

What others are saying about the writings of Fiona McGier:

Fiona McGier writes an above average story of the loves and losses of a well-to-do Latin family. It is enchantingly warm and sexy, and full of promise. I was impressed by this author's delightful voice in portraying the ins-and-outs of a large loving family who stick together to help one another through thick and thin. It's a must read.

JoEllen Conger, Conger Books Reviews

Fiona McGier brings us another salsa-hot segment in the history of this Hispanic family. She has a way of sharing the Reyes family's love and exciting passion for life... the kind of passion that keeps a large family together sharing their love and compassion for one-another. It's the type of family you wouldn't mind belonging to yourself.

JoEllen Conger, Conger Books Reviews

Fiona McGier has an amazing talent for setting a scene and then throwing in the unexpected to keep the reader on their toes.

Delane, Reviewer for Coffee Time Romance & More

Fiona McGier has done it again in the next book of the Reyes family... the passion is all there. I loved it and can't wait for more from this talented author. She creates characters that come to life and the story line never fails between them.

Mary, Reviewer for Night Owl Reviews.com

Prescription For Love

By

Fiona McGier

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Chapter One

Enrique hurried down the hall to the closed door of what he hoped was his last appointment of the day. He was surprised to see out of the corner of his eye, that all of his nurses appeared to have gone home already. The usually busy reception area was now deserted, and the waiting room was empty. He shrugged as he took the chart off the wall adjacent to the closed door, and he briefly scanned the paperwork.

“Unexplained fever”...“Can’t sleep at night”...“Feelings of discontent and agitation”.

He sighed. He was a general practitioner, not a psychiatrist! While he might be the only doctor in the area, he was not capable of curing all of the ills that the local populace might present to him. He was over-worked and tired. But there was no one else there to go in to tell the patient that he was not going to see her, so he straightened his shoulders, took a deep breath, and rapped on the door with his knuckles.

“Come in,” a low, sexy voice purred from inside.

He opened the door to see his last patient of the day.

The woman was beautiful: long red hair trailed down her shoulders, grey eyes stared at him, and her sensuous lips smiled at him as he slowly walked into the room. He was trying hard not to stare at her cleavage, but she had not belted the small examining gown very well, and it gapped open in just the right places. The rounded globes of her breasts peeked out of both sides of the gown, and as she uncrossed her legs, he caught a quick glimpse of more red hair.

“The carpet matches the roof,” was the only thought he was able to muster, as the woman spoke to him.

“Hello, Dr. Reyes.”

He cleared his throat. “Umm, hello, Miss...”

She smiled again, before licking her lips.

“I didn’t supply a name because you don’t need to know who I am. Just that I need your help. Only you can make me feel better. I need you, Dr. Reyes.”

“How odd,” he thought to himself, but the bulge in his pants was making it difficult for him to think, as each tiny movement she made showed off her various assets, and he found himself unable to look away.

“She’s a patient! I can’t do this!” He thought to himself.

He now spoke out loud, trying to distract himself.

“What seems to be the problem?”

She sighed heavily, then leaned back on her elbows, which made the gown gap even more, and the only part of her luscious breasts that he was unable to see were her nipples. They poked insistently through the thin fabric, and he had a quick thought that the air conditioning must be on too high, causing her areolas to stand out even more, with tiny bumps that accentuated the larger pebbles of her nipples...they looked like they could cut glass.

He felt himself sweating profusely, which did not seem possible if the AC was on too high. He had been unable to move since he entered the room. He felt like he was in a trance; his feet seemed to be rooted to the spot.

The woman now began to gently swing her legs...she had been sitting on the edge of the examining table with her legs crossed when he walked in. Now she was leaning back, but her legs were extended off the table. She was still on the edge of the table, so each

swing of her legs caused a breeze that gently wafted the gown up, giving him more quick glimpses of the curls of dark red hair, and sending up to his nostrils the scent of a woman in heat. Her pheromones were driving him crazy: his cock was twitching in response, and he could feel moisture already leaking onto the thin fabric on the front of his pants.

She spoke again, her words sounding like a seduction.

“Doctor, I’m so hot! No matter what I do, I can’t stop being hot. I can’t get any relief, I can’t sleep. I don’t know what is wrong with me, or what I need, but I think you might have the cure for me.”

He took a deep breath, “I...uh...I guess I should examine you?”

Her grey eyes glittered, “Yes, you should.”

He moved closer to her, each step bringing him closer to losing control over himself and violently taking this woman.

“Does it hurt you up here?” He asked, as he gently examined her neck, a relatively safe place to start.

“No.”

She rolled her head, rubbing her face against his hands and arms like a cat would, scent-marking her prey.

“Does it hurt you here?” He asked, lightly touching her shoulders.

He gasped as she shrugged her shoulders slightly, causing the gown to fall backwards onto the table, exposing her breasts.

“No, but you had better look closer at them, Doctor. They are on fire.”

He lowered his head, and she raised her breasts with both hands. As if in a dream, he felt himself lowering his head farther, and somehow her nipple ended up in his mouth. She moaned loudly, then the only noise was the suckling noises made by his mouth, as he licked and teased and sucked on her tiny hard nub.

Aghast at what he was doing, he pulled his head back slightly, and she turned slightly, then pulled his head down again, so that her other breast could get the same attention from him. She moaned again, and began to writhe on the table.

“Oh, you have made it worse!” She hissed. “Now I’m burning up! What are you going to do about that, Doctor?”

He was confused, there was no blood left in his brain, so coherent thought was difficult.

“What should I do? How can I help you?”

“Take my temperature!”

He turned to look in the drawers behind him for a thermometer.

“No! With this!”

Her hands now began to stroke the twitching bulge in his pants; she quickly undid the button at the top and unzipped his pants. Somehow he had forgotten to wear underwear that day, so his throbbing cock sprang out of the dropping pants, and she moaned again.

“Now! I need you now!” She gasped.

He took a step up and stood on the ledge that patients used to get up onto the table. She spread her legs wide open, and the smell of her juicy pussy drove him wild! He could see the gleaming moisture that welcomed him, and he leaned closer to her as she stroked his cock, then rubbed it against the moisture she was producing. She arched her

back, pushing against him, and he tensed his butt muscles as he thrust forward, into the welcoming heat of her body.

She screamed, “Yes!” as he pushed himself forward until he felt he had come to the end of her, and bumped her cervix up and out of his way. Then all coherent thought left him, as he pumped himself into her, drawing out, pushing back in, over and over again, until with a mighty roar, he felt himself begin to spasm, and the hot sperm shot up and out of his balls, to explode into the welcoming slick heat of her tight hole.

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With a start, Enrique woke up and instantly realized where he was.

“Damn! Gonna have to wash the sheets again,” he whispered out loud, then laughed at himself for whispering, when there was no one else in the room to hear him.

He rolled onto his back, away from the gooey mess in his bed, and smiled at the ceiling.

“Last time she was a blonde. The time before that she was a brunette. I wonder what my brain is going to think of next?”

He smiled even broader into the darkness.

“But that is my favorite fantasy. Of course, I would never do anything like that with a patient...I wouldn’t risk my medical license; it wouldn’t be worth taking that chance. But then, since it’s forbidden, that must be why it’s such a hot wet-dream for me.”

He sighed heavily, “And part of why I’ve been doing this so often, is that it’s been so long since I was with a real woman.”

He remembered how quickly every mother of an eligibly-aged daughter had beaten a path to his office, once word got out that the new doctor in town was an American, and a single man at that. They all wanted to see him for themselves, before they started dragging their daughters in for him to see, as if it was a cattle-call. At first he had been amazed at how many young women in town appeared to be ill with unexplainable things. But it didn’t take him long to realize just what the mothers were doing. And after he had dated a couple of the young women once or twice, he also quickly realized that in their small town, if a man wanted to sleep with a woman, he had to marry her.

Enrique did not consider himself a snob, but he had grown up in a suburb of Chicago, and he had gone away to college for many years, in order to earn his medical degree. He was a well-read man, who valued stimulating conversation almost as much as good sex...though these days, he might value one just a bit over the other!

No one in the town he now lived and practiced in had ever been out of the area they were born and raised in. Even though it was not really that long of a drive, few had ever even been to Mexico City, the cosmopolitan capital of their country. Enrique had taken a few day-trips there, on his infrequent days off. He had attended a few medical conferences there also, and had been befriended by some of his colleagues who taught classes at UNAM, the colloquial shorthand for the world-famous Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico.

They had agreed with him that it was probably safer for him to date women who had a more worldly view of life, and who would not expect him to choose someone to settle down with before he got to know her. They had also been amused that, due to the way he was raised, Enrique did not intend to have a traditional Hispanic-style marriage. He had no desire to regard his wife as merely the bearer of his children, while he would feel free to pursue many other women.

His parents had met while in high school, and had dated only each other. They had been happily and monogamously married for over thirty years, and had eight children to prove it. Enrique was not sure that would be easy to re-create, especially since he was already thirty and had not yet met any woman who made him feel as if he couldn't live without her. The women of his dreams were a good-enough substitute, for now.

With that thought making him smile again, remembering how much he enjoyed that particular dream, he drifted back off to sleep.

Chapter Two

Had she not been forced to attend as a guest speaker, a symposium on the origins of exotic medical plants before she boarded the bus that was to take her to the jumping-off point for her research, Tanora Doyle would not have been wearing high heels, which she had never really been comfortable walking on. And if she had not been wearing high heels, she would not have gotten a heel stuck on the steps that led down off the bus. As it was, she had felt herself free-falling forward with one heel stuck in the grates of the last step, and she had instinctively put her hands out to catch her fall. Due to the angle she fell at, her left hand took the brunt of the weight of her fall, and she heard her wrist snap at the same time as her brain registered unbearable pain.

Her research assistant of many years, Raul Mendoza, had gotten off the bus right before her, so he was immediately at her side to help her up.

Solicitously, he asked, "Are you alright, Boss?"

Still swearing, she tried to answer without sounding like she wanted to cry, but the pain made it difficult for her to speak.

"Damn it! I hate high heels! I'm so damned clumsy in them! I think I broke my wrist!"

He cradled her arm, and bent it at the elbow, to allow for her to hold it up with her other hand.

"Yeah, I heard a snap too, Boss. We'd better get you to a doctor, pronto!"

She shook her head in frustration.

"First it took forever to get permission to head out...then we had to find locals to hire to be our guides and send them on ahead of us, with the truck loaded with our gear... then that damned conference. Now this! If I didn't have so much riding on this expedition, I'd say to hell with the whole thing!"

He smiled at her, long used to her outbursts.

"You know you don't mean that, Boss. Let's just find out where the nearest local medicine man is, and get you fixed up."

"Just get me some heavy-duty pain-killers, and be done with it!"

She gritted her teeth against the pain.

He shook his head.

"No. Tannie, you can't go traipsing around in the wilderness of Mexico with a gimpy wrist. We will probably need to get you a cast, and then we'll figure out our next move."

Reluctantly agreeing with him, she sat down on the bench he led her to, and rocked gently, trying to keep her mind off of the extreme pain of her injury. She lost track of him, while he located the local men they had hired to accompany them, and found out from them where the only doctor in town was. She had to glare at many a man who ogled her, their obvious interest only serving to make her angrier, since she was currently unable to physically fend them off.

She was aware that her looks were just exotic enough for them to want to add her to their lists of conquests. She had long curly brown hair with a few gold highlights, but it was held up in a bun as usual; her hazel eyes had yellow centers if you looked closely enough, and her skin was the color of café mocha, courtesy of her bi-racial heritage. But at the moment, all she could think of was trying not to cry, and hoping against hope that the bone might not be broken, and that she might still be able to head out into the country in two days, as she had planned.

After a brief, bumpy ride in the truck they had hired for their journey, she found herself sitting in a crowded waiting room, trying not to pay attention to the conversations that had ceased when she and Raul had walked into the room, but which now had resumed with a vengeance. Had she not been in so much pain, she might have been greatly amused, as she usually was, listening in on the words spoken in español, which they figured she would not understand.

“¡Que bonita!”

“¡Pero, es una mulata!”

“¿Por que esta aqui?”

She grimaced as another twinge of pain raced up her arm, and she had to concentrate on trying to convince her brain that the aching was far enough away from it for it to ignore. Meanwhile Raul was busy flirting with the receptionist, trying to convince her that Tanora had to be seen before the others who had been waiting longer. He did not appear to be having much success, until the door opened and a stern-looking nurse with steel-grey hair pulled into a tight bun walked out.

She peered over her glasses at Tanora before speaking in heavily-accented English.

“Eet ees broken, señorita?”

“Si, lo temo,” Tanora answered.

The nurse now held her arm at the elbow, and did a cursory examination of the wrist, which was steadily turning dark red and bruised. Tanora had to bite her lip so as not to scream, but she let out a few curses, some in English and some in español, for good measure.

The nurse’s lips twitched as once again, all conversation ceased.

“¿Habla usted español, señorita?”

She grimaced, as she nodded, “Si.”

With a significant glance around at the now-silent people in the waiting room, the nurse motioned for Tanora to get up and follow her into the office. Raul asked if he could go with her, in flawless Spanish; but then since his father was originally from Mexico and he resembled his father, for him it was not unexpected.

The stern nurse shook her head before leading Tanora down a short hall and into a small room. Just walking had jarred the wrist so much that Tanora was once again, having to fight hard not to cry from the pain. The nurse, who had a gentle touch despite her harsh manner, helped her to sit on the examining table, and filled out the information

sheet that would tell the doctor what her problem was. She closed the door behind her as she left the room.

Tanora was left to study the walls, which held only the medical documentation that Enrique Edgar Reyes Hernandez had passed all necessary exams at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, completed his residency there as well as at the University of Chicago School of Medicine, and was certified as a medical practitioner by the state of Illinois two years ago. There was further documentation in Spanish verifying that he was also licensed to practice in Mexico, but she was just starting to read that when the door opened, and the doctor walked in accompanied by the stern nurse.

Enrique walked in still reading the chart, and didn't look up as he said, "Miss Tanora Doyle? I'm Dr. Reyes..."

Then his eyes met hers, and he smiled despite himself, as his eyebrows rose questioningly.

She nodded wearily, speaking through gritted teeth, "My dad is Irish. Mom is black. Since he figured I would probably look more like her than him, he gave me a name that would announce to the world that I'm half-Irish."

He smiled at her, "Oh...that explains things. Now let's take a look at your wrist."

He asked questions and did a thorough exam, after which he proclaimed the wrist to be undoubtedly broken, and in need of a x-ray to be sure it was just broken in one place, with no fragments floating around. He would need to set the bones and apply a cast.

"Fortunately for you, I have what I need to do all of that right here."

He nodded at the nurse, who went out to get the necessary equipment and supplies.

Meanwhile, Enrique got some pills out of a locked drawer, and offered them to Tanora with a glass of tap water.

"Is it okay to drink the water here?" She asked, looking longingly at the pain pills he held out to her.

He nodded, "Yes. We have a filtration system for the water coming into the building. I wouldn't offer it to you if it was going to just make things worse. Now swallow these, and it will take the edge off some of the pain for you. I'm afraid I'm going to have to hurt you a bit more, as I set the bone and get the cast on."

"How long will I have to keep it on?" She asked after she gulped the water, suddenly realizing how thirsty she was, after the long, hot, dry bus ride, and the time she had spent waiting in his anteroom.

He answered her in a distracted manner while he looked in the drawer for some more pill samples to give her.

"Probably six weeks should do the trick. You're young and healthy...I don't think you'll need to have it on much longer than that."

The nurse had returned with a portable x-ray machine, which he used to take two x-rays of her wrist. He gave them to the nurse to develop. She soon returned to deliver a tray filled with supplies, and Enrique busied himself washing up and getting things ready.

A few moments later another nurse brought in the x-rays, and Enrique hung them on the wall, flipped a light switch, and examined them closely, looking for fractures. He nodded in a satisfied manner, before turning to smile at his patient.

"As I had hoped, no shards of bone anywhere. You just fractured the radius right above your wrist...it's one of the two main bones that make up your lower arm...the

inside one. I can easily reset this and immediately put it into a cast, so the healing can begin.”

He nodded at the nurse and they got to work on the wrist.

Tanora yelped as he moved the bones into place, then she began to complain.

“You said six weeks? Will I be able to move around, do my job with the cast on?”

He looked up to smile at her, “As long as your job doesn’t require you to do any heavy lifting, I think so.”

She sighed heavily.

“I was supposed to head out into the back country with my team. I’m a botanical research biologist. I go out looking for the plants that can be developed into viable medicines. There are some promising studies that have shown that just a couple of days from here, there are plants that might have the answer to all kinds of things. Who knows, maybe even a cancer treatment?”

Enrique didn’t look up while he finished applying the wet strips of cloth that were already hardening into the cast.

“You mean like that movie with Sean Connery...what was that called, *Medicine Man*?”

Tanora nodded, “You’ve seen it? Down here?”

Now Enrique looked up to smile at her, and he shook his head.

“No, they don’t show many American movies down here, except for big action flicks and porn. Didn’t you read my shingles hanging on the wall? I grew up in Illinois, close to Chicago. I’ve only been down here a little over a year. My mom is a really big fan of Sean Connery...she used to tease my dad that if she ever left him, it would be for the first James Bond. No one else. My dad would then point out to her that Sir Sean was fond of wearing skirts in public. That usually ended the discussion.”

Tanora smiled briefly at that, and realized that the pain had become bearable.

“A kilt is not a skirt,” she sniffed. “What was in those pills you gave me?”

“Why? Did they take the pain away like they were supposed to?”

“Not completely...but I can think about other things now, besides how much my wrist hurts.”

He nodded, “Good. Part of that is the bones are set back where they belong now, and they are held in place by the cast. And of course, part of that is the fact that you are a skinny little thing, and I gave you an adult-sized dose of Vicodin. I’ll give you some to take with you too, so when those wear off, you can still get some sleep tonight.”

“How are you able to set a bone without being in a hospital?” She asked curiously.

He smiled, “Many of the conveniences of modern medicine are just that.

Convenient, but not really necessary. I could see the fracture of the bones in your x-ray. Once I had eased them back where they belonged, you stopped gritting your teeth. Not really rocket science. But down here, there aren’t many lawyers in the area, so I’m not afraid of being sued over every decision I make. That’s part of why I opened my practice here, instead of up in the states.”

The nurse took the tray with all of the used medical supplies out of the room.

Enrique once again assiduously washed his hands before turning back to Tanora to ask, “How do you feel? Can you walk?”

Tanora eased herself off of the table, and promptly felt her legs buckle underneath her. Enrique caught her with one hand under her arm on the side of the broken wrist, and the other on her opposite shoulder.

“Whoa there, little lady. Is there anyone here who can help you walk to where-ever you are staying?”

Tanora smiled gratefully at him before she nodded.

“Thanks for catching me, Doctor. I don’t need to break any other bones today! My assistant, Raul, is outside in the waiting room.”

