rest up."

She couldn't help to grin as she nestled in his arms, though she knew she should go to her own room. The security she felt in Nic's embrace was just too tempting to walk away from. For now.

Larisa closed her eyes, breathing in his masculine scent and the smell of the sex they'd created, and slowly fell asleep.

Herrera's Temptation by Samara King

* * * * *

Larisa woke up with a start the next morning. She rubbed her eyes and gazed to where Nic had been lying next to her all night. The smile that crept on her face had nothing to do with the joyfulness feeling in her chest.

No, last night was about sex. Larisa chuckled as she stretched. *Good sex!*

A glance at the clock confirmed that it was nine o'clock. She jumped out the bed. It wasn't like Nic or her to sleep this late, especially with the appearance at the theater in mere hours. If she knew Nic, he would want to drill her, test her out, and then drill her some more.

She didn't know where things would go from here with Nic, but maybe there was something sparkling between them. A possibility.

Larisa raked a hand through her hair and placed one hand on the doorknob, pulling it open. She stopped dead in her tracks. "W-What the hell is going on?"

"Good morning, sunshine," a tall, tawny haired, white man said. He pushed up his glasses while holding a gun.

Her mouth went dry. *How the hell did this wacko get in?* "Who the hell are you?"

The man frowned, his gaze taking in her attire. His eyes glittered with anger. "Oh Dara, I am ashamed of you." He pointed his gun at her. "You must really think you're something, huh? I've been watching you, parading around like some whore."

Larisa noted the house was completely silent. Too silent. *Where the hell was Nic? The alarms? The guards?* Despite the sickly feeling that settled at the pit of her stomach, she remained calm. The man had called her Dara, so he obviously thought that's who she was.

She held her hands up. "Look, I'm sure we can talk about this? Uh...?"

The man shook his head. "Jonathan." He aimed the gun. "You high and mighty bitch. You forgot my name."

"No, no. It's not like that," Larisa replied.

"Then what is it like, huh, Dara? Tell me." He walked closer. "You know I saw the two of you."

"Two of us?" God! What had he done with Nic?

"Don't play stupid, Dara. I saw you with your little boyfriend last night. You let him touch you. How could you?"

"T-That didn't mean anything. He's old news." Larisa felt fear grip her, and it didn't let go. "Look, Jonathan, why don't we sit down and talk about this. Just you and me." She made a move to walk closer to him. The release on the safety stopped her.

Jonathan sneered. "Don't play me, Dara. I'm not one of your little counterparts. Just ask the two dead guards outside."

"You killed them?"

He looked confused for a moment. "You left me no choice, don't you see that? I had to take substitutes when you didn't answer the casting calls." He grinned. "But none of those whores have your grace, Dara. That's what makes you special. That's why I'm here. I know I can make you happy if you just let me."

Larisa's eyes went wide when she saw Nic creep up behind Jonathan. She looked away. "I know you can too, Jonathan. Let's go sit down and—"

Just then, Nic lunged for Jonathan hard, knocking him to the floor. The gun clattered to the ground, and Larisa ran to it.

She picked up the gun, pointing it at the crazed man. "Freeze, you asshole!"

Nic punched the deranged man square in the jaw, yet he came back with a right hook. He kicked Jonathan off him and was going to straddle him when a slice of pain struck him on left side. Nic fell back, placing his hand on his ribs. He looked down at his fingers and saw the bright crimson of blood.

He grunted. "Shit!"

Nic could hear Larisa shouting at Jonathan to put down his weapon, but he took one lunge at Nic, and a gunshot echoed through the air. The knife fell on the right side of Nic, and Jonathan landed on the

floor with a thud, the cold, hard stare of death emblazoned on his face.

Larisa kicked the man over, checked his vitals and turned to face Nic. "He's dead."

Nic realized for the first time that she had tears in her eyes as she bent down on her knees. She grabbed the cell phone out of his pocket and dialed 911. He could barely make out what she was saying as the room began to spin.

Larisa dropped the phone and held Nic's head in her lap. "Christ, Herrera! You didn't have to go get stabbed to get me to cry."

Nic grinned and then moaned at the pain the action caused. "I never thought I'd see the day."

"Oh, shut up!" Larisa said, pressing her hand against his wound. She gazed into his eyes. "Stay with me, Nic. Don't you dare die on me! Nic!"

He tried to keep his eyes open, but he was so cold. The urgency in Larisa's voice conveyed her worry. He wanted to stay awake, to reassure her, but he couldn't keep his eyelids open. The last thing he remembered was seeing tears running down Larisa's face and thinking he didn't like it.