“Okay then, I’ll help you out the door, and he can take you from there.”

He held her gently but firmly, as they walked down the short hall, then the pretty receptionist that Raul had been flirting with opened the door, and Raul was instantly on his feet, concern evident on his face.

“You okay, Boss?” He asked urgently.

Tanora smiled at him, and nodded, which made her dizzy.

“Yesh,” she slurred at him.

He gave Enrique a questioning look.

“I had to give her some pain killers, to be able to set the break in her wrist. I’m giving her some extras, to use over the next couple of days.”

“You’d best give them to me,” Raul said, “She’s in no position to be handling any drugs right now.”

Enrique smiled at the older man, while still supporting Tanora, “That’s for sure. I guess I shouldn’t have given her an adult dosage, considering how skinny she is.”

Raul nodded, as he filled out the paperwork to be able to leave.

“She’s not one to do drugs of any kind...guess they are more effective on her because of that, huh?”

Enrique nodded, “Probably. You know where you are staying? Will you be able to get her there, or do you want me to have someone go with you?”

Raul shook his head, “Nah, we’ve got a few local guys hired to help us head out into the wilderness. They are already on the payroll, so they’ll give me any help I need. How long will she need to stay around here? We were supposed to leave within a couple of days.”

Enrique shook his head, “No. I think she should stick around town for a week or two...just so I can see her every couple of days, to be sure the cast is doing what it’s supposed to, and she doesn’t need any more pain-killers.”

Raul made a face.

Tanora yelled, “A couple of weeks? No way, José! I’ve got plants to find, research to do. Just try and stop me!”

Enrique let go of her for an instant, and she almost pitched forward into Raul’s arms. Enrique quickly grabbed her again, and handed her over to Raul, who supported her while they started to walk to the door.

Enrique walked with them, to open the door for them, and he turned to waggle his finger in Tanora’s face.

“You listen to me, young lady! I’m your doctor now, and I’m telling you that you need to rest this wrist for a minimum of a week. I expect to see you here a couple of days from now. You won’t need an appointment, since all I need to do is check on the cast.

But you are not to go out on any kind of camping trip until I tell you it's okay! Got that?"

Tanora stuck her tongue out at him, but Raul nodded over her head at the doctor.

"Yeah. Message received. Now, Boss, let's get you to the hotel we are staying at, and I'll tuck you into bed, so you can get some rest."

Enrique smiled after them as the door shut, then he turned to go back to work.

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Many hours later, he opened a beer while he heated up the dinner that his cleaning lady had prepared for him before she left for the day. He walked out onto the porch of the small house that was assigned to the doctor of the town, as part of his pay. He sat on the wicker rocking chair, and looked meditatively at the sunset. He tried to clear his mind, to relax, but he knew just what he wanted to think about before the day's events had even begun to be processed by his tired brain.

"She is gorgeous!" He thought to himself, and he smiled at his body's instant reaction to remembering what she looked like...the same reaction that he had had to fight while he treated her broken wrist.

Tanora Doyle was of medium height, with a slight build. She didn't look anorexic, like some modern American women; she was thin, but there was a hint of healthy musculature under her skin that spoke of good genetics. She had curly light brown hair, and most unusual for a woman of her warm café au lait skin color, she had green eyes. There were freckles scattered around on her lovely face, and when she smiled there were dimples crinkling around her mouth, making her look like she smiled frequently, lighting up the room. She wore light brown tinted glasses with gold rims, and her hair appeared to be curly, but was put up in a sort of bun-thing...Enrique wondered just how long her hair was, and if he would ever get a chance to find out.

He smiled to himself again, as he remembered her slurred reaction to his insisting that she needed to stay in town for at least a week. He had added "Or two," just because he wanted to try to keep her around for as long as possible.

"Hey," he reasoned to himself, "It's been a long time since I've met any woman as interesting as this one. And she's going to be using my town as a jumping-off point to going out into the countryside. She'll have to come back regularly for supplies. I want a chance to impress upon her just why she needs to come back to see me whenever she's in town."

He shivered with anticipation, when he remembered what she had felt like in his hands, when he was helping her out of his office. His hands tingled where they had touched her. Meditatively, he smiled, taking another swig from his beer.

The alarm rang, letting him know that his dinner was heated up enough for him to eat. He toasted the sunset with his almost empty beer bottle, and headed inside to dine.

Chapter Three

Raul grimaced as he held the door open for Tanora to enter the waiting room at the doctor's office. She had been torturing him non-stop for the past couple of days, and he

was almost ready to ask the doctor to prescribe more pain pills, just to mellow her out... or else to give him some, to increase his already large amount of patience. Enforced inactivity was not something that Tanora dealt well with, especially when she was looking forward to getting out into the wild to do what she loved so much: commune with the local plants.

Raul walked up to the window to check in with the pretty receptionist that he had flirted with the last time, but Tanora used her good arm to push him out of the way to announce, in flawless Spanish, that she was here for a check-up, and the doctor had told her she did not need an appointment.

Raul rolled his eyes, and announced, "I'm going out for a smoke, Boss."

Tanora made a face at him, as she always did when he smoked, or talked about smoking.

"Fine, go kill yourself... then I'll have to find a replacement assistant, in addition to all of the other damn delays I'm having to deal with for this expedition!"

Raul bolted out of the door none too gracefully, glad for a reason to be away from her complaining. He walked out a ways away from the front of the office, and sat on a bench under a large tree, for the shade it would provide. He lit his cigarette and inhaled slowly, enjoying the familiar feel of the hot smoke as it burned his lungs. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes for an instant, sighing with enjoyment of the simple physical pleasure of smoking.

"That's not good for you, you know," a voice said conversationally, and he opened his eyes to see the good doctor standing in front of him, lighting himself a cigarette and inhaling deeply.

He gestured at the space on the bench next to Raul, and asked, "May I?"

Smiling, Raul nodded, "Of course."

Enrique sat down and inhaled again, sighing with pleasure.

"I have to sneak out to have a smoke, because I lecture my patients all day about how they need to quit. I usually stay out back, where no one can see me, but I saw you come out here. There's something I want to talk to you about."

This last was said in a tone of importance, so Raul turned with curiosity to look at the doctor.

Enrique took a deep breath, "You work for her?"

Raul, who had suspected this line of questioning would arise, sooner or later, smiled and nodded.

"Yeah, for the last four or five years."

Enrique leaned forward to rest his elbows on his knees as he tossed his lighter from hand-to-hand for a moment, as if he was thinking over what to say next. He turned to look up at the older man.

"Are you lovers?"

Raul smiled briefly, then shook his head.

"No."

"Why not?"

Raul smiled ruefully, "You're much younger than me. Maybe when you are my age you will know why not."

At Enrique's curious look, Raul continued.

“I was married when I met her. I had been on expeditions before, but never with anyone as talented...or as just plain lucky as she is. I was honored that she chose me, out of all of the applicants, to be her assistant.”

He sighed heavily.

“Then when my second marriage broke up too, I had a momentary hope that something might develop between us...but nothing ever did. As for her, she is oblivious as to the effect she has on us poor men. But she helped me through the pain of separation like a good male friend would, taking me out to get me drunk, telling me I was better off without her, and things like that. In return, I’ve helped her to get over many things...most of which I am sworn to secrecy about.”

He sighed again, “Sometimes it bothers me that she views me as a ball-less eunuch. But she depends on me to be everything else that she needs, and I am glad to do it. I only had one son with my first wife, and I don’t get to see him much. I guess I treat her like the daughter I never had, and I’m like an uncle figure for her. It works for us. And she is most generous about sharing credit for her discoveries with me, so I’ve had my name published in more professional journals than I can even remember, as the right-hand man to a very successful research biologist. Win-win for both of us.”

Enrique stubbed out his cigarette and turned to the older man to ask earnestly, “Then you won’t have a problem with me asking her out?”

Though he had been prepared for the question, Raul let the other man see his eyebrows shoot up into his hairline.

“You may want to reconsider that, Doctor,” he said.

“Why?”

“I told you, she is oblivious as to her effect on men. She will be surprised, and then irritated, because you are talking about something other than her burning passion, which is her research. I have watched her brutally shut down many an aspiring suitor, both young and old. It’s not that she means to be cruel...she just doesn’t want to waste time on something that doesn’t interest her.”

Enrique smiled broadly, “But she’s never experienced the Reyes charm, has she?”

Raul raised just one eyebrow this time.

“That confident, are you?”

Enrique sighed heavily, “Yes...no...I mean, more desperate, I guess...and intrigued.”

He shrugged, “All of the eligible women in town are anxious to get married and to start popping out a dozen babies. While I am flattered by their attentions, I’m also old enough to realize that spending your life in bed only sounds like a wonderful idea...though after as long as it has been for me, it sounds better every day!”

Raul smiled ruefully and nodded in agreement.

“In reality, you have to get out of bed to go to work, and to carry on all of the other details of your life. While getting laid is something I think about day and night, finding a soul-mate, a woman who is interesting to talk to, who can enhance my life by being an equal partner...that is what I am really looking for.”

Raul snorted, “And you think Tannie might be what you are looking for?”

Enrique nodded.

Raul let out a quick bark of laughter, “Good luck with that!”

At Enrique's curious look, he smiled, saying gently, "She's not really looking for a man, or to be a soul-mate to anyone. She's pretty one-dimensional these days... concerned only with her work."

Enrique looked at his watch then stood up, "It's time for me to head back to work. I presume she's in there, waiting to see me?"

Raul grimaced, "Yeah, and she's in fine form today. Nothing makes her happy while the expedition is being delayed. Good luck with her, but don't expect too much."

Enrique began to walk away.

"And Dr. Reyes? Don't take it personally. She doesn't mean to be cruel and abrasive...that's just her way. She's direct. She doesn't brook fools."

Enrique nodded, "Thanks for the heads up."

He inclined his head towards the office building, "Coming?"

Raul shook his head and lit another cigarette.

"Nah, I'll just wait to hear the news when she gets out."

"Adios, then," Enrique said as he turned to walk back to work.

Raul shook his head as he watched the younger man's form go around the back of the building, and disappear from view.

"And good luck, Dr. Reyes. You will need it!"

He took another drag from his cigarette, and stared meditatively off into space.

Chapter Four

Tanora had been sitting with the others waiting to see the doctor as patiently as she was capable of being...which was not very. She was trying to ignore the rapid conversations in Spanish involving speculations about who she was, and what an obviously young, attractive woman of color was doing here in their small village in an obscure corner of Mexico, not much frequented by tourists. She was tempted to yell out at them that she could understand every word, and that they should stop talking about her, when the stern nurse once again walked through the door leading to the inner offices, and smiled at her.

"Senorita Doyle? The doctor will see you now."

Tanora jumped up and strode through the open door without a backwards glance.

Once again, the nurse showed her into one of the small examining rooms. Tanora got up onto the examining table to sit, and the nurse did a cursory check of the cast. She wrote some notes on the clipboard, then walked towards the door, saying, "He will be right with you." She walked back out and closed the door behind her.

"Yeah, right," Tanora snorted, "Like I can expect him anytime in the near future! He'll probably keep me waiting in here so long my bones will be all knitted by the time he gets here!"

"Don't you wish that was true?"

She looked up in surprise as Dr. Reyes strode briskly into the room.

He stopped at the sink and assiduously washed his hands.

“Uh...I’m surprised to see you so quickly, that’s all,” she stammered in her embarrassment. “I was out in the waiting room so long, I figured I’d have to be waiting in here just as long.”

He turned to her and smiled, and for an instant, she forgot why she was even here, as she basked in the admiration that he radiated at her.

He really is a good-looking man, she thought to herself. Surprised at her own reaction, she shook herself, returning to reality.

Enrique, meanwhile, had moved closer to her, and his physical proximity made her hyper-aware of how thin the fabric of her blouse was, and how tight her shorts were. Since she felt so flustered, which was an unusual feeling for her, she fought her own instincts with her usual abrasiveness, which had managed to turn off many an interested man in the past.

“You know, I’m really pissed off about having to spend so damn much time sitting around picking my ass, waiting for you to approve my going off into the country.”

He gently held her arm in his warm hands, and turned it this way and that, examining the cast.

“You kiss your mother with those lips?” He asked, a small sly smile playing around his lips.

Tanora was momentarily taken aback, both by his teasing tone, and by the sensuous curve of his lips, which she hadn’t noticed before.

“Of course...I mean, what do you mean? Are you making some kind of insinuation, Dr. Reyes?” She glared at him defiantly.

He shook his head, still smiling.

“No, I was just wondering why such coarse words were emanating from such beautiful lips, that’s all.”

Tanora’s stare wasn’t as much defiant this time, as surprised.

“What are you talking about?”

Not sure she wanted to hear the answer, she abruptly changed the subject.

“So, is it healed enough for me to be able to head out on my expedition yet?”

He shook his head, not smiling this time.

“No, young lady. You are most definitely not able yet to withstand all of the rigors of backwoods camping. The cast is holding up well, but I expected that. Your bone, on the other hand, will take some time to heal completely. The last thing that you want to do is push your luck. That will risk a re-injury that might mean either it won’t heal right, and would have to be re-broken and reset...or it will heal more slowly than it should. Either way, trying to rush things is ultimately not in your best interests.”

He smiled at the dismayed look on her face, and held a finger up to her lips as she opened her mouth to complain.

“No. You are a professional woman, Miss Doyle. You need to respect me as a fellow professional. Listen to what your doctor tells you. You need to stay in town for at least another few days. That will give your bone time to proceed with healing... enough for you to be able to have limited use of it.”

He smiled slyly at her.

“And it will give me time to work up the nerve to ask you to have dinner with me.

She almost bit his finger off, as she exploded.

“What?” What are you talking about?”

He continued smiling at her.

“You know, dinner...en español, cena...a late evening meal, best consumed with company so you have someone to talk to. I’m sure a sophisticated woman like you is familiar with the concept.”

She sputtered, “Of course I know what it is...but why the hell do you think I am interested in eating with you?”

He shook his head, gently admonishing her.

“You really need to get a handle on your language. You may be used to working with men, and swearing like a marine, like they do. But you are in a town now, and will find that most people will recoil when they hear words like that coming out of the mouth of such a lovely young woman. And someday, when you have children, you will have to watch what you say, or your kids will pick up your bad habits. Time and place, woman. Time and place.”

Tanora jumped down off of the examining table, ignoring how the jarring hurt her wrist. She walked quickly over to the door, and her uninjured hand was on the doorknob, when he spoke again.

“Fine, go ahead and leave. But you won’t be able to go anywhere until I sign off on your official paperwork that your injury is sufficiently healed for you to be able to return to work.”

She froze at the door, and slowly turned to glare at him.

“What did you say?”

He smiled innocently, turning to wash his hands again, taking his time drying them, and answering her only when he was done.

“Well, the paperwork that you need to have signed by a local town official will have a space on it for any reasons for your not being able to leave at the expected time. You had said you were leaving in two days, which I presume means you want to leave tomorrow. I’m afraid that I won’t be able to sign off on your going, so the mayor, whose very pregnant wife is out there in my waiting room as we speak, won’t sign off on your going. That means that the locals you hired to go with you won’t be prepared to disobey his orders, so you won’t be going...unless you and Raul can carry everything yourself?”

In the stunned silence, he winked at her.

“Oh, wait...you can’t carry much with a broken wrist, can you?”

She exploded.

“You asshole! You are enjoying this, aren’t you?”

“Tsk, tsk. What did I tell you about your language?”

“But I have to leave! You have no idea how long I’ve been planning this trip! Or how long I had to wait for the funding! Or how many asses I needed to kiss, in order to get permission from my bosses at the university! Or just how much is riding on my finding what I told them I thought I could find out there! You have to let me go!”

He shook his head at her, “You know, not once did I hear a please in any of that.”

She glared at him again.

“Is that all you want? Then please may I have your permission to go?”

He shook his head again.

“No, your wrist isn’t healed enough yet.”

She gave him a suspicious look.

“When will it be healed enough?”

He smiled at her conspiratorially.

“I knew you were an intelligent woman.”

“When?” She asked through gritted teeth.

“After you have dinner with me.”

The silence that greeted his words was beyond stunned. Tanora wasn't sure she was even still breathing. She felt as if she was trapped in a dream, her feet glued to the floor, unable to move, unable to express just how angry she was.

If she gave in to her irritation right now, he would make good on his threats and not allow her to leave. The idea of being at the mercy of the obviously delusional, though admittedly, very good-looking Dr. Reyes, was enough to make her want to scream. But she had to admit, he had the upper hand here; and just as she had to do when begging for funding, she was going to have to give in to the inevitable, and do whatever was needed to get permission to go out into the field. This meant she had to bite the bullet and accept his invitation.

She gritted her teeth again, as Enrique smiled pleasantly at her, obviously enjoying her conundrum.

Trying to swallow her anger, she glared at him.

“One date? Just out to dinner?”

He smiled and nodded.

“Where?”

He shrugged.

“It's a very small town, I'm sure you've noticed. About the only place to get a decent meal and a few drinks, is the restaurant in the hotel that I presume you're staying at. Today is Friday, and I've got a full slate of patients out there that I still need to see. I don't know when I'll get done, so tonight is not a good choice. But tomorrow is Saturday, and I only work a half-day. I could meet you in the bar about six o'clock tomorrow. How does that sound?”

She gnashed her teeth again briefly, before choking out brightly, “Fine, just fine.”

He smiled at her.

“You know, if I didn't already know you are part Irish, I'd be guessing that by now. You may not have red hair, but you've sure got the temper of the Irish.”

“What a great way to endear yourself, Doctor. First you force me to accept your dinner invitation, then you insult my heritage. I can't wait to hear your dinner conversation.”

He smiled at her again.

“I'm hoping you'll see what a great conversationalist I can be, when I'm given a chance. That's all I'm asking for, Miss Doyle. A chance.”

She glared at him again.

“And I assume you'll be expecting to call me by my first name?”

He smiled even more broadly.

“Hey, I'll even allow you to call me Enrique. Dr. Reyes would sound so formal, while you are screaming out my name after dinner.”

She stuck out her tongue at him.

“As if, Dr. Reyes. All you said I had to agree to was dinner. That's all you are getting. Dinner, then you will sign my paperwork so I can go, right?”

He nodded solemnly.

“Of course.”

She turned the handle of the door and opened it.

“Fine. See you tomorrow night, Dr. Reyes.”

“Hasta la vista, hermana,” he spoke after her, as she left the room.

Then he spoke under his breath to himself.

“I can’t wait!”

He walked out of the door and returned to his work day with a smile on his lips.

Chapter Five

Tanora briefly considered just wearing the clothes she had on already for her dinner date. She was dressed for checking and repacking the equipment she needed for her field research, and she had gotten dirty and disheveled, as usual. But she had just enough female in her, that she wanted to make a good impression on the doctor...she wanted him to see just how good she could look, before she shut him down decisively.

She also had to admit to herself, though reluctantly, that she really did find Dr. Reyes attractive. He was quite a few inches taller than her, so she guessed he was about six feet tall. He was thin but muscular, as she had noticed when she got the opportunity to study his arms up close, while he applied her cast. He also smelled nice...a combination of his after-shave and his personal scent, made all the more noticeable since it always seemed so damned hot in Mexico.

When the drugs had kicked in, she had unconsciously leaned against his shoulder, as he applied the layers of fabric that became her cast when they hardened. She had enjoyed that brief contact, but in retrospect, had almost convinced herself that it was just the drugs that made her act so uncharacteristically. Almost.

Dr. Reyes also had short, curly black hair, and eyes so dark they almost appeared to be liquid...much darker than even her mother’s. When he smiled at her, the corners of his eyes crinkled...and not because he was old. She didn’t think he was any older than her thirty-one years; after all, it had taken her until she was twenty-six to earn her doctorate, but he had to add in internship and resident hours. So if he had been in practice for almost two years, he was probably about thirty.

With a sigh, she heard her mother’s voice in her head, telling her that she wasn’t getting any younger, and that this obviously educated young man was a good choice, and that she should consider...what? Marrying him? That would involve her having sex with him. She shuddered convulsively.

She quickly shook her head and said out loud, “Enough! I don’t need to think about that now. He said just dinner, and that’s what I intend to hold him to. But there’s no reason not to let him see just how good I can look...or that I know how to behave in polite company as much as he does. As long as he doesn’t say or do anything to piss me off, that is.”

She chuckled to herself, perfectly aware that the main reason that Raul had been with her so long, was that he was able to overlook or just plain ignore her frequent temper outbursts. Whenever she got too demandingly imperious, he would excuse himself and

go smoke. She hated being around anyone who was smoking, and he knew why. So he also he knew she wouldn't go looking for him and risk having to breathe in the noxious fumes

She sorted through her clothes and realized that she really only had one choice of dressier outfits. She took a shower before dressing herself in a long brown-printed peasant-style cotton skirt, and a dark brown cammi. The top was one of her favorites because not only did the color look good on her, but it showed off her shoulders and her cleavage, yet was padded in the bust area, so she didn't have to worry about her nipples poking through the fabric, no matter how cool the air conditioning would be on in the hotel restaurant.

She put on brown sandals also, which she had bought at a Renaissance Faire that her mother had dragged her to a few years ago. They had long straps that she laced up her legs. They looked impractical, and were more expensive than she had expected, but they were the most comfortable sandals she had ever owned, and she was able to walk for hours in them without her feet hurting. Whenever she attended official events where she had to stand for a long time, making small talk with potential backers for her expeditions, she often wore long skirts that would cover her feet so she could get away with not wearing heels, and instead would wear these sandals, to give her confidence.

She smiled to herself as she thought, *I won't need confidence tonight. All I have to do is make nice with the good doctor until I can beg off early, telling him I'm tired and need to get to bed. Then he'll sign the paperwork, and I can be off only a couple of days later than I planned to leave.*

Tanora stopped at the door, and took a last look at herself in the mirror that was over the dresser next to her bed.

You look really fine, girl, she thought, *hearing* the words that her mother often used on her when she got dressed up, as she so rarely did.

She made a face at herself in the mirror, then walked out the door and locked it behind her. She resolutely straightened her shoulders and headed down to the lobby.

~*~

She had not seen her dinner partner in the hotel restaurant area when she entered it, so she went into the bar area and found an unoccupied chair at the bar and sat down. She ordered herself a Sol, a Mexican beer that she was fond of because it was light and refreshing in the heat that even the air conditioning couldn't completely alleviate. She was beginning to think that her being alone in the in bar wasn't a good idea, based on the number of men who were ogling her and slowly making their way towards her, moving from chair to chair, competing to be the one to reach her first, when she heard a voice from behind her address her in an amused tone.

"I almost didn't recognize you. You clean up so nicely."

She turned and felt herself blush at the intense scrutiny in the eyes of her doctor.

Unconsciously, she licked her lips and said quickly, "It's about time you got here. Meeting me in the bar wasn't such a good idea. Look at them," she gestured, waving her uninjured hand around slightly, indicating the men who had ceased their forward motion when a man began to speak to her

He chuckled, saying in a low voice, "Circling like buzzards around road-kill, aren't they?"

She made a face at him.

“Thanks for that analogy. Gosh, how am I going to be able to resist you, with all of this sweet-talking going on, huh?”

He chuckled again, “Hey, I have five sisters. I know what you have to put up with where-ever you go. Dad taught them all to just laugh at it, and not to let it bother them. You can regard it as a compliment, if you want, or you can try to rail against it...but it’s human nature. There’s no way to stop it, so you might as well just accept it and move on. It’s almost always harmless...”

She got up, suddenly angry.

“Yeah, right. Almost always. You’re late, you know. I’m not sure I’m even hungry anymore.”

The look she gave him was nine-parts challenge, one part invitation.

Enrique had always enjoyed a challenge.

“Well, in that case, I guess you won’t mind spending another week or so languishing around in our town. Think of all of the time you’ll have to get more closely acquainted with all of the locals.”

He gave her an evil grin, and was mystified at the sudden look of fear that flashed so quickly across her face that he thought he might have imagined it. It was replaced by resignation accompanied by a heavy sigh.

“Let’s go find a table then,” she said as she turned away from him to face the restaurant area.

Nodding, Enrique put his hand on her elbow and guided her into the dining room. She had jumped when he touched her, but quickly recovered her composure. And as usual, she used anger as her defense.

“What are you touching me for? I can walk by myself, you know.”

Enrique leaned in closer to her, saying softly into her ear, “I’m letting the locals know that you are under my protection. I’m *claiming* you, as it were.”

Tanora tried hard to ignore the sudden response her body did, as his warm breath blew on the tiny hairs of her neck. She was upset with herself, so her body stiffened, a sign of rejection not missed by her companion.

“It’s not a message meant for you. But we are in a small town in Mexico that is full of Hispanic men. This way, even when I’m not around, they will remember that they saw you with me; and since I am the only doctor around, they’d best not irritate me.”

She looked slightly mollified.

“It’s for your protection, I assure you.”

“I don’t need your protection...” She began, but was cut off by the approach of a very attractive, much younger woman, whose eyes lit up when she saw Enrique.

As the hostess guided them to one of the best seats in the restaurant, she chatted animatedly with Enrique about her mother, who was being treated by him for her heart trouble. The look she gave to Tanora was somewhat less than friendly. Since she valued honesty in even brief relationships, Tanora was glad of a reason to dislike the pretty young woman who flirted so boldly with her dinner partner.

“Friend of yours?” She asked as she sat down in the chair that he insisted on holding for her.

He pushed her closer to the table, then leaned closer to speak almost into her ear again.

“Why? Don’t be jealous, querida. I only have eyes for you.”

She shot a quick angry look at Enrique, and he laughed in response.

“Honestly? Take a word of advice from your doctor, Tanora. Hispanic men give compliments to beautiful women. The usual response is to say *thank-you*. Better yet, you might try giving a compliment back in return. You will find that makes your time spent in a Hispanic culture much more enjoyable. Your other choice is to be angry all of the time. Anger takes such a huge toll on your energy. You need all of your energy focused on healing your wrist, so you can get back to doing the job that you love so much. “

Tanora gritted her teeth and said, “I’ll keep that in mind.”

The waiter appeared at their table, and Tanora ordered herself another beer, suddenly determined to spend as much of Enrique’s money as she could, since he had all but blackmailed her into this dinner date.

Enrique ordered himself a Negra Modelo beer, along with a plate of mixed appetizers. Then he leaned back and smiled at Tanora.

“So I’ll start off the conversation by telling you about my family. You can politely listen, then tell me about yours, alright?”

The corners of his mouth twitched in amusement, as surprise and irritation waged a visible war on her face.

“Whatever,” she finally spat out.

“Like I said earlier, I have five sisters. I also have two brothers. I’m the second in birth order, so while I did have my older sister ordering me around when she started baby-sitting for my parents, I usually got around that by picking fights with my brothers, both of whom are right after me in ages. And I would do it in such a way that she never figured out that I started it. So I’m not the conciliatory one, like a middle child. But neither am I the demanding one, like the oldest, or the spoiled one, like the baby.”

Tanora snorted, “No. It’s perfectly clear to me which one you are...the sneaky one. You started trouble, then blamed the younger ones. Just like you blackmailed me into this dinner. Is it that hard for you to get dates around here?”

She waved vaguely towards the hostess, who kept glancing in their direction.

Enrique sounded wounded, “Ah...no, it’s not. But she is, after all, almost young enough to be my daughter.”

“I thought that was what you Latino men like...younger, dumb women, so you can keep them barefoot and pregnant, and continue on as if your own life never changed.” She glared at him defiantly.

Enrique sat back and took a long, slow drink from his beer bottle, while he watched her. Tanora tried to keep glaring at him, but finally took a drink from her own bottle as well. When the silence continued, she began to fidget.

Finally, after about five minutes, she shrugged, and asked, “So, I’m getting the silent treatment now?”

The corners of Enrique’s mouth now curved upwards in amusement, and Tanora had to force herself to look at his eyes, and not fixate on how his sensuous lips made her think naughty thoughts. She was angry enough about being there at all. The suspicion that she might enjoy the feel of those lips on her various body parts, which were hardening as she thought about it, annoyed her enough to make her want to irritate him into ending their dinner before it was even served.

Enrique took a deep breath, then sighed.

“I realize that I kind of forced you into accepting my invitation, but I didn’t think you would agree to have dinner with me unless I did. I do intend to sign your paperwork Monday morning, no matter how our evening goes. I am a man of my word. But I had hoped that we could share some pleasant conversation while we enjoy the best cooking that this town has to offer.”

He leaned forward, “You are a very beautiful woman, Tanora. And I’m intrigued by your choice of careers. I have five sisters, some female cousins, and a few close women friends. In my experience, not many women would choose to go traipsing out into the wilderness in search of exotic plants. You have to deal with the heat, the insects, the wild animals, and the discomfort.”

He continued, “And yes, I could easily date most of the unmarried women in this town, if I wanted to. But they are all small-town señoritas, who would not be able to hold up their end of the conversation. I’m not a snob, but I am an educated man. I grew up in a suburb of Chicago. Unlike most of the local residents, I’m well aware that the world is a very large place, and that I haven’t seen as much of it as I would like to. I love to learn new things, and talking to interesting people is one of my favorite ways to do that. But unless I take a trip to *la capital*, and visit with some of my fellow professionals there, I’m usually pretty bored in my off hours.”

The waiter arrived with their appetizers, and Enrique leaned back, smiling at her.

“While we wait for them to cool enough for us to eat them, can we make an agreement that we will both be on our best behavior for just this one night? ¿Por favor?”

Tanora looked at him for a long moment, and found herself unable to stop the smile that she now graced him with.

“Okay, I guess you are right,” she said slowly.

“Good,” Enrique said as he patted the back of her hand that was reaching for a tiny stuffed pepper.

“And you should smile more,” he observed. “You have adorable dimples when you do.”

“Make other people self-conscious much, Doctor?” She asked after she swallowed the appetizer she had been chewing and quickly reached for her beer.

Enrique gave her an amused look.

“Oh, did I forget to mention that I ordered the extra-hot plate? Hot as in spicy?”

She smirked at him.

“Not a problem. I cut my eye-teeth on Thai food, authentic-style. It was my favorite when I was a kid.”

“Where did you grow up?” He asked.

She shook her head, “No. First tell me why you are down here in this small town, when you are such a man of the world. What the hell is there for you in such a backwards area, where you are bored when you are not working?”

He sat back and nodded.

“Your first swear word of the evening. Well done, lasting so long, my dear.”

She stuck out her tongue at him.

Enrique chuckled as the waiter returned to take their dinner order. Once he was gone, Enrique spoke again.

“My grandfather on my dad’s side was from this town. It was where he grew up. I really loved mi abuelo. Since I was his oldest grandson and his namesake, he always

took a special interest in me, and we were close from the time I was a little kid. So when he wanted to take a trip back home a few years ago, I convinced him to wait until I had a break from my classes, so I could go with him. I was in my second year of medical school, and the pressure was almost unbearable. He knew that, and he also knew that he was getting a bit too old to travel alone...so it was good for both of us.”

Tanora had finished sampling the appetizers, and felt she had to say something when he paused.

“Did you grow up speaking Spanish? Obviously you are bi-lingual now.”

He nodded. “Mom and Dad are both Hispanic, so we grew up speaking both languages in the house. They met in high school, and never dated anyone else. They’ve been married over thirty years and have eight kids. But still they take every opportunity they can to sneak around to grope each other.”

“Lovely,” Tanora commented with raised eyebrows. “Must make for some fun-filled family gatherings.”

Enrique laughed, “You have no idea.”

“So..what? You came, you saw, you liked the area, so here you are?”

Enrique nodded, “Yeah. That’s about right. Abuelo knew the guy who was the doctor before me...they had gone to school together. He was looking to retire, but afraid that it would be impossible to find a replacement willing to move here. The local residents don’t usually go to college, and the few that do, never move back home. We talked a lot about the challenge of practicing medicine in such a remote area. I was already pretty much decided that I wasn’t going to be a specialist, but a general practitioner. When I left with abuelo, there wasn’t as much of an agreement, as an intention on my part, to think it over.”

Enrique stopped to take a drink from his beer.

“I liked the people I had met down here. I liked the fact that it is close enough to *la capital* for me to visit there, and attend medical conferences; but far enough away that there is peace and quiet here. In fact, the beauty of the natural surroundings was the biggest influence on my deciding to move here. This area is really lovely for much of the year, especially when everything is in bloom. And the stars are like nothing I ever saw living up in the Chicago area. No light pollution down here. You feel like you can reach up and touch them.”

“I haven’t noticed,” Tanora said. “I’ve been drugged to sleep every night since I got here.”

Enrique chuckled, “You should be out of those pills by now. I only gave you enough for a couple of days.”

Tanora nodded, “Yes, but I didn’t take any during the day. I only took them at night so I could sleep. I’ve been spending my days checking and re-checking the equipment, to be sure we don’t forget anything crucial. And counting the minutes until I can get out there to do what I came to do.”

The waiter returned with their food, and they both busied themselves with eating for a while. Their companionable silence was filled with the music of the strolling mariachi musicians who were serenading at the tables of the few tourists in the dining room.

“So how does your grandfather feel about you living in the town that he crossed the border to get away from?” Tanora asked, while still chewing.

Enrique put his fork down and took a drink from his beer, before he answered.

“That’s the one thing I really regret. He never got to come down here to visit me. He was planning on it, but he passed away last November.”

“I’m sorry,” Tanora said quickly, dismayed at the obvious distress that her innocent question had caused.

He shook his head and smiled sadly.

“Abuelo knew I was here...he knew I was happy here. He was overjoyed that one of his grandchildren was making him proud back in the old country...”

He was quiet for a long moment again, and Tanora waited politely for him to finish his thoughts out-loud.

“When I got the call that he had passed away, I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to make the wake and funeral. But the mayor’s father had known my grandfather as well. So he pulled a few strings, and got me on a red-eye flight back up to Chicago. I only stayed for a few days, but it allowed me to say goodbye to a man I had admired and loved so much that I grew to love the area that he loved also.”

He took another drink and thought for a moment before continuing.

“The oddest thing was that the ones who cried the loudest at the wake and funeral, were the daughters-in-law. I mean, Dad has three brothers and five sisters, so there was a whole lot of wailing going on. Abuelita was almost inconsolable at times; but then, they were married for over fifty years. But my mother, and my Tía Tegan...they seemed to be hurting even more than anyone else. I asked Mom why she seemed to be so much sadder than even his own daughters, and she told me it was because they had had his love for so much longer than she had...that he was the father she sometimes wished she could have had, but didn’t. And Tía Tegan said she felt at a loss because she was just getting used to having his love to count on, and then he was gone.”

Tanora didn’t know what to say in the face of such a recent loss, so she just smiled, consolingly she hoped. When the waiter returned to their table to clear away their empty plates, she asked him to bring them both coffee.

Enrique shook his head and rapidly ordered the house coffee instead, for both of them. The waiter smiled, winked at him, and left.

“So what’s in this house coffee that he found so amusing?” Tanora asked suspiciously.

Enrique smiled at her, “You’ll see. You are done with those pills, right?”

“Why?”

“Because you shouldn’t drink much while you are taking them.”

“I don’t think I should drink what you ordered at all,” she observed.

He smiled again, his most charming smile, and leaned forward to touch the back of her hand that was resting on the table. This time she didn’t try to pull her hand away, which Enrique chose to view as a major accomplishment due to his charm.

He smiled more broadly.

“Your turn now. So where were you born and raised, that Thai food was so commonplace?”

“On the east coast. Mom is a Biology professor at Princeton. She used to do research for big pharma, but got disillusioned by the pressure to produce new drugs for things like erectile dysfunction and male pattern baldness, when she really wanted to work on a cure for cancer, or diabetes, or something more important. She’s taught there for years. That’s why I did my undergrad work there...no cost to employees’ kids. I did

my grad work there because it had the best program in what I wanted to do. Once I had my masters and began to work on my doctorate, I had to decide if I was going to teach or do research. I've never been a very patient kind of person..."

Enrique's eyebrows shot up into his hair.

"No? I would never have guessed that!"

She glared at him, while he smiled.

"Not good at taking much teasing, are you?"

"Is that what you call it?" She sniffed. "I thought you were just being rude."

"Nah. Got five sisters, remember? You women-folk just don't understand teasing until it gets explained to you. We men talk to each other the same way...it just never occurs to us that you will take offense. None meant."

"Humph!"

The waiter returned with their coffees, and Enrique took a quick sip, then smiled at her.

"You are going to love this...I know I do."

Suspiciously she took a tiny sip... she smiled despite herself.

"Hey, this is really good! Tasty, sweet...there's cinnamon...I even taste chocolate. What's in it?"

Enrique shrugged elaborately.

"Who knows? A little drop of this, a little splash of that. It's a special concoction of the bartender's. Who cares what's in it, as long as it's so good?"

She took another sip and smiled at him.

"I guess so," she said slowly.

She took another bigger sip.

"So, you went into research, and then what?" Enrique prompted.

"Then I had to learn just how much kissing butt went into getting approval for in-the-field research. As a student when I went it was already a done-deal. Someone else had to get the funding and the permission. Once it was up to me, I couldn't believe how much work needs to be done before you ever even get to the area you want to explore! It's like Asian cooking: all of the chopping that happens before-hand, is the really time-consuming part. The actual cooking is the fun part. For me, the time spent actually in the field is the best part. I love the camping out, the roughing it, and the hunt for exotic plants. And the thrill of discovering something new and potentially useful puts me on a major high for weeks!"

"So how do you find out if it is potentially useful?"

"I can do some very limited testing in the field...but to get any really reliable results, I have to send samples to labs owned by the university that is paying for the trip."