Chapter Five

"Looks like you saved the day again, Nicolas." Dara kissed him on the lips and then pulled away, tears shining in her eyes. "How can I thank you?"

Nic held her hand. "Knowing that you're safe is all the thanks I need. Grace would be so proud of you, Dare."

She rolled her eyes. "I don't know about that. I slept with a madman who raped several other women and came back for revenge because of my rejection." Shaking her head, she whispered, "I don't know if my big sister would be proud of that."

"It's not your fault, Dara."

"One day I might believe that, but this whole situation has made me so thankful." She squeezed Nic's hand. "Thankful for the people in my life I can count on. Now, what can I do for you? Really?"

Nic thought of Larisa and the fact that Sergeant Kellerman had said she'd stayed with him that first night, but had immersed herself back in work. He knew better, though. She was avoiding him and what was going on between them, and he hadn't the slightest clue how to resolve things.

"Right now, I'd settle for a burger and a beer."

Dara grinned. "If you weren't my brother-in-law, I'd be really nice and give you a sponge bath."

"I'm sure Nic would love that."

At the sound of another voice, he turned, hearing a sound at the door. He faced the intent gaze of Larisa Vega. The woman he'd fallen in

love with.

Sponge bath? She'd give him a damn sponge bath. Larisa gritted her teeth, watching the woman and Nic.

"Hi. It appears I've come at the wrong time." She smiled, which she hoped looked sincere as Dara gave her an once-over. The pretty woman walked closer. "I just came to see how Herrera was—" She cut her eyes at him and then back at Dara. "But I can see he's just *fine*." She turned to walk away.

"Please, don't go. You must be Larisa," Dara said, offering her hand and smiling. "Nicolas has told me so much about you."

Larisa turned to face the couple, trying to keep her wayward emotions at bay. "Yes, and you must be Dara."

"I owe you my life."

"I was just doing my job."

Nic spoke up then, his eyes burning into hers. "She's being modest, Dara. She saved both of our lives."

Larisa felt her cheeks burn with embarrassment, and more importantly, anger. "Yes, well, on that note. I must be going. I'm glad to see you're doing well." She took a deep breath and had made two steps toward door of his hospital room when she heard Nic's deep voice calling her back.

Why couldn't he leave well enough alone? Why couldn't she? The time to pretend was over, and it was better if they both faced it now than later.

"Vega, you don't think you're going to get away that easily, do you?" Nic asked smoothly, grimacing in pain as he angled his large frame upward in the bed. He turned to Dara. "Could you give us a moment?"

"Sure." Dara replied, smiling knowingly. "Thank you again, Detective."

Larisa nodded, watching as Dara Estes escaped the heat emanating from her and Nic within the sterile hospital room. She waited until the door closed and swirled around to face him. "I wouldn't have sent her away if I were you, especially seeing as she was promising a sponge bath."

Nic chuckled and then winced, clutching his side where a seven inch blade had narrowly missed vital organs. "Jealousy looks good on you, Vega."

She crossed her arms over her chest, not looking at him and how his rich, tanned complexion contrasted against the starch white sheets. "I'm *not* jealous."

"Nor should you be, Larisa. Dara is my sister-in-law. Grace's baby sister." His eyes met the surprise in Larisa's brown gaze.

"Why the hell didn't you tell me that earlier, you asshole?"

Nic shrugged. "I respected Dara's wishes. Life in front of the camera and public is already so evasive. She didn't want to drag Grace's memory into that world too, especially when she's always felt like her sister didn't approve of her faster-than-lightning lifestyle."

Larisa shook her head, her eyes finding his. "You scared the hell out of me."

"Why? Because I want you, or because I almost died?" Nic asked softly.

"Both." Larisa grinned. "Is there room in the bed for two?"

"Why don't you come over here and find out, *querida*?" Nic raised the covers, mesmerized as she sashayed her sexy self over to his side. His gaze wandered over her as he took her hand in his.

"Don't think you own me or something now," Larisa mumbled.

"Get over here." Nic chuckled and kissed Larisa on the lips. His body responded to her soft flesh squirming against him. He knew the truth. She owned him, but he didn't want to scare her away.

As Nic held Larisa in his arms, he wondered when his life had suddenly become so full.

He'd been a goner the moment he'd given in to his sweetest temptation.

The End

About the Author

Tell you about me? Let's see, I'm thrill seeker, who enjoys dirty martinis, good fitting blue jeans and manage to keep a secret...or two. I've been told that I suffer from a vivid imagination that refuses to be tamed by the mundane. What better way to indulge myself and hopefully all of you, than creating erotic tales? (I'll let you know if there is a better answer to that question if I ever stop writing them)

<http://www.samaraking.com>