"Isn't that the kind of research that your mother didn't like doing?"

Tanora shrugged, "Yeah. But mostly I think she really quit doing research because she was pregnant with me, and wanted to have more predictable hours, with more time off."

Enrique smiled as she took another large drink from her cooling coffee. He signaled for the waiter to bring them another two coffees.

"Okay with you?" He asked her, when she noticed him waving.

"Sure," she smiled broadly at him, "This is really good. Now where was I?"

"What does your father do?"

“Oh, he’s a writer. He spends all day up in the attic, banging away on his old electric typewriter. Sometimes he isn’t seen for days, because he gets so carried away, that he even sleeps up there.”

Enrique suddenly got a shocked look on his face, and he leaned forward excitedly.

“Oh my God! Tell me your dad’s name! It isn’t Shamus Doyle, is it?”

Tanora nodded, “Uh huh. Why?”

“Because my dad has every single book your dad has ever written! For years, that’s been our most reliable gift for Dad’s birthdays and Christmas presents. As long as there was a new Shamus Doyle spy novel in his pile of presents, he was a happy man. I can’t wait to tell my dad that I’ve met the daughter of his favorite writer!”

The waiter brought them two more coffees, and this time neither of them gave it much time to cool down.

As they chatted about her dad’s books, Tanora found it increasingly difficult to not fixate on just how attractive her dinner companion was. When he smiled, she wanted to lose herself in his dark eyes. His lips were sensuous and suggestive of much pleasure to be had from their application to her various body parts. Those parts were feeling awake and warm, as if they had been slumbering, but the caffeine in the coffee woke them up enough for them to remember how much fun they could have; and the alcohol in the coffee raised their temperature. She was grateful for the padding in her bra, as she felt her nipples pucker...she even felt her toes curl. She wondered what it would feel like to kiss her doctor...if his in-bed manner would be as gentle and comforting as his bed-side manner.

So when he stopped talking, as if he was waiting for a response from her, a few minutes passed before she even realized he was silent.

Enrique had a boner that threatened to levitate the table they were both leaning on. He hoped he was making sense as he talked about the books her dad had written, that his dad had insisted he read also. But all he was really doing was imagining stripping Tanora naked and licking her all over, to see if she really tasted as good as she smelled. He had been tantalized by the quick sniffing of her neck and hair that he had been able to do twice early on when he whispered in her ear. That had started him twitching; but watching her relax across the table from him, watching her smile easily now, and getting quick glances down the front of her cammi when she leaned over, was driving him to the brink of insanity. It had really been a long time since he had been with any woman, and this one was intoxicating him now...even more than the coffees!

He stopped talking because the blood was deserting his brain, and he ran out of things to say that didn’t involve an invitation to his bed.

They looked at each other for a long moment, and an understanding seemed to pass between them. They both took a drink from their coffees and realized they were almost done. Enrique signaled for the check from the waiter, and he handed over his credit card.

“Why don’t we go outside and have a look at the stars?” He heard himself saying, and hoped it didn’t sound like as much of an invitation as he meant it to be.

“Okay,” Tanora said, wanting nothing more than to be alone with this man.

The waiter brought back the card and the receipt, and Enrique signed and handed over the paper. They both finished their coffees, and got up from the table.

“Oh!” Tanora exclaimed, as she wobbled slightly. “I feel a little dizzy.”

Enrique took her elbow and leaned closer to whisper into her ear, “I feel dazzled by your beauty, and barely able to keep my hands off of you any longer.”

Tanora gave him a quick look of surprise, followed by a small smile. She licked her lips before she spoke.

“Where are we going?”

“Let’s just walk around to the park behind the hotel,” he suggested. “The lights from the hotel won’t be as noticeable back there, and the stars will look brighter.”

“Um...the stars, yeah,” she said as they walked around the building.

Enrique had let her arm go once they were in the shadow cast by the hotel in the moonlight. She turned when she heard the unmistakable sound of a match being struck.

“What are you doing?” She asked in dismay.

“Lighting a cigarette,” he answered.

“You smoke?”

“Uh huh...but not that many anymore. Maybe two or three a day.”

He peered closely at her face in the moonlight, asking, “Why? Is that a problem for you?”

She turned away from him.

“I...uh...I don’t like cigarettes. I don’t like to be around anyone smoking. The smell nauseates me. And you’re a doctor. Isn’t that hypocritical? And stupid?”

He smiled at her, as he threw the butt down and ground it out with his shoe.

“Yes. But it’s about my only vice, so I try not to be too hard on myself for it. I spend my days telling my patients to quit. One of these days, I will.”

The lack of blood flow to his brain was part of the reason that Enrique didn’t notice how the flavor of the evening had suddenly changed, and not for the better. Tanora had turned away from him, so he couldn’t see her face. And moonlight is not the best lighting to illuminate nuances of facial expressions.

“I’ve been having trouble keeping my hands off of you all night, Tanora,” he said, as he put his hands onto her shoulders and rubbed them, then moved up to massage the back of her neck.

“That feels good,” she said with a sigh.

“What would feel even better, is a kiss, señorita.”

He gently turned her around to face him, then wound his hands into the back of her hair, under the chignon that she had pinned it up into.

She froze.

He leaned forward and kissed her, gently at first, then more insistently, as his control over his instincts, already loosened by the alcohol, was side-tracked by his more primal needs.

She made a sound that he took for a moan. His tongue pressed against her lips and he pushed his way into her mouth, to duel with her tongue. He moved closer to press himself against her, and one hand descended from her hair, and began to move towards the breasts he had been longing to touch from the first time he saw them.

Suddenly she pushed at him.

“No!” She choked out. “This can’t happen! Not now, not ever!”

Confused, Enrique reached for her again, only to have her slap his hands.

“Don’t touch me! Don’t ever touch me again!” She spat out her words.

“What? Why? What the hell is going on?” Enrique was trying to process the sudden turn of events with a brain dulled by alcohol and hormones.

Tanora turned and ran back towards the hotel. She stumbled in the darkness, but kept moving away from him so quickly that he had to shout after her.

“What did I do?”

“Everything! Nothing! Go away!”

Then she was around the corner of the building, and Enrique was left alone in the darkness, with only the stars to talk to.

He shook his head, trying to clear it enough to be able to think.

“What just happened?” He asked himself aloud.

But there was no one there to answer, and the stars kept quiet.

With a heavy sigh, he lit another cigarette and started walking back to his car, which was parked around the front of the building.

Chapter Six

Enrique spent much of Sunday fighting his hang-over. Monday morning he was finally feeling like himself again, but he was still trying to figure out just where he had lost control of the evening he spent with Tanora. As soon as he got to his office, he found her chart and signed the paperwork that gave his permission for her to head out into her beloved wilderness. Then he got busy seeing patients, so it slipped his mind that he was supposed to have the signed paperwork delivered to the mayor’s office for his signature.

And when the mayor’s wife went into labor later in the morning, almost two weeks after her due date, he forgot all about anything else except getting to the hospital to meet the expectant parents, and making sure that his patient delivered a healthy baby. He drove way too fast and almost beat the ambulance there, even though the nearest hospital was over an hour’s drive from their town.

Typical of first-time mothers, the labor was a long, drawn-out affair. Enrique had admitted her to the hospital soon after her labor commenced, and he spent the next thirty-six hours there. He ate there, he slept a few hours here and there, and he and the mayor kept up the vigil, watching over the sometimes moaning, and sometimes screaming, mother-to-be.

When the baby boy finally made his appearance, all four of the participants were exhausted. The baby weighed in at almost ten pounds of tired and cranky infant. He had the wrinkled look typical of post-mature babies. But he was healthy, and that was all that everyone had wanted.

The mayor and his wife were ecstatic...and tired. She was glad when the nurses took her son to the nursery to clean him up and take his vitals; she promptly fell asleep. Her husband, after making a few calls to their families, collapsed onto the recliner in her room, and joined her in exhausted, dreamless sleep.

Enrique first made sure that the baby was doing well in the nursery. Then he stumbled out to his car and drove himself home in a fog of tiredness. He made his way

into his house, determined to sleep for a week. He ignored the blinking light on his phone's answering machine. After a quick shower, he threw himself face-down on his bed and slept there until his alarm blared at him all too early the next morning. He reluctantly crawled out of bed to return to his office to try to catch up with his patients.

~*~

Enrique didn't get a break from seeing patients until late in the afternoon on Wednesday. He planned on driving out to the hospital after he left his office, to check up on the mayor's wife and the baby, so he knew his work day wasn't over yet. He made a quick excuse to the stern head nurse, telling her he just needed five minutes to himself, and he headed out the back door, to the bench where he usually sat and smoked.

He had just lit his last cigarette, swearing at himself for not having remembered to buy more, when he was surprised by the sudden appearance of Raul Mendoza in front of him.

"May I?" The older man asked, nodding to indicate that he wanted to sit on the bench also. Then without waiting for an answer, he sat down heavily, and lit a cigarette. He leaned forward, balancing his elbows on his knees, then he turned to look up at Enrique, and he spoke in an accusing tone of voice.

"What the hell did you do to her?"

Enrique was taken aback, both by the tone, and the insinuation. He instinctively reacted defensively.

"Nothing! I swear it...we had dinner, a few drinks. That's all."

"Then why has she been acting like she can't get out of Mexico fast enough?"

"What?"

Raul nodded.

"Yup. She's been saying that if she can't get the permission she needs, she may as well just give up, and head on home. Believe me, I've been with her for years. This is not in character for her. Something must have happened, besides dinner and drinks, to make her so upset."

Enrique looked straight in front of him for a few moments while he finished his cigarette. Then he shook his head.

"I kissed her...that's all! I never even got to cop a feel. She reacted like she was being attacked, and she ran. I'm still trying to figure out what I did, to make her run away from me like that."

Raul sat back and sighed.

"What did you talk about during dinner?"

"Huh?"

"Did you talk about anything that might have caused her to not do any dating for the last two years?"

Enrique shook his head.

"No. We talked about our families, and where we grew up...what we do for our jobs. Nothing personal. Except I did tell her I think she is beautiful...and I do. But that can't have been a surprise for her."

Raul suddenly sat up and turned to Enrique.

"Wait a minute. You said you kissed her. Where?"

"On the mouth..."

"No! I meant, where were you? In the restaurant?"

“No, out back of the hotel. I asked her to come out there with me, so we could see the stars. Why?”

“Did you smoke during dinner?”

“No.”

“When you were outside?”

Enrique thought for a moment.

“Yeah,” he said finally. “I had a cigarette while we were walking back there. She seemed upset with me about it, but I told her I only smoke a few a day, and it’s the only vice I have, so I’m not ready to give it up just yet. Why? Is that important?”

Raul got up and walked a short distance, then turned back to face Enrique.

“Yes, it is.”

“Why? How?”

Raul just paced for a few minutes; abruptly he stopped in front of Enrique.

“Listen. I can’t tell you. It’s not my story to tell. It’s hers. But you are the first man she has agreed to be with in any way, shape, or form, for two years. Maybe if you could talk to her, you could get her to explain to you what happened. I think it would be good for her to talk about it.”

“But she ran away from me. She told me never to touch her again. How am I supposed to get her to talk to me?”

Raul stopped and looked off into space for a minute, then turned to Enrique to look pointedly into his eyes.

“You’re not planning on hurting her, are you?”

Anger made Enrique almost shout.

“No! Of course not! What do you take me for?”

Raul nodded.

“I figured you to be an honorable man...you even sought my permission to ask her out. You might be good for her...”

He was quiet for a few more minutes, then he seemed to make up his mind about something, and he sat down next to Enrique again.

“Did you sign the paperwork for our expedition?”

Enrique nodded wearily.

“Yeah, on Monday morning, like I told her I would. But the mayor’s wife went into labor that day, two weeks late. I spent the next day and a half with them in the hospital. The baby finally arrived late last night; I barely got a few hours of sleep before I had to come to work today.”

“Where is the paperwork now?”

“Still in her file, I think. I forgot to get it sent to the mayor, because of all of the commotion. Why?”

“Call her. Tell her you have it, but that you need her to come and pick it up, to take it to the mayor. Give her any reason you need to, but tell her she has to come to see you.”

“What if she won’t?”

“She will...I’ll make sure of it. I’ll be there when she gets the phone call. I’ll tell her she has to do it, or the expedition will be canceled. I’ll remind her of how much work she has already done, to get this project approved. I’ll remind her how important this is to her reputation, since she insisted she would not come back empty-handed. And if I have to, I’ll drive her here myself.”

“Where should I have her meet me? The examining rooms are so cold and impersonal...plus she might feel uncomfortable in such a small space.”

“Do you have an office?”

“Uh huh. It’s a small one, in the back of the building, right by the door I come out of when I’m sneaking out to smoke.”

“What time do you think you will get done seeing patients today?”

“Today? Not until late, because I still need to get back to the hospital to see the Señora Jimenez and the baby.”

“How about tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow’s Thursday, right? I usually see patients until about two in the afternoon. Then I review files, make phone calls, that kind of thing.”

“If you call her today, you can tell her to meet you in your office tomorrow, once there aren’t any more patients for you to see.”

“I suppose so...but everyone else will be gone by then, too.”

“That doesn’t matter. But you need to ask her why she ran away from you. I hope she answers you.”

Enrique studied Raul before he spoke.

“You’re not going to give me any hints are you? About what this is all about?”

Raul shook his head.

“No. But I will make sure she comes here. The rest is up to you, Doctor.”

“What am I supposed to do? Convince her to stay in Mexico? Convince her to go on her expedition?”

Raul nodded, before he stood up to leave.

“And maybe convince her to let you kiss her again.”

Enrique looked up sharply at the older man.

“No other clues?”

Raul shook his head.

“No. Just call her.”

Enrique sighed.

“Alright. I will...as soon as I get back into the office.”

Raul nodded.

“Good. Adios, doctor.”

Raul walked quickly, and was soon around the corner and out of sight.

Enrique thought about what had just happened. He got up slowly, and walked back into the building. He went into his office and sat in the chair and leaned forward on the desk, his head in his hands, to think some more.

He was baffled as to what was going on with Tanora, but intrigued enough to want to know her secret. She was beautiful and bewitching, and he wanted to smell more of her, than just a few quick sniffs of her neck and hair. He had only had a brief taste of her lips, and he wanted more of that too. And her body?

He felt himself, tired as he was, twitch to attention. She had felt good in his hands... damn good! He thought of the cleavage that he had stared at, inconspicuously he hoped, all evening. He wanted to see those breasts, to hold them...he wanted to touch and experience all that this woman had to offer.

But in order for anything to happen, he had to get her to meet him in his office, then to talk to him. About what? He had no idea. But Raul had made it sound important.

Enrique sighed out loud. He picked up his phone and pressed the buttons, to call the enigmatic Tanora Doyle.

Chapter Seven

Raul had been afraid that he would have to drag his boss by her hair to get her into the car for the ride to the doctor's office. She had been rude to Enrique on the phone, and suggested that Raul should pick up the paperwork. When she was unable to talk the doctor out of a face-to-face meeting, she had insisted that Raul drive her, and come with her into the office.

As the rental truck pulled up to the back door of the doctor's office, Raul turned expectantly to Tanora.

She looked at him mutinously.

"You really are going to make me go in there by myself, aren't you?" She spat out the words at him.

He nodded.

"Yup. You need to talk to him. We may need his help in the future. He's going to be the closest medical person to where we are going. We may need him someday to come out to where we are, if someone gets hurt. And we need that paperwork to get out there."

She started to object, "We could just forget about it and go home."

Raul shook his head.

"And waste all of the money we have already spent, getting ready? What chance will there be for any future expeditions, when they can throw it back at you that you backed out of this one...for no apparent reason? No, Tanora, we need to get going. So you need to go in there and talk to him, and get us those signed papers."

Tanora sighed heavily.

"Oh, alright. I'm going."

She opened the door and jumped out of the truck.

"Will you be waiting here for me?"

He shook his head again.

"No, boss. I've got to get this beast gassed up, and make sure the local men we hired are ready to go as soon as we get the okay. You just call my cell when you are ready to be picked up. I'll drive you to the mayor's office, we'll get his signature, then we can be off in the next day or so."

She sighed again as she walked towards the back door to the doctor's offices. The door was open, so she walked in and saw Enrique sitting behind the desk in the office that was closest to the door. He had left his door open so she would see him there.

Tanora felt her heart begin to pound as she saw him turn to smile at her. She hadn't noticed that he was on the phone, but once he saw her, he made quick work of his caller, and hung up the phone before she was even fully in his office.

"Come on in and have a seat," he said as he gestured at the chair on the opposite side of his desk.

He poured two glasses of water and offered her one.

“Thanks,” she said gratefully, since her nerves made her feel like her throat was constricting, and she had been worried about how to talk with no saliva in her mouth.

He sat and watched her drink, smiling as she put the empty glass down. But he didn’t say anything. Tanora realized that he was waiting for her to initiate conversation. She swallowed and began speaking.

“So, can I have the signed papers, now that I’m here?”

Enrique shook his head slowly.

“Not right away. You have to answer a question for me.”

She fought her feelings of fear and anxiety with her trusty weapons of anger and irritation.

“Why? Why the hell should I answer anything you ask?”

Enrique sighed loudly.

“Because you acted as if I attacked you the other night, when all I did was kiss you. I want to know why. I want to know what you think I was trying to do, and how I can avoid that kind of situation in the future.”

“Why? There isn’t going to be another chance for you to try that again! I’m going out into the relative safety of the wilderness, and I don’t plan on spending much time in town once I’m back. With a little luck, I will find what I’m looking for, and be able to leave as soon as possible.”

Enrique leaned forward in his chair, and rested his folded hands on the desk in front of him. His hands appeared relaxed, but Tanora got the sense that he was controlling himself only by sheer force of will; his muscles appeared to be coiled and knotted. He spoke slowly and quietly.

“What happened? I thought you wanted me to kiss you.”

“You thought wrong! End of discussion. Where are the papers?”

He looked at her for a long moment before reaching into a drawer and taking the paperwork out to put it on the desk between them.

“What if I told you the price for giving this to you, is another kiss?”

Tanora stared at him, and was almost tempted to agree to that condition. Then she shook her head.

“No! That’s never going to happen again.”

Enrique sighed heavily, shaking his head.

“Honestly, Tanora, you are making me wish I had bought another pack of cigarettes, instead of deciding that this is as good of a time as any to finally quit.”

She looked up at him from staring at the paperwork and trying to figure out if she could just grab it and run, or if he would be able to stop her before she reached the door.

“You’ve quit?”

He nodded wearily.

“And don’t think it’s been easy. I haven’t had much sleep, since the mayor’s wife’s delivery took so long. I won’t be able to catch up on my rest until the weekend, and it’s only Thursday. I almost ran out of smokes during her labor, and afterwards I forgot to get more. Besides, I figured that since you find it so distasteful, I might as well give it a shot now, with the faint hope that someday you might allow me to kiss you again.”

She stared at him, her attitude softening, and he waited.

Finally, she spoke slowly, “You are quitting for me?”

He nodded again.

“On the off-chance that I will kiss you again?”

He smiled, and she spent a moment lost in the curve of his lips, and the heat that radiated from his dark eyes. The anger and fear inside of her began to melt, and she relaxed into the chair, before she sighed heavily.

“I can’t stand being kissed by someone who is a smoker.”

He nodded, “It must be unpleasant, if you are a non-smoker.”

She shook her head, “No, that’s not it. It’s...it’s because of what it reminds me of...”

He regarded her silently for a moment, before asking, “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No...yes...I don’t know. It’s not something I want to talk about, but you really didn’t do anything wrong. You just brought back some bad memories.”

He poured her another glass of water, while she gazed off into space for a long moment. Finally she shook her head, as if she had come to a decision. She seemed to shrink into herself, but she began to speak in a small voice.

“It happened two years ago. I was running in the park near my apartment at night, alone. I had been doing it for years, so I never gave it any thought. I had had a long day in my office, and wanted to unwind. I like to run...or at least I used to.”

Enrique began to have a very bad feeling about what he was about to hear. But he sat quietly, hardly even breathing, as he waited for her to continue.

Tanora looked off into space again, as if she was seeing something that he couldn’t.

“The news stories had been talking for weeks about women being attacked in the park at night...warning everyone to not be in there alone. Or at least to carry a cell phone. I didn’t pay them any attention because I had lived in that area my whole life. I didn’t think I had anything to worry about. I never ran with headphones on, and I always paid attention to my surroundings. But I didn’t even notice the two men until they stepped out of the dark by the trees, and one of them grabbed me.”

Enrique wanted to offer comfort but didn’t know how, so he kept silent and waited.

“I started to scream and tried to punch the one touching me, but the guy who wasn’t touching me held a gun to my head and said he would kill me if I made a sound. Then the other guy laughed and pushed me over to the park bench.”

Enrique said quietly, “May I apologize on behalf of all men, for the unforgivable agony they must have put you through?”

Tanora focused on him briefly, surprised.

“Why? You weren’t the one who raped me.”

“Because I have five sisters. I would want to kill any man who hurt them like that.”

“Dad said that too...they had to remove him from the courtroom a couple of times.”

Tanora shook her head, sighing.

“I guess I should tell you all of it, now. The one guy pulled my shirt off, and tore my shorts down, then kicked my legs apart, and raped me from behind. It was the most painful thing I had ever felt in my life...and I was helpless to do anything about it, because the other guy kept that gun pointed at my head, and reminded me that he’d kill me if I made a sound. Then he unzipped his pants too...”

Enrique swore softly under his breath.

“And he told me to open my mouth. I shook my head at him, determined to make him shoot me for that. I didn’t even care anymore if he killed me. I wasn’t going to suck his disgusting dick. The other guy behind me, who was still enjoying himself, opened his mouth to yell at me. I hadn’t realized that the asshole was still smoking while he was raping me. But he was...and the cigarette fell out of his mouth when he yelled. It fell onto my back, and I screamed. That’s when the other guy grabbed my ponytail and took advantage of my open mouth.”

Enrique’s face was white, as he convulsed, “Oh my God!”

Tanora looked back at him for a moment, then looked away again and continued.

“Lucky for me, there were two other women who had run close by when this all got started, and they were smart enough to have a cell phone with them. One kept watch, to be sure the guys didn’t get away, and the other one moved away a little bit and called the police. By the time the guys were done violating me, the police were there. They tried to run, but it’s hard to run with your pants down, so they both got arrested. It turns out that they were responsible for a lot of the other rapes as well.”

Tanora stopped and took a deep breath. She drained her glass of water. She turned to look at Enrique and saw the compassion in his eyes, so she managed a small smile for him.

“The bad guys got thrown in jail for a very long time, thanks to all of us women who identified them in court.”

Enrique nodded and spoke angrily, “Where I hope they are learning everyday, and brutally, how wrong it is to force unwanted sex on anyone.”

Tanora shrugged, “Probably. But at least they aren’t hurting any more women in there.”

There was silence for a while; Enrique poured another glass of water for Tanora and she drank it. Enrique spoke slowly again.

“No wonder you hate cigarettes. And now I know what I did wrong. But please, Tanora, tell me, they weren’t Hispanic men, were they?”

She shook her head, saying, “No, they were rich white boys, out for some fun. Turns out they were targeting women of color, because they had this notion in their heads that we wouldn’t mind, that we all liked to be bitch-slapped and abused. They had watched way too many videos, and believed all of that bullshit that the rappers put into them.”

Enrique let out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding and nodded. He leaned forward across his desk, to where she had her hands tightly clasped, and he gently took one of her hands in his, and kissed the backs of her fingers.

“I won’t pressure you ever again, Tanora. I hope you will want to kiss me someday. But that will be your choice. I can wait.”

She looked into his eyes and felt herself getting lost in their inky darkness. She sighed gently.

“But you said you gave up cigarettes for me?”

He nodded.

“I haven’t had one since yesterday afternoon, when I had my last one. And after what you have told me, I don’t think I will ever be able to stomach having another one.”

She smiled at him, saying gently, “Then you deserve a reward, for making the right choice. And some incentive for you to keep on doing it.”

He raised his eyebrows and looked at her questioningly. She got up and moved around to his side of the desk, then balanced her butt against the desk, and watched as he looked up at her. The height of the chair was just right, so that when she was standing, she a few inches taller than him...about the same difference that there was between them when they were both standing, and he was the taller one.

But with him sitting there, Tanora felt as if she had the power. Enrique acknowledged as much when he spoke hoarsely, his voice filled with deep emotion.

“You don’t have to do this, Tanora. But I promise to keep my hands to myself. Even though I want to touch you, more than anything else in the world right now. I won’t. You are in control. Do what you want.”

She gave him a small smile as she thought of what it was that she wanted to do. Long-dead feelings seemed to be waking up, but she wasn’t going to rush anything. And he wanted her to take her time. So she did.

She leaned over slowly, and used both of her hands to softly caress the sides of his face. While she kept one hand still, she used the other to brush the curly black hair off of his face, and ran her fingers back onto his scalp, enjoying the warmth emanating from his head. The hand that was still on the side of his face, slowly moved down, and she used her thumb to trace the lines of his lips, enjoying the soft, sensuous feel of them.

She lowered her head, and her lips gently brushed against his...once, twice...on the third touch, she leaned into it, and concentrated all of her being into her lips, as if they were the only body parts that she had.

She didn’t open her mouth...she kept up the gentle pressure of her lips on his. She opened her eyes and smiled at the transfixed look on his face. He opened his eyes as well. She gently rubbed her nose against his, back and forth, and they breathed onto each others’ faces, while gazing deeply into each others’ eyes.

She brushed her lips against his again, and applied more force. She leaned forward and opened her mouth slightly, to run her tongue around his mouth, tasting his lips, tracing their lines, enjoying the feel of the prickly hairs that had grown since he had shaved in the morning.

Her tongue made lazy circles around his mouth before she delicately poked it against his lips, mutely urging him to open his mouth...which he did. She reached her tongue into his mouth, and began to brush against his tongue. Their lips were still pressing together, harder now, and she inadvertently moaned, and leaned closer to him. She still had one hand in his hair, holding his head at the perfect angle for her to kiss him without either of them straining their necks.

The other hand slowly moved down to his shoulder, then down to his upper arm, which she squeezed gently as another moan escaped her lips. She leaned in closer again, and her hand slipped around behind his back, to massage his neck and shoulder blades. She was concentrating all of her being in the parts of her that were touching him, but other parts of her body were on fire!

Her nipples were so hardened that they almost hurt with the intensity of their puckering. She could feel the warmth in her belly that spread from there down to her upper thighs. Her tiny bud of pleasure had pushed itself out from under its hood, and each movement she made caused it to rub against the seam of her jeans, which were getting moistened by the slick fluids leaking out from her hot core. She felt like she was coming alive again, after a long winter of voluntary chastity.

She opened her eyes as her tongue returned to its own home, and her lips brushed lightly against his, as she sighed heavily. She leaned her forehead on his, and spoke in a whisper.

“I’m not ready for anything else yet. I didn’t think I was even ready for this much...”

Enrique’s arms were trembling from the enormous control he was exerting over his own muscles to hold them still. His hands had a death-grip on the arms of the office chair he was sitting on, and his thigh muscles were twitching reflexively. He had never been so hard in his life...or as determined to reign himself in, to keep his promise to the woman who could move him more with a gentle kiss, than anything he had ever felt before. He took a deep breath, before he answered her, in a voice syrupy with need and desire.

“Take as much time as you need. I will wait.”

She gave him a wondering look.

“Really?”

He nodded looking deeply into her eyes; the gold color was now a circle around her enlarged pupils, swirling in time with her panting. His own eyes were so blackened with passion and desire that there was no color left in them anymore.

“I have a feeling that you are really, really worth waiting for. So...yes.”

She gave him a small smile, and gently rubbed her nose against his again.

“So, is this worth giving up smoking for?”

She leaned her face forward again, to reclaim his lips with her own. This time, the pressure of her lips was firmer, more confident, and she moved her body just a fraction of an inch closer to his. Enrique couldn’t contain the groan that escaped from him. He wasn’t sure what he was more afraid of: that his rock-hard erection was going to rip right through his pants to force itself on her, or that he was going to do what he hadn’t done since high school, and come in his pants from just kissing a woman. He was almost undone by the pressure for relief that he was so close to losing his battle against.

With a heavy sigh, Tanora reluctantly separated her lips from his. With their faces only inches apart, she gazed into his eyes, and lost herself in their inky depths. As if dazed, she shook her head gently to clear it, and she slowly backed away from him.

He had closed his eyes, to concentrate all of his strength on holding himself in check. When he opened them again, he saw the surprise on her face as she watched his arms tremble from the death-grip he had on the chair. Their eyes met, and he saw passion to match his own, the gold rings swirled around her pupils, accenting the hazel-green colors.

Tanora cleared her throat.

“I...um...need those papers now. For the...uh...trip.”

He was glad for a reason to think about something else, so he nodded briefly, waving towards the papers still on the desk in front of him. He was still unable to talk around the passion and desire that she had awakened in him.

She picked up the papers and slowly walked toward the door.

“How...uh...”

Enrique took a sip of water after clearing his throat. He attempted speech again.

“How long will you be gone?”

Tanora stopped at the threshold, with one hand on the door, the other holding the signed passport to her expedition.

She shrugged.

“Don’t know. A couple of weeks...maybe more. Depends...”

“On?”

She turned to give him a smile rife with the same desire that he was desperately trying to stifle.

“On how long I can wait before I kiss you again.”

Enrique felt his lips twitch while his eyes burned into her, attempting to bore right through her clothing to the skin he so wanted to taste.

“I’ll be waiting for you.”

She smiled in a conspiratorial manner, nodding at him before she turned the handle of the door and walked out.

Enrique moaned.

“¡Dios mio, mujer! Don’t make me wait too long! There’s no fantasy I’ve ever been able to imagine, that comes close to doing to me what you just did. I already want more of you...all of you.”

With a heavy sigh, he got up and locked up his office with only one thought in mind. He needed to get home pronto, to relieve the pressure that was making his balls ache for relief. And when he was finally able to do what he had to do, he concentrated on reliving every moment in his office, every second of the kissing that was so much more than just lips pressed together. He realized that his soul had been touched by hers, and he whispered her name as he exploded.

Chapter Eight

Enrique had never imagined that time could move so slowly. A week passed, then another. There was no word from the expedition, and no way of knowing how long they would be gone. He went through the motions of being alive: taking care of patients, eating, working out to relieve some of his stress and worry. Sleeping, however, was more problematic. He would lie awake and imagine being with the feisty woman whose kiss had captured his soul...but that meant he didn’t get any sleep, and would have to pleasure himself before he could sleep. Then he would dream of her, and wake up to find he needed to wash his sheets again.

Wednesday was always one of his busiest days. He was too busy to miss smoking, when he saw patients from early morning, until dinner time. He had just grabbed a mint candy to change the flavor of his mouth, when his nurse told him that there was one more patient he had to see. He sighed before walking over to the door to take the clipboard off of the nail outside the examining room.

He glanced at the name on the clipboard: Tanora Doyle. He looked up at the nurse quickly, and she smiled at him and nodded. With adrenaline coursing through every cell in his body, he opened the door and there she was, sitting on the table and smiling at him.

“You’re back,” he said, stating the obvious.

She nodded.

“Uh huh. Just got back about an hour ago. Wanted to let you take a quick peek at the cast, then I’ve got to get back to work.”

He tried to hide his disappointment.

“Work, still?”

She nodded again.

“Yup. Until I get the samples catalogued and sent back to the labs, I’m not done. Once that is taken care of, I’ll be able to relax until I hear back from them about whether or not my suspicions are correct. I think I’ve really found something this time, but I’ll have to wait and see what they think.”

He had washed and dried his hands before carefully turning her arm around, examining the state of the cast. It was dirty, but that was to be expected, when she had just returned from over two weeks of camping out in the countryside. But it appeared to still be structurally sound, so he was relieved that at least her wrist was still encased in it, so still doing the healing that it needed to do.

He looked up at her, and saw a glint of excitement in her eyes.

“Well, doctor?”

He smiled at her.

“Seems to be okay. When can you have dinner with me?”

“I thought you’d never ask!”

“When?” He persisted.

“I have to finish prepping samples to send, then get them sent to the labs, but that shouldn’t take more than a couple of days. What day is today?”

He smiled, “You don’t know?”

She shrugged.

“Out there, the days all blend in together. I think it’s the middle of the week, right?”

He nodded.

“Wednesday, to be exact.”

“I should be done by Saturday sometime. How is that?”

He smiled at her, backing away to stop himself from crawling on top of her on the table and forcing her to submit to his amorous fantasies. He fought for enough blood to remain in his brain, so that he could think of what he wanted to say.

“How about you come to my house, and I’ll make you dinner this time?”

Her eyebrows rose quickly.

“You know how to cook?”

He gave her an offended look.

“What, because I’m a man, you think I can’t?”

She smiled and nodded.

“My dad can’t even heat up a can of soup without boiling it all over the stove.”

This time his eyebrows rose.

“Shamus Doyle, whose characters are macho-men who can control world events without breaking sweat? Then they cook gourmet meals and wow the panties off of the sexy heroine? All in a day’s work? Shamus Doyle can’t cook?”

She shook her head.

He rolled his eyes.

“Wait’ll I tell Dad! Well, I can. Remember, I’m from a big family. Mom did most of the cooking, but she made sure that we all learned how to take care of ourselves. That

included learning how to cook enough so we wouldn't starve once we moved out of the house. So I know how to make all kinds of American-style favorites, like burgers and steaks. You know, the grilled meat things that men are supposed to cook, while the women make everything else. I actually know how to make some of the other things to go with the meat, too."

She smiled at him, her lips promising things that he broke out in a sweat imagining.

"Okay, what time will dinner be?"

He thought for a moment.

"How about I pick you up about seven? That will give me time to pick up what I need, and start getting everything ready."

"What should I bring?"

He smiled at her.

"An appetite."

He grinned as she began to object.

"No, really. I've been so worried about you, missing you, wondering when you would be back. I want to do something for you, to show you how important you are to me. Let me cook for you."

He took her uninjured hand in his, and kissed the tips of her fingers. His lips lingered, brushing lightly against her knuckles. Her breathing sped up, to match his.

"What's going to be for dessert?" She asked breathily, feeling her nipples pucker, and warmth beginning to spread through her abdomen and downward.

When he smiled at her, his eyes were once again, darkened with passion.

"We'll see," he said softly.

She nodded slowly, taking a deep breath.

They gazed into each other's eyes for a long moment, before she broke the silence.

"So, is my wrist okay?"

He nodded.

"Yeah. The cast is holding up, it's healing like it should be."

"Then I'm going to get back to doing what I need to do, so I'm done by Saturday. See you at seven, Doctor."

He gave her a pained look.

"You can call me by my first name, you know. If we are going to be dating, then your continuing to call me Doctor is kind of awkward, don't you think?"

She gave him a shy smile.

"Is that what we are doing?"

He nodded.

"I hope so."

She smiled.

"Then okay, I guess so. But Enrique is such a long name. Can I just shorten it... maybe call you Rick?"

"Only if you let me call you Nora."

She looked at him in surprise.

"Not Tannie, like everyone else does?"

He shook his head.

"No. I'm not everyone else. And Nora feels more natural to me. It makes your name softer, less harsh."

Her eyebrows rose once again.

“Careful, Rick, I’m not a soft-kind of woman.”

He flashed her a quick, secretive kind of smile.

“No? Are you sure?”

She got down off the table, and brushed past him, heading for the door.

“See you on Saturday, Rick.”

“I live for Saturday, Nora.”

She flashed him a final smile, and walked out of the room.

Enrique took a moment to compose himself before walking out the door to head for his office. He tried to will himself to relax, taking deep cleansing breaths, to appear less aroused than he was. But his mind was already thinking of what might happen on Saturday. So he resigned himself to the gossip that would surely accompany his office staff witnessing his obvious reaction to once again seeing the woman he felt like he had been waiting for his entire life.

He smiled, and walked out the door.

Chapter Nine

Tanora sighed with satisfaction as she put down her napkin and stifled a very unlady-like belch.

“That was delicious,” she told Enrique, who nodded and smiled.

“I’m glad you liked my special creation, steak a la Reyes. More sangria?”

Tanora nodded and smiled.

“Yes please. That is delicious too.”

“An old family recipe, passed down from my grandfather.”

“The one who was from here?”

Enrique nodded again as he refilled both of their glasses.

“Yes. Why don’t we move into the living room, where we can be more comfortable? We can sit on the couch and watch the last of the sunset out the window.”

They both got up and carried their glasses into the next room, to sit on the comfortable plush couch that faced the picture window. Since the house was on the outskirts of town, they were looking at the mountains in the distance, with the sun setting behind them. They sat and watched the sky darken for a while, in a companionable silence, with Enrique’s arm casually draped over Tanora’s shoulders.

Enrique broke the silence, saying, “I’m so glad you agreed to come to dinner here, Nora. It was fascinating hearing about what you think you might have found on your trip. But mostly, I just enjoy your company. I like having you around.”

Tanora turned to smile slyly at him.

“Oh? Raul used to say that too. Until being around me so much drove him to learn to ditch me claiming he had to have a smoke. Speaking of that, how is the non-smoking thing going for you?”

Enrique smiled.

“I don’t mean to brag, but I haven’t even snuck one since I told you I was out and quitting.”

He leaned forward and put his glass on the table, then turned to her, speaking earnestly.

“I really meant it, when I told you I am quitting for good. It hasn’t been easy, but I figure it’s worth it.”

She put her glass down also, turning to him.

“Just for the off-chance that I’ll let you kiss me again?”

He nodded slowly.

“You may think of what you did to me as just kissing, but that’s not how I saw it. Nora, you touched my soul...I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you since then. I spend quite a few of my waking hours thinking about you, and I dream about you every night...I’m not sure what you did to me, but all I can think of is how much I want you to do it again.”

Tanora wet her lips nervously.

“You’re just saying that because you want to cross the color line, right?”

He shook his head, as she continued quickly, “It’s alright. I’m used to it. Lots of guys want to do it, but they feel more comfortable with me because I’m half-white.”

Enrique shook his head more forcefully.

“That’s not what this is about, Nora,” he said. “I’ve been across that line and back again any number of times.”

He smiled at the surprised look on her face.

“Honey, I told you I grew up in a suburb of Chicago. In West Chicago, to be exact. My graduating class had a large number of Hispanics, but almost as many black kids. White kids were the minority where I come from.”

He leaned forward, to gently brush a wisp of hair out of her face. She had her hair up again, but loosely, so some of it had come undone, and had fallen in loose tendrils around her face.

“I don’t fall in love with the color of a woman, Nora. I fall in love with the woman. Her color is irrelevant.”

Tanora looked steadily into his eyes.

“Is that what is happening between us?”

He nodded and smiled at her, the passion in his eyes once again darkening them until there was no color visible except the inky blackness.

He leaned forward, his one hand playing with the tendrils of hair falling loosely down the back of her neck, and he gently touched her lips with his.

With a small sigh, Tanora leaned forward also, and their lips pressed against each other, the sensitivity of them enhanced by the fact that they were the only contact points touching each other. Long moments passed, while their lips worshipped each other, rubbing against each other, pressing together.

Tentatively, Enrique’s tongue poked out of his mouth to lick a path around her lips. With another small sigh, Tanora opened her lips and let him taste her mouth. Their tongues dueled, darting in and out of each other’s mouths as they pressed their lips together with more intensity.

Tanora was surprised to realize that her hand had moved up, of its own accord, to caress Enrique’s shoulder, pulling him closer to her. He still had one hand on the back of

her neck; the other one now lightly gripped her shoulder, then ran down her arm, to her elbow. He gently ran his index finger back and forth across the inside of the crease of her elbow, and Tanora shivered from the chills that ran up and down her spine.

Enrique was having difficulty making any coherent words come out of his mouth, with all of the blood in his body routing itself to the part of him that desired her the most. But he made an attempt to communicate, his voice so hoarse he hardly recognized it as himself.

“Oh God, Nora. I want you so much...I’m afraid to have you touch me anywhere, because I’ll come. Let me touch you, most beautiful woman. Let me give you pleasure. Let me teach you how to enjoy being touched by a man...by me. Let me love you.”

Tanora was having trouble thinking, because her brain was trying to tell her to panic and run, while her body was responding to him, to the light touches that were making her feel goose bumps all over. She felt herself trembling from the heat he was generating in her, as her nipples hardened, and the heat radiated from her abdomen, down to the center of her pleasure. Her clit rubbed against the thin fabric of her panties, and she moaned.

“How?” She gasped. “How do you want to love me? I’m not ready for everything...not yet.”

He nodded, before lightly brushing her eyelids with his lips. He kissed the tip of her nose. He pressed his lips against hers, then trailed his tongue along her cheek to her ear, and poked the tip of it into her ear, making her shiver. He sucked her ear lobe into his mouth and nibbled at it, delicately. She squirmed with anticipatory pleasure, feeling herself melt under his every touch.

He whispered into her ear, “May I touch your breasts?”

She nodded solemnly, then felt her breath catch in her throat, as he rubbed one thumb against her nipple through the thin fabric of her cammi. The already hard nub jutted out of the fabric, demanding more from him. He rubbed the other one as well, then smiled at her, as she squirmed more noticeably, her pelvis beginning to thrust itself forward, then retreating back again.

With a groan, he put both hands under her shirt at her waist and pulled the cammi up, then sucked in a breath at the strapless bra that now was the only thing keeping her breasts covered. He reached one hand around behind her, as he urgently pressed his lips against hers again, and deftly, he popped the clasp that held her bra together.

He had to move back then, and the bra fell of its own accord. He took a deep breath and sighed.

“You are so beautiful...such perfect breasts.”

He lowered his head and began to lick around each breast, tracing the outline of them, and making smaller concentric circles, until he reached the darkened skin of her areola. Then he switched to doing the same to the other breast, licking circles around it, then moving closer to the nipple, until she was swooning from the hot breath that was coming so close...so close, but never actually doing what she wanted him to do. Then he switched to the other breast and began the same pattern again.

Tanora was ready to scream. Her nipples ached for his mouth...she moaned as he delicately poked the pointy end of his tongue against the hardened bumps of the dark brown circle that defined the end of her left breast's areola.

“Please, En-Reeck-ay, please...” She panted. Then she grabbed the back of his head with her hand and pulled his face into her breast.

He latched onto the nipple with a vengeance. He licked and suckled, drawing it into his mouth, before pulling his head back and blowing on the wet tip, making her shiver again. He repeated the movements over and over, pulling the entire nipple into his mouth, sucking hard, his tongue brushing against the bottom, pushing it against the roof of his mouth, before he drew away again.

She moaned in agony, thrusting her hips forward, her movements now just instinct, as she sought relief from the burning ache that was between her thighs.

He leaned forward again and changed his tactics. Clamping his lips tightly around the areola, he flicked his tongue across the end of her overly sensitive tissues at the very tip of her nipple, back and forth, while her hips moved spasmodically, thrusting forward and then pulling back, her clit aching from her desire to be touched by him.

He let her nipple go with a pop, grinning at her frenzied reaction. He licked a path from one nipple to the other, and he sucked the other one into his mouth also, to begin the same torturous clamping and flicking he had been doing to the first one. He compounded her agony by moving his hand up onto her other breast, rolling her hardened aching nub, slippery with his saliva, between his index finger and his thumb.

“Oh God...oh God,” she moaned helplessly, as her body shivered and squirmed, straining against the restraints of clothing, her breasts on fire, causing her to feel like she wanted to crawl out of her own skin.

“More?” Enrique asked her against the skin of the breast his mouth was torturing.

“Yes!” She gasped.

With that, he slid gently down to his knees in front of her, and laid his head in the lap of her skirt, as he hugged her hips. He inhaled deeply.

“May I pleasure you more?” He asked, looking up at her, his eyes shining with intensity, no color visible in them anymore.

She nodded, barely able to remember how to speak.

“No penetration though, okay?” She whispered...she was still scarred and scared, but now frantic with awakened feelings that threatened to make her scream with frustration.

He kissed her knees, one after the other. He pushed her skirt up gently, then kissed his way up the inside of one thigh, then down the outside of it, before doing the same on the other one. Each time he got closer to the area covered by the thin fabric of her panty, he blew hot air onto the silk. Then he moved his lips further away from what she wanted him to do, and he resumed his kissing, which turned into licking, his tongue trailing a wet path up and down her thighs.

Tanora was almost sobbing with frustration, when he finally clamped his mouth down on the front of her vulva and sucked the silky fabric into his mouth. It was better, but still not enough!

She shook her head back and forth, moaning and writhing.

“More! More!”

Enrique smiled up at the woman he was reducing to a quivering puddle, and gently pulled at her panty, watching as she instinctively lifted her hips, allowing him to pull the last barrier down, to let him see what he had been imagining from the first time he saw her. He sucked in his breath, admiring her for an instant, before he gently pushed her legs further apart, and trailed his tongue up from her one knee. He stopped at her curls

and inhaled deeply, then he turned his head and kissed her other knee, before trailing his tongue up again, to once again inhale deeply.

Tanora had stopped breathing the first time she felt his hot breath on her most private area...but when she realized that he was teasing her again, she lost control over herself and thrust her hips forward, trying to make contact between his tongue and her no-longer hidden, engorged clit.

Enrique chuckled softly, as the tip of his tongue poked at the hardened nub that jutted out at him, dark pink and glistening with need.

“Is this what you want, my lady?” He asked in a silky purr, his voice thick with passion.

“Yes,” she panted, her breathing shallow and staggered.

Satisfied with her answer, he dove into her with his tongue, licking and lapping, tasting all that she had to offer. He moved both hands up to push her thighs apart, his fingers cradling her butt cheeks, and he used both thumbs to rub the crevices of her upper thighs, while he savored the juices that soaked his face.

He was just discovering how responsive she could be, when all of a sudden her body stiffened, she thrust her hips up off of the couch cushions, and she screamed, a long, loud, wailing sound. A sudden gush of fluids let him know that not only had she had an orgasm, but she was one of those very few women who actually ejaculated when she came.

Now even more fiercely aroused and anxious to continue, he returned with renewed energy to the exploring of her with his mouth. He used both thumbs to gently massage her outer labia lips together, pushing upwards, to stimulate the base of the clitoris that he continued to lave with his tongue. He felt her arch her back again, and smiled against her skin as he felt her stiffen then scream again. This orgasm lasted longer than the last one, as she thrust her hips forward, almost drowning him with her fluids.

Enrique pulled his head back to look up at her and was fascinated by the dark red flush that spread from her face down to her breasts, and down to her belly. She moaned, bereft of the feeling of his tongue and mouth, and he lowered his head again, to continue stimulating her, to see how many times he could make her scream and moan, before she begged him to stop.

Over and over again, he brought her to the brink of the precipice, then pushed her over the edge. Each time she screamed, thrashing around on the couch, thrusting her swollen labia into his face, covering him with the fluids she produced so copiously when she came. And each time he rejoiced, knowing that he had conquered her fears, and that she now belonged to him.

Finally she gasped and pulled at the hair on the back of his head.

“Enough!” She panted, as she struggled to relearn how to breathe.

She watched him move back up, to sit next to her on the couch once again, and he smiled at her, his eyes shining almost as much as his face was, glistening from the ample proof that she had enjoyed herself immensely.

“Your turn,” she said with a smile, as she reached over to caress the enormous bulge in the front of his pants.

He shook his head.

“No, Nora,” he gasped as she traced its length with her fingers, “You don’t have to do anything for me.”

“But I want to,” she said softly, as she unzipped and unbuttoned, then slid her hand in, to take a full measure of the man.

She slid to her knees in front of him, and eased his pants and boxers down his hips, then smiled as he obediently lifted his butt and allowed her to pull them down to where his shoes stopped her from pulling them off. She yanked at first one shoe, then the other, continuing to tug on his pants until she had him naked from the waist down, the only clothing now left on him being the shirt that he had only partially buttoned closed.

She was now the one to suck in a breath, as his cock sprang up, the dark skin bulging with veins loaded with blood. She wrapped her hand around it and rubbed up and down, while her other hand hefted his balls, fondling first one, then the other, rolling them against each other, as she leaned her face forward and inhaled deeply. The line of black hair that ran down from his navel acted like an arrow, pointing down to the nest of dark curls that covered his skin and his scrotum, while the majestic engorged shaft throbbed in time with his heartbeat, quickened by his passion, further excited by the close scrutiny she was giving it.

She leaned even further over, and buried her face in the dark, musky hair under the base of his penis, running her tongue along the length of him, from the bottom to the tip. She then moved back down and did the same thing, running her tongue from the bottom up from all angles, gently turning him over, so that she covered his entire shaft in her saliva.

The tip of him glistened with drops of lubrication, and he trembled with anticipation, his breathing now stopped, as he waited to see what she would do next.

She lapped at the purplish plum that was the head of his cock, then poked the tip of her tongue into the eye that wept for her. He gasped; she sucked the head of him into her mouth, and sucked hard on it, as he fought himself not to come, his groans music to her ears.

“No, not yet you don’t,” she said, as she grasped him at the base, and gently squeezed while pushing the index finger of her other hand against the tight skin behind his scrotum, allowing him to focus on something other than the feel of her mouth on him.

Then she began to take him further into her mouth, sucking him in, then drawing herself upwards, each time licking at the fluids that leaked out of him, measuring how close he was to exploding by his groans, and the amount of salty lubricant he was producing.

Her hands were busy also, fondling his balls, and stroking the base of his shaft, holding it still, so she could concentrate without having it twitch whenever she drew her mouth off of him.

Suddenly he stiffened, and groaned, “Now!”

She moved her face back, continuing to rub the base with her hand. He yelled as he came, while she milked him for all that he had, watching the sticky fluid cover her hand and his abdomen. He had thrust himself upwards, now he fell backwards, spent, his breath coming in gasps.

Tanora crept back up onto the couch and snuggled against him, as he put his arms around her and held her tightly. She laid her head on his chest and listened to his recovery. He fought for control over his breathing, and gradually, his heartbeat stopped racing, and he was quiet.

He reached one hand down and put a finger under her chin, to raise her face up to look at him.

“Oh my God, Nora. I didn’t expect that...I would never have asked...”

She smiled at him.

“If you had asked, I’d have said no. But you didn’t. You didn’t ask me for anything. You just gave. I had to return the pleasure, Rick. I haven’t had an orgasm in so long! I was even afraid to touch myself. But now I’m not so afraid anymore.”

He leaned forward and pressed his lips to hers in a kiss that was the meeting of their souls. They both leaned into it, and sighed.

She made a face at him as they drew apart.

“But I’m sorry I couldn’t swallow...I have never liked that part. But after the rape... well... I threw up all over him. He was still slapping me for that when the police yelled at him to freeze. I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to do that again...”

Enrique shook his head and gazed deeply into her eyes.

“¡Basta! Nora...enough. There’s no need to apologize, when you just gave me such supreme pleasure. I don’t want to hear about what any other man ever did to you. I can’t think about any other woman anymore...I haven’t been able to since the first time you walked into my office.”

She looked at him in wonder.

“Really?”

He nodded solemnly.

“Really. You are the woman of my dreams, my fantasies, and now, my reality. You are the only woman I want anymore, Nora. Just you.”

She sighed and leaned forward to kiss him again. His hand massaged the back of her head, and he pulled the barrette out, letting her hair spill all over her shoulders. He wound his hand into its thick silky curls, and he inhaled deeply, enjoying the slightly flowery aroma, before he sighed.

“I’ve been wondering how long your hair was for weeks.”

She smiled coyly at him.

“You could have just asked me, you know.”

He shook his head.

“I only want what you give to me, voluntarily, Nora. I will wait for everything until you are ready. As long as you promise not to have sex with anyone else.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“I’ve have always made it a habit to only get involved with one man at a time. After being with you now, with all that we did, I’m not available to any other man. Even though we didn’t really have sex yet.”

He shook his head.

“Yes we did, querida. What we did was give each other extreme pleasure, leading to orgasm. That’s sex in any book.”

When she looked about to disagree with him, he put a finger over her lips.

“No, Nora. Don’t argue with your doctor.”

The corners of her lips curved upwards, and he had to lean over and kiss them again. They spent long moments caressing each other’s lips with their tongues. Then Enrique made to rise.

“But I’m getting a bit chilled out here. Why don’t we retire to my bed and get some sleep?”

Tanora looked at him for a long moment before she sighed and nodded.

“Okay. You’re right. It is getting chilly out here. And I am really tired. I haven’t been getting much sleep lately, what with the expedition, my own nerves, and worrying that you would reject me, now that you knew what had happened to me.”

He held out a hand and when she put her hand in his, he pulled her up and into his arms.

“Never,” he murmured against her cheek. “If anything, it has made me love you more, for the strength that you have shown in telling me about it. If you hadn’t told me, I’d have thought you just weren’t interested in me. Now that I know that you are, I will wait as long as it takes for you to feel comfortable enough with me, to allow me to make love to you the way I want to.”

She tweaked one of his nipples, turning her head up to grin at him.

“What, that wasn’t good enough for you? What we just did?”

He nodded solemnly.

“Yes, it was very good...for both of us. But still not enough. I can wait, though. Until you are ready.”

She grinned at him as they walked into the bedroom in the back of his house.

“And I’ll bet you will spend a whole lot of time torturing me to death, making me scream with repeated orgasms, until I beg you to make love to me, right?”

He raised both eyebrows and licked his lips.

“That’s my plan, little lady. Any objections?”

She shook her head, as he turned back the covers on his bed, and she slipped off her skirt, to lie down wearing only the panties she had retrieved from the floor.

“None that I can think of.”

He smiled at her, as he slipped off his shirt, and turned off the light, to climb into bed next to her. He held out his arms, and she crept into them, so they could hold each other closely while they drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Ten

Enrique slowly opened his eyes in the morning, initially surprised that he was even harder than usual. Then he inhaled deeply and realized that the woman of his dreams was right next to him, asleep, and the smell of her skin intoxicated him. Since she was lying on her side, he ran one hand down her back, enjoying the curve of the small of her back, the full roundness of her butt cheeks, and the area right under them, the silky skin so sensitive that she jumped even in her sleep.

She rolled onto her back and sighed gently, before opening her eyes to see him staring down at her.

“That’s only kind of creepy,” she said with a lazy smile.

“What? Me watching the woman of my dreams, who has come to life for me, and is all but naked in my bed?”

She smiled again, more broadly.

“How long have you been watching me? And did I drool or anything gross like that?”

He smiled before leaning his head forward to meet her lips, as she pushed herself up on her elbow, towards him. They kissed gently, then both lay back to snuggle closer together.

“I wouldn’t have cared if you drooled...and nothing you could ever do would be gross to me.”

He laughed at her raised eyebrows.

“Nothing? Really?”

“Uh huh...you’re perhaps forgetting that I’m a doctor, querida? I see the human body as a wonderful work of art, with parts that coordinate to create life. And you are a most beautiful woman, with the most beautiful parts I have ever seen. I am honored to have you in my bed, sleeping with me.”

She snuggled closer to him, inhaling his skin, then licking her way to a nipple, only to bite it gently. There was a quick audible intake of his breath.

“That usually means something more, though,” she said breathily.

This time his eyebrows rose.

“I thought you said you weren’t ready for more yet, cariña.”

She shook her head.

“I’m not. But I feel bad that you woke up like this,” she reached down and caressed his rampant hard-on that had been twitching against her thigh, “And there’s so little I’m willing to do for you.”

He smiled at her.

“So little? Many men pay big money for the kind of blow job you gave me last night. Many women find the whole idea disgusting.”

She sighed.

“With someone you don’t care about, yes. But with you? I can’t say I enjoyed it as much as you did, but it was pleasurable. Besides, I had to do something to repay you for how you made me feel. It was the only way I could think of, that I was comfortable with. For now.”

He caressed her body again, running both of his hands over her curves, his eyes becoming darkened with passion again.

“Is there any way I could talk you into a reprise of last night?”

She gave him an arch look, pretending that the thought had never occurred to her, even though it was obvious that it had.

“You mean now? In the daylight? With no alcohol for me to steady my nerves with?”

He chuckled softly.

“I have some orange juice in the fridge and a bottle of champagne in my wine rack. We could have mimosas while we make breakfast, then we could think of ways to work off the calories we ate...”

“That does sound tempting...”

She pushed herself up to lie across his chest, lowering her head to kiss him. He moaned as their lips met, both of them once again expressing their feelings with their

mouths and tongues, all conscious thought centering on the pleasure they were giving and getting.

They both jumped when the phone rang.

Enrique swore softly under his breath, holding Tanora down.

“Don’t you need to answer that?” She asked breathlessly.

“I’m hoping not to have to,” he answered grimly.

After three rings, the answer machine played his voice message.

The tone signaled that the caller was to leave a message, and instantly the room was filled with the wailing of a child in pain.

“Doctor Reyes?” The mother’s voice was desperate, and the child continued to scream in the background.

With a heavy sigh, Enrique sat up, reaching for the phone next to his bed.

Tanora got up and went to use the bathroom, while Enrique found out which one of his patients needed his expertise this early on a Sunday morning. When she got out, he was already half-dressed, but apologetic.

“I’m really sorry, Nora,” he began.

“But you have to go?” She asked.

He nodded.

“One of my younger, more adventurous patients fell out of a tree, and his mother is afraid he broke his arm. He won’t stop screaming, and it’s turning purple.”

She moved closer to him, to help him button the small buttons on his shirt. His hands were shaking so much he was having difficulty.

“Nerves?” She asked gently.

He shook his head ruefully.

“No, unsatisfied lust. I have to get a grip on myself and control my emotions better, before I face them. All I can think of right now is how much I want to bury myself in your sweet body...anywhere. ¡Dios mío, Nora! What you do to me!”

She wrapped her arms around him and turned her face up to receive the bruising kisses that his lips gave her. They spent long moments rubbing against each other, until finally he gently pushed her away from him and staggered backwards, to sit down heavily in a chair and look for his socks.

He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, and it was still shaking.

Nora smiled at him as she picked up her skirt and pulled it on over her hips.

“So, this is what it’s like, being the only doctor in a small town?”

He nodded.

“And this is what it’s like being involved with the only doctor in a small town.”

They continued to dress in silence.

Enrique finally broke the quiet.

“Still interested?”

Tanora looked up from pulling on her sandal, to see real concern in his eyes.

She smiled at him, walked up to him, and since he was still sitting down, she pulled his head into her breasts, and she hugged him, her hands running down his back and massaging his shoulders. He pulled her closer and rubbed his face against her chest, his teeth pulling at her top, inhaling deeply, before he turned his face up to look deeply into her eyes.

She shook her head gently, smiling at him as she spoke.

“Enrique, nothing can change how I feel about you now. You’re the only man I have had any interest in, since I was attacked. You have helped me to stop being afraid of my own feelings. You have put me back in touch with my own self...with my own desires. Yes, you foolish, wonderful man. I’m most definitely, still interested.”

He let out a long breath, then pulled her head down for a long, soulful kiss. Reluctantly, their lips parted, and he shook his head as he got up and picked up his keys from the table next to the bed.

“That’s good, because I have to leave now. Lord only knows I don’t want to. But I have to go.”

Tanora nodded.

“I understand. You have to go work your doctor mojo on that kid’s broken arm, like you did on my wrist.”

He smiled hopefully at her.

“But I’ll get to see you again? Soon? Really soon?”

She nodded.

“Call me, Rick.”

“I will.”

“Then let’s go. You can give me a ride to the hotel, right?”

“Yeah, it’s on the way to my office. And even if it wasn’t, I’d still give you a ride home.”

They walked out onto the porch together.

“I want a rain check on that breakfast with mimosas, you know.”

He turned back to her, from locking his front door.

“Me too,” he said simply, leaning forward to lightly brush her lips with his.

They both got into his car, and drove off into the morning.

Chapter Eleven

He did call her, later that evening, when he was fixing himself dinner. She was in the middle of sorting through and repacking her gear, in case she would need to go back out for more samples. They agreed that she should continue working, with the idea that they could have dinner together again either Monday or Tuesday night.

As he lay in bed, trying to sleep, Enrique found himself fixating on the beautiful parts of the woman he had fallen in love with. This time he didn’t need to wait for the dream; and when he was done, he rolled over with a smile, and fell asleep on the pillow that she had rested her head on the night before, surrounded by the smell of her hair.

Tanora decided that her tired muscles needed a long hot bath, after the exertion of cleaning and repacking all of her equipment. She filled the tub with bubbles and water, then settled down with a bottle of cold water next to her, to keep herself hydrated. With a sigh of satisfaction, she eased herself down under the bubbles, and immediately began to fantasize about the man she had not expected to meet, who had managed to get her to tell him about her experience that had led to extreme fears, and then had met them with gentle, loving understanding.

Her mother had often told her that her father, the rough and tumble Irishman, had captured her heart by listening to her, really listening, then sharing his own heart with her, in words that totally captivated her. Tanora smiled as she thought of the man who listened to her, then met her every resistance with love and understanding. He filled her with such desire that she was gradually forgetting her own hesitancy, in her eagerness to share herself with him.

She was not surprised to find that her nipples had hardened and her breath had sped up. Deciding that there was nothing wrong with touching herself anymore, now that Enrique had been able to touch her and enable her to feel such extreme pleasure, she gradually stroked herself under water, rubbing her nipples, then sliding one hand down to delicately run one finger over her suddenly erect clit.

She gasped, as the nub jutted out further, insistent on getting even more attention. She ran her finger back to find she was producing copious amounts of lubricant, which she now rubbed forward, to spread all around on the source of the heat that was flooding her abdomen. Her breathing sped up even further, until with a long sigh, she squeezed her eyes shut and watched the stars exploding on the backs of her eyelids, as she came repeatedly, keeping her spasms going by continuously stroking herself from her swollen clit to her slippery inner lips that yearned for the touch of her man.

When Tanora finally got out of the bathtub, she was amused to see that her fingers and toes looked as wrinkly as raisins. And despite all of the self-stimulation she had enjoyed in the tub, she was hornier than she had been for many years. Even before the rape, she had not been happy with the men she had been involved with, since so few of them understood her passionate desire to make a difference in the world with her research. Their lack of understanding had translated into lack of ability to please her.

About the only man who understood, besides her father, was Raul...but there wasn't a possibility of anything happening between them. He was too old for her, and too necessary as a partner in her research. She was not willing to risk their not getting along after sleeping together. She suspected that at one point, he wanted something to happen between them, but she didn't...and he didn't pressure her. They both accepted what their relationship had become.

But Enrique? She had not expected to find any man willing to accept her, after the rape. Logically, she knew it was not her fault...that she had only been in the wrong place at the wrong time. But in her inner soul, she still felt that somehow she had been to blame. She shouldn't have been running alone so late at night. She shouldn't have been wearing such short silky running shorts, with a tiny tank top. Maybe if she hadn't looked so sexy as she ran by them?

"No!" She said vehemently out loud. "It wasn't my fault. It was theirs. And they are in jail for it. I need to realize that I can go on and live my life...I need to put my fear and my guilt behind me."

She smiled as she slid between the sheets on her bed, thinking of how much she wanted to feel Enrique's hands touching her again. How much she wanted to feel other parts of him touching her again. How much she wanted to forget all about her fears, and have him make love to her...soon!

She was still smiling when she fell asleep.

Chapter Twelve

Enrique was so busy he didn't have time to even stop for lunch. Mondays were usually busy days for him, and he had eaten a big breakfast to prepare himself. But he was still tired when he finally got to sit down in his office and put his feet up. He was just wondering if he should call the object of his affection, when she popped her head into his office. He instantly felt better, and smiled at her.

"Hello, sunshine. You are a sight for sore eyes!"

"I'm so excited! I have to tell you what happened!"

He continued to smile as she came into the office and threw herself down onto the chair on the other side of his desk. With the nonchalance of a teenager, she sat back with one leg over the side of the chair, swinging it with nervous energy, and the other leg tapped on the floor. He tried not to stare up her shorts, but the arrangement of her legs made it damned near impossible! He forced himself to ignore the sudden rush of blood to his nether regions, and he took his feet off his desk and leaned forward.

"What happened to get you so excited and happy? And please tell me that it involves me."

She gave him a surprised look, before shaking her head, grinning.

"What? No...I mean, you always excite me, yes. But this is my job! My career! My passion!"

"Did you hear from your university lab?"

"Yes! They think I've really found something this time. They want me to get out there and get lots more samples of the one plant I figured was the most promising...and get this. They want me to take the samples personally, to the lab at UNAM, in Mexico City."

He had to smile at her infectious enthusiasm. She seemed to be waiting for him to make a response, but grew impatient and spoke again.

"Don't you have friends there?"

He nodded.

"Uh huh. A few. Mostly other doctors, some professors. Why?"

"Well duh! I want you to come with me! I want you to take a few days of a real vacation, and we can go have some fun in Mexico City! I've never been there, but I from what I've heard, it's a beautiful place. And since you know some locals, we can maybe visit some of the places that tourists never find out about."

He felt even more blood rush downward, as he thought about having her to himself for a few days, in a hotel room, with no job to interrupt them.

"When..." he cleared his throat and swallowed hard, before he continued, trying to ignore the sexual fantasies now playing themselves out inside his brain.

"When are you going to head out there to collect more plants?"

She jumped up and paced, as if she was leaving that instant.

"Tomorrow! Thank God I did all of that repacking yesterday...my gear is all ready to go. Raul is getting things all set up with the two men who went with us before, and the plan is to be heading out there by early afternoon tomorrow."

She turned to him from the opposite end of his office and crowed.

“Just think of it, Rick! If this really is what I hope it is, it will be a breakthrough in dealing with some cancers! Colon cancer, maybe even other gastro-intestinal issues. This could change everything for so many people!”

He got up and held out his hands to her, and she walked quickly back to him and took his hands to allow him to pull her close for a quick kiss.

“And we can spend some time alone together. I really like the sound of that,” he murmured into her ear, before he bit her earlobe.

She jumped, then giggled.

“Yeah. Success in my career, then time for some hot sex with my honey. Life is really looking up for me these days.”

His eyebrows rose, while he tried to ignore the twitching from inside his pants.

“Really? You think you’re ready for that?”

She nodded.

“Uh huh. I think so. But we’ll find out, once we get to *la capital!*”

Enrique moved back to sit behind his desk again, determined not to let her see the enormous bulge that betrayed his excitement. He wanted to share her enthusiasm for her job and the success she was seeking.

Suddenly he thought of something that had been bothering him in the back of his mind.

“Querida, have you been reading about the drug wars going on all around us?”

She made a face at him.

“A little bit. Why?”

“Well, things have been getting closer and closer to us, lately. Do you think it is safe for you to head out now? Maybe you should wait until things settle down a bit?”

She vehemently shook her head.

“Absolutely not! No way am I letting fears of what could happen, delay me, when my backers want me to get right on this.”

“I’m just worried about you, that’s all,” Enrique said slowly. “I’ve just found you...I can’t lose you now.”

She gave him an exasperated look.

“Raul has always taken good care of me! And there’s two other men too...the local guys. They are cousins, and they grew up close to here, so they know the area really well. And I can take care of myself, you know. I’m not a baby.”

He regarded her silently for a moment, before he got up and walked around to the side of the desk she was vibrating on, and he leaned back to balance on the edge of the desk. He reached into his pocket and took something out. He shook his head, and seemed to make up his mind. He reached out and took her hand, then put the item into her palm.

“Here, take this. It will make me feel better if you do.”

“What is it?”

She looked curiously at it, then recoiled.

“It’s a knife? You’re giving me a knife?”

He nodded.

“A switchblade, to be exact. It was my grandfather’s. Remember, he grew up around here. It used to be a lot rougher back then, but there are still pockets of crime, even in this small of a town. Mostly from outside the town, like the drug cartels and their

minions. But he gave this to me, for good luck. I've never had to use it. I always figured that since I had it, I wouldn't need it. I want you to have it, for the same reason. So you won't need it."

She shook her head slowly.

"But I don't even know how to use it. I've never held a knife that was a weapon before. Won't it just make me more of a target, and they'll just take the knife away from me and use it on me?"

He took the knife from her hand, and showed her the mechanism.

"You just touch this button here, see?"

The blade slid quietly and quickly out of the end of the housing.

She looked at it closely.

"It's not a very long blade," she observed.

"But it's plenty long enough if you are holding it against the skin of the person who is threatening you when you touch the button. Especially if they don't know you have it, and you hold it somewhere on their abdomen. There are lots of inner organs in there, most of which are pretty vital. You stab someone in their abdomen with this, and it's a pretty good bet that you will do them enough damage for them to be unable to follow you, giving you enough time to run away."

She gave him a startled look.

"That's really kind of creepy. Now I'm scared to even touch it again. You don't really think I'm going to be in any danger, do you?"

He sighed, as he took her hand again, and put the weapon back into her palm

"I hope not. Like I said, I'm hoping that if you have it, you won't need it. Better to be safe than sorry. Obviously I'd rather be with you, protecting you, but maybe Abuelo's juju will be enough. He was a tough old guy, and this was always in his pocket. Now I want it to be in yours."

"Are you sure? It has real meaning to you..."

He gently tilted her face up to look into his eyes.

"You mean more to me than any possession could. Now show me you know how to open it. Just touch that button..."

She did, surprised that it was so easy to use, and the blade was so silent.

"So, you keep that in your pocket from now on, okay my love? I want to know that mi abuelo is watching over you for me."

Tanora nodded slowly, trying out the button for the blade a few more times, until she felt comfortable knowing how it would come out, and how to close it up again. She put it into the front pocket of her shorts, then walked closer to Enrique for another hug to thank him for his concern.

The hug led to a kiss, which led to some grinding together of body parts. With a groan, Enrique gently pushed her away.

"Have mercy, querida. You are leaving town tomorrow. I presume you are not planning on spending the night with me tonight?"

She shook her head slowly.

"I'm sorry, Rick, but too much to do tonight."

"Then leave me to my fantasies, and I will live for your return."

She smiled at him, and nodded.

“The sooner I leave, the sooner I’ll be back, and the sooner we can head for *la capital!*”

“Did Raul give you a ride here?”

“Uh huh.”

“Is he out there waiting for you?”

“No. He’s rounding up the guys who went with us before, so they can go with us again tomorrow. Why?”

“Then I presume you need a ride back to your hotel?”

She gave him a sly smile, “Uh huh.”

“And you will reward me with another hug, another kiss, maybe a little more groping, before you get out of my car and go back to your job?”

“Uh huh.”

“Then let’s go.”

They smiled at each other. When she preceded him out the door, he gently patted her rear end, his fingers curving up under the back of her shorts to lightly stroke the soft skin that made her jump every time he touched it. She looked over her shoulder at him and stuck out her tongue at him, then made elaborate licking motions, as if she was being sure not to waste a drop. Enrique groaned, and she giggled.

“Hey, you started it!”

They walked holding hands, out to his car.

Chapter Thirteen

Tuesday morning Enrique was busy making his rounds to the rooms holding his various patients when a commotion from the waiting room outside drew him to walk over to the receptionist area to see what the problem was. Tanora was there, yelling in rapid Spanish at the receptionist, that her friend needed to be seen right now!

Enrique pushed open the door and saw Raul bent over double, perched on the edge of a chair, his face an ashen color, and a grimace of pain on his face.

“What’s the problem?” He asked as he quickly walked over to the unexpected patient.

“He never tells me anything about how he feels! Who knows how long he’s been in pain? He just collapsed while we were getting gear into the truck! He fell over and started moaning! I thought he passed out!”

Enrique turned to look up at her, from crouching in front of Raul.

“Focus, Nora. Did he say where the pain is?”

“In his belly...see how he’s holding it?”

Enrique moved the man’s hand and pressed lightly on the area the hand had been covering. There was a loud groan of pain from Raul, and he turned his head up to look Enrique in the eye.

“It won’t go away. It’s a sharp, stabbing pain in my side. I couldn’t even sleep last night.”

Enrique felt his forehead.

“You’re burning up. Do you still have your appendix?”

Raul nodded, while grimacing again, as another sharp pain ran through him.

Enrique turned to his receptionist.

“Call General! Tell them we need an ambulance here *now*! He’s going to need this out, and the sooner the better. We have to get him there before it ruptures.”

Gently, he helped Raul to stand, and led him in through the door to the examining rooms, and helped him to lie down on the table in one of the empty rooms. He lay on his side, still slightly bent over. Enrique arranged his legs so that he was balanced on his left side and unlikely to roll in either direction. Tanora stood by his side, vibrating with anxiety.

“Will he be alright?”

Enrique turned to her and spoke in a low voice.

“I hope so. If it ruptures, he could die. We need to get him to an operating table as soon as possible. This has probably been going on for a while, for his fever to be so high, and him to be in so much pain.”

Tanora gave him a frightened look, and walked over to gently stroke the hot forehead of her friend. She shook her head as she admonished him.

“Stupid Raul! Stupid macho male pride! If you were in pain, you should have told me! How long were you going to wait? How can I go out to do collecting without you?”

He looked up wildly and grabbed her arm.

“Don’t! You can’t! You have to wait...”

Another spasm of pain shot through him, as Enrique loaded a hypodermic with something, and hurriedly wiped Raul’s upper arm with alcohol, then gave him a shot.

“What was that?” Tanora asked.

“Something to relieve some of his pain...to take the edge off the spasms.”

The door opened and the nurse gestured for Enrique to come out into the hall.

Tanora brushed Raul’s hair out of his face, and patted his cheek.

“He’ll take care of you...he’ll fix you up. He’s a good doctor.”

She stopped because he had opened his eyes, which were now glassy-looking, and he tried to focus on her face, and force coherent words out.

“You can’t go alone...wait for me...”

Then he shut his eyes and doubled over with another pain spasm. She turned her head up to see Enrique hurry back into the room.

“The hospital sent a helicopter ambulance...it should only be another fifteen minutes or so. It would have taken over an hour for them to drive here, and I told them he probably doesn’t have another hour. We need to get him into surgery soon, so it doesn’t rupture.”

She looked searchingly into his face while he examined Raul, gently pressing at certain points, stopping when he obviously caused more pain.

“How can you be so sure it’s his appendix?”

He looked up at her with a quick flash of a grim smile.

“I’ve seen patients like this before. I almost lost one my first year here, because I didn’t react fast enough. I was too busy trying to eliminate what else it could be. The ambulance drove here, and the kid went into shock when we were less than a mile from the hospital. He was young and healthy, and the surgeon was already prepped and ready, so he was able to save him. By the time I got cleaned up and into the operating room to

help, he had cleaned up most of the infection from the rupture. But I learned then that it's better to react quickly, and risk being wrong, than to wait."

She sighed.

"I don't know what I'm going to do without his help out there. I guess I can manage just this once, but he has to get better. There's a reason he's my partner when we go into the field...he's really good. I need his help. He says he's grateful that I give him full credit for whatever we find, but what he doesn't know is just how grateful I am to have him with me..."

She brushed Raul's hair out of his face again, and his eyelids fluttered open briefly while he moaned.

"You can't...not alone..."

He squeezed his eyelids shut again from the pain of another spasm.

Enrique looked up at Tanora.

"He seems pretty adamant about you not going out into the field without him. Maybe you should wait until he's able to go with you?"

She shook her head.

"No way! Once you are done with the surgery, he's going to need some time to recuperate, right?"

He nodded.

"Probably a couple of days in the hospital...then reduced activity for a couple of weeks."

"No way can I wait that long! The plants might not be still there...they might get eaten by critters, or dried up...I have to go today! I have my cell phone. You can call me to let me know how he's doing."

She looked down at Raul and smiled.

"And don't worry partner...I will make sure that you still get full credit."

The nurse knocked then entered the room.

"The helicopter is landing now, doctor, in the parking lot behind the office."

Enrique nodded.

"Help me get him ready."

Then the room was filled with nurses and EMTs, as they got Raul onto a stretcher, started an IV, and wheeled him out the door and out to the waiting helicopter. Tanora watched it all, feeling helpless, and followed them out to watch them climb up into the emergency copter.

Once Raul was inside, Enrique raised a finger and made the sign for just a minute to the EMTs, and he climbed out to quickly walk over to Tanora. He had to shout to make himself heard, over the sound of the helicopter blades.

"Don't go until you hear from me! Promise me that, at least."

His eyes burned into hers.

She shook her head.

"No promises. Just help him...you do your job, and let me do mine!"

He tried to grab her upper arms, but she backed away from him, gesturing at the waiting copter.

"Go!" She yelled at him.

He turned and quickly walked back to the copter, but turned back for a final glance at her before he got into it.

She was trying to figure out what he was doing, when she realized with a start, that he was mouthing the words, “I love you,” to her.

She blew him a kiss, watching as he got into the helicopter which took off the instant both of his feet were off the ground.

Tanora said a quick prayer for all of them to be alright, and for Raul to be well taken care of by her man. Then she turned and walked back around to the front of the office, where she had left the truck. She got in, turned it on, and backed out to head back to the warehouse they had their equipment in, to meet up with the rest of her team and get started on their expedition.

~*~

She had not expected to face any opposition to her giving the orders, so she was unhappy when the two men who had accompanied them before acted sullen when she told them she was in charge. They had both regarded her rudely, and when she turned to answer her cell phone, they were rapidly conversing in a low tone, so she couldn't hear what they were saying.

“Enrique?”

She could barely hear what he was saying, due to the noise and commotion going on behind him.

“You can't go out there alone with those two...”

The rest of what he said was garbled.

“Why? I know what I'm doing...and they were with me before, so they know what we need to do. I'll be fine.”

“No! Raul said...”

There was the sound of an ambulance siren, and she tried to understand what he was saying, but it was lost in the noise.

“Rick, I need to go. You need to get him into surgery. Call me when you are done, so you can let me know how it went.”

There was some scratchy noise on the line, as if Enrique was talking again, then someone told him, “Now, you need to be in there now.”

“Bye, Rick. Talk to you soon,” Tanora said loudly, before turning to face her companions.

“Are we ready to leave?”

“Soon, señorita. Just one more thing we need to get, then we will be ready.”

The taller man had spoken, his eyes glinting as he smiled at her. He turned to his cousin.

“Stay with her, I will be right back.”

The other man nodded.

Tanora sighed, vexed at yet another delay. She busied herself rechecking all of their gear, making sure it was all present and accounted for. She felt slightly self-conscious, with Juan's eyes on her while she worked, and she was glad that for once, she had chosen to wear baggier cargo pants, rather than the denim shorts she wore so often in really hot humid weather.

When Pedro returned, she asked, “Ready now?”

He nodded, smiling at his cousin over her head.

“You are driving, right?”

She nodded impatiently.

“Of course. Get in.”

Juan walked around to the passenger door and got into the truck.

“Oh, señorita?”

She turned to ask what he wanted, and instead of hearing Pedro slam the door shut, she felt him move closer to her side. She was turning back to ask him what he was doing, when she felt a cloth clamped over her face. She smelled ether and tried not to breathe, but the exertion of trying to pull off the hand that clamped so hard on her face, made her need to breathe in. She was conscious of Juan grabbing her hands, and holding them still, while the hand kept the cloth clamped down, and she felt herself slowly succumbing to the blackness that beckoned to her.

Her last thought was, “Enrique! I should have listened to you!”

Then she was out.

~*~

Enrique was chewing his lips, anxiety tightening every muscle on his body. He had been called to assist in surgery, but resisted scrubbing long enough to call Tanora. He hadn't been able to speak with her long, because they had a bad connection...probably due to the interference of all of the hospital's electronics, as well as the distance between them. Cell phone towers were not plentiful in under-populated areas, and good signals were infrequent and undependable. Getting cut off in the middle of a sentence was to be expected. But he had hoped for better.

He knew Tanora had heard him telling her not to go out alone, but he also knew what a stubborn woman she was. He had reluctantly scrubbed, figuring that the sooner surgery started, the sooner it would be over.

The surgery itself was uneventful. Once it was over, the head surgeon had insisted on going over the information he had supplied, and the delay had seem interminable to him. Finally he had interrupted the senior medical man, and told him that he had to get back to his town...that someone he cared about might be in danger, and he had to do what he could to prevent a tragedy.

The older man had laughed, telling him that he should let the police handle matters of danger...his expertise was needed elsewhere. But he had allowed Enrique to leave soon after that.

Raul would need to be in the hospital for the night, and possibly for another twenty-four hours after that. Enrique promised to be in contact with the hospital soon, and ran out to the truck he was being allowed to borrow, to begin the long drive back.

He had made the drive before, over the years, in as little as an hour. This time, fearful of what he might find when he got back, he drove with a lead foot, trying to get back before dark, and desperate to see if Tanora had listened to him and stayed in town, or not. If she was there, he would get down on his knees and thank God for having kept her safe. If she was not, he would need what little daylight might be left, in order to begin to search for her...which would be much more difficult, since he really had no idea in what direction to even be looking.

As he drove, he replayed over and over again in his head, the few coherent words that Raul had managed to say, before the anesthesia completely put him under. When they had gotten to the hospital, he had been separated from his patient for a while, filling out forms and being asked questions that he didn't have all of the answers for.

When he was able to head back, he found Raul right outside the operating room, on a table, with the head surgeon already prepping for the operation. He was told to get himself scrubbed and ready to assist, but Raul had grabbed his hand urgently, and pulled him closer, to mutter at him.

The words were indistinct, and the hallway was noisy, so Enrique had lowered his head, almost to the man's chest, to try to understand what he was saying.

"Oosa-puta...they saw you drive her home...thought she was a virgin until that... Oosa-puta...that's what they called her..."

Enrique looked intently into the other man's face, trying to decide if what he was saying was just babbling from the drugs he had already had pumped into him, or if what he was saying was true. He had lived in Mexico long enough to know that it was habitual to take anagrams that began with vowels and use them as words. He knew that "Oosa-puta" meant "U.S.A. puta", and he was terrified at what that might mean.

"Raul, are they going to hurt her?"

His eyes were wild, glassy and unfocused, but he nodded slowly.

"Can't let it happen again...took so long last time...must protect..."

Raul's eyes had closed as he sighed heavily, and was silent.

Enrique gnashed his teeth now, driving wildly across the miles between him and the woman he loved. When he was more than halfway back, he called the mayor's office, and talked to his old friend about what he was afraid of.

"Who did she go with?" Enrique asked, "Who were the two local men?"

Lorenzo Jimenez told him to wait while he pulled out the paperwork he had signed for the original expedition, and for the quickly organized return trip.

He whistled softly, a sound that Enrique recognized as a bad sign instantly.

"What? What's wrong?"

Well, I'm sure it's nothing to worry about..." Lorenzo began.

"What?" Enrique was trying hard to hold onto his temper, but in his anxiety, he yelled into the phone.

"They are forasteros, not men of our town, but travelers, who look for work wherever they go. They probably told señorita Doyle that they knew the countryside, since they travel in it so much. They have been renting a small cabin close to the swimming lake, on the southern part of town. You know the area I'm talking about?"

With dismay, Enrique remembered having made a house call on a family there once, and being struck by the poverty and look of decay so close to the vibrant town he knew and loved. That's where the two men Tanora was trusting were renting a place? Then that's where he was going to start!

"Have you been able to get her on your cell phone?" Lorenzo asked.

"No! I've tried and tried, but she never answers. I'm going to head over to the cabin to look for her."

"You think they may have taken her there?"

"It's on my way back into town anyway. It's as good a place as any to start. I have no idea which direction they would have been heading, other than into the woods up in the hills. But if what I'm afraid of is true, they might not have been in any hurry to do any research...or to do anything that she told them to."

"I'll have Francisco drive out to meet you there. That way if you do find them, you will have police back-up."

“I hope I won’t need it,” Enrique said through gritted teeth, “But thanks. I’m hanging up now, because the rain is starting to fall heavier, and I can’t hear you very well over it. And the last thing I need to do is slide off the road.”

“Adios.”

Enrique tried one final time to get Tanora to answer her phone, but when it went to her voice mail again, he punched the button to hang up, and swore loudly.

“If they hurt you, I won’t wait for justice, Nora, I swear it. I’ll kill both of them. My precious sweetheart...you don’t need to go through this twice! No woman should even have to go through it once! God-damn it, I can’t even see the fucking road anymore! But I’ll get there soon, Nora. Hold on, querida. Hold on...”

And Enrique drove faster than he ever had, over slippery, wet roads, through heavy rain, and prayed to find the cabin deserted when he got there, even though he then would have no idea where to start looking.

Chapter Fourteen

Nora felt nauseated and disoriented when she opened her eyes. She wondered why everything looked so unfocused, until she realized her glasses weren’t on her face. She searched the room and saw her glasses on a nearby table. She quickly shut her eyes again when she heard voices getting closer to her, as if they were returning to where she was.

Her shoulders ached, and she felt her arms stretched out behind her, and realized that her wrists were tied to the back legs of the wooden chair she was seated on.

Experimentally she tried to move her legs, and found that they too were tied. She could feel the ropes biting into her ankles, and realized that her legs were tied to the front legs of the chair. The voices began to speak very close to her, so she tried to pretend that she was still limp and unconscious.

“When is she going to wake up?”

“I don’t know Juan, but if it isn’t soon, we can just smack her until she’s awake.”

“Now that we have her here, I want her.”

Pedro grunted, “Me too. But I have to go hide her truck in the woods, so no one can see that it’s here.”

“How long is that going to take?”

“Not long, but I have to drive it far enough into the woods, that no one can find it... and even if they do, they won’t have any idea to look for her here.”

Footsteps walked over to the door.

“You just keep an eye on her until I get back, okay? And no having any fun with her until I’m back. It was my idea to bring her back here, so I get to fuck her first, understand?”

Juan grunted in response.

Pedro walked out of the door and a sudden gust of warm wind slammed the door shut. There was the distinct smell of rain-soaked ground, and Tanora wondered briefly how long she had been unconscious, since it had only been partly cloudy when she drove back to the warehouse.

She felt like she was going to choke on her sudden fear. This was her worst nightmare, and it was going to come true for a second time! Most women lived their entire lives without being raped even once. Why was it her luck that it seemed about to happen again? She felt her heart racing and her breathing speed up, and she was afraid that she was going to hyper-ventilate and pass out again...and that would be a very bad thing, when there were two men who planned on raping her, and she had to try to think of a way to stop them.

The major difference was that the last time, she had had no warning that it was about to happen. This time, tied to a chair, still presumed to be unconscious, she had a moment to think of any possible way to stop what had been unavoidable when it had happened before.

She fought her panic, and tried to focus on the words her father had told her, in-between his rants and ravings about precisely how he wanted to exact revenge on the scum who had violated his daughter.

“Sure’n’ the best way to not be a victim, is to out-think the bastards, Tanora me lassie. They probably think all women are sluts, so you have to use that against ‘em. Make ‘em think you are going along with it, then after stroking for a few seconds, grab and twist and make sure they won’t ever be able to father any children. The world doesn’t need more rapists. And they will be so busy puking all over themselves, you should have time to run away.”

Tanora listened intently now, barely breathing, trying to discover where Juan was. She had spent enough time with them to know that he was obviously not the brains of the pair of them...not that they had much between the two of them. But Pedro had told him to wait until he got back. Maybe it was time for her to convince Juan that he didn’t need to wait for a little taste of what was to come.

She heard his footsteps approach her, so she took that opportunity to take a deep breath, as if she was just waking up, and she opened her eyes, to see his face peering at her from just a few inches away.

“Good! You’re awake. Now as soon as Pedro gets back we can have some fun.”

Juan’s face was contorted into a grimace meant to be a smile. He looked like a man about to commit a crime that he was really happy about.

Tanora felt her insides quail, as if she was going to throw up. She willed her stomach to settle down, and took a deep breath.

“Why am I tied to a chair?” She asked in a wheedling tone. “How am I going to have any fun if I can’t move?”

He took a long drink from his bottle of tequila, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand before he answered her.

“When Pedro gets back, we’ll untie you. Then I’ll hold you down, so he can fuck you, and he’ll hold you down so I can. And I know you will like it, you whore. We thought you were a virgin, since that’s what Raul told us. You even had him fooled, you slut. But we saw you getting a ride home from the doctor in the morning, after you stayed the night with him. So now you are going to get what’s coming to you.”

Tanora fought back the panic that rose in her throat, to smile in a leering manner at the weaker link.

“Why don’t I give you a sample of what you are going to get, before Pedro gets back? Why should we have to wait to have fun, when he won’t know anyway?”

Juan took another swig from his bottle and looked at her uncertainly.

“I can’t untie you...he’ll know.”

“Then why don’t you let me suck on you? Just a little? I promise I’ll swallow all of it if you come, so he’ll never know.”

As she expected, he got a crazed look in his eyes and he stepped closer to her. She wondered if he had ever had a blow job, and hoped that he hadn’t, so her plan would work.

He took another drink from his bottle, and put it down to unzip his pants, looking around in all directions, as if he expected to be caught.

“You’ll have to untie one of my hands, though,” Tanora said, breathing a silent prayer that he would believe her.

He looked at her uncertainly again.

“What? Why?”

She tried to leer at him again, hoping that the loss of blood-flow to his brain would make him not notice the disgust she was sure was on her face. She tried to shrug casually, even though it made her aching shoulders hurt more.

“Well, that’s how it’s done, you know. I have to be able to move parts of you around, to play with your balls, to finger your asshole. That’s what makes it a really good blow job. But then, you know that, right? Surely an experienced, sexy man like you has had good blow jobs lots of times.”

She gave him an arch look and smiled.

He slowly moved over to her and walked to the side of her chair. She heard the snap of a switchblade as the blade shot out, and she felt him cutting the ropes that held her uninjured arm tied up. She breathed a quick thank-you prayer that he had not tried to untie her arm that had the cast still on her wrist. She was right-handed, and having the use of her good hand was an unexpected bonus. Gratefully she remembered that the switchblade that Enrique had given her was in her right front pocket, so presuming she was able to disable Juan, she would be able to cut the rest of the ropes and hopefully get out of the cabin before Pedro returned.

She forced herself to concentrate on how to do what she knew she had to do.

Juan now stood directly in front of her. He had pulled himself out of his pants, and was stroking himself, and knowing what he planned to do to her, smelling the pungent odor of his unwashed body parts, she felt momentary panic as the nightmares of her last two years threatened to overwhelm her, making her unable to move.

Resolutely she stuck out her tongue, as if she was trying to close the distance between her mouth and his cockhead. He pushed his pelvis forward and she gagged at the unpleasantness of smelling the acrid odor of him as she forced herself to lick as little of him as she could get away with. Slowly she moved her hand up to stroke his balls. He groaned and leaned even closer, and she moved her hand around, hefting the load of his testicles, getting her hand positioned just right, so that she could do the maximum amount of damage in as little time as possible.

He pushed himself forward and grabbed her pony tail, meaning to shove himself into her face. She grabbed both testicles in her hand and squeezed as hard as she could, twisting her wrist counter-clockwise and pulling down, as if she was trying to pull them right off of his body.

His reaction was instantaneous. His eyes popped out of his head and he gasped and gurgled, trying to take in a breath. She let go and he staggered backwards, then fell onto the ground retching, his hands reaching down to hold what was left of his balls. He appeared to be trying to scream, but the drooling preceded the puking, and he was twitching on the floor, helpless in his agony.

Tanora was shocked at what she had done and frightened at being discovered and punished by the larger cousin. She reached into her pocket and pulled out her switchblade, then leaned over and cut both of her legs free of the ropes. She fell to her knees on the floor and pulled the chair over, so that she could cut the ropes off of her injured arm. She ignored the pain from it, and the agony of the man on the floor. Her only thought was to get away.

She pushed herself up and realized the circulation in her legs was impaired from the ropes that had been so tight. She stamped both legs, feeling the pins and needles prickling sensation making her legs usable again, and began to make her way slowly towards the door.

To her horror, she now heard footsteps coming up the stairs onto the porch. Tanora sped up as fast as she could and made it to the back of the door before it was thrown open and Pedro strode in.

As he was taking in the sight of the empty chair on its side, and the man retching in agony on the floor next to it, he growled. Tanora edged around the door and began to run out of it. He howled with rage when he saw her, and he chased after her.

With her heart ready to explode in her chest, Tanora tried to outrun him, heading for the woods he had hidden her truck in. But he was taller and uninjured. He quickly caught her and spun her around to slap her across her face. He hit her with the palm of his hand, then backslapped her, then hit her with his palm again, all the while holding onto the arm with the cast, twisting it behind her.

“You bitch!” He yelled, “You whore! Oosa-puta! Just fucking you is too good for you! I’m going to kill you now!”

Terrified, Tanora readied herself with the switchblade that she still held palmed in her right hand. She hadn’t put it away after cutting herself loose because there hadn’t been time. Her head ached from being hit back and forth, and each time he hit her, it was harder than the last time. She was afraid he would snap her neck and kill her before she had time to do anything to him.

Suddenly he pulled at her blouse and she heard the stitches rip as he shredded it right off of her. He had grabbed her bra at the same time, so she stood in front of him, naked from the waist up.

With a growl he threw her to the wet ground, knocking the breath out of her, and unzipped his pants. She barely had a chance to take a deep painful breath, trying to stop herself from feeling dizzy from the blows to her head, when he fell on top of her, tearing at her pants. She tried to fight him, but he pushed at her injured arm, throwing it roughly to the ground. She screamed out with pain, and had a momentary fear that he had broken her wrist again. Then she had to concentrate on trying to squirm, as he pulled her pants down and ripped them off also.

He shoved his legs wider, to push her legs apart, and she knew that he was going to rape her, and then kill her. She had been afraid that she wouldn’t be able to use the knife, because of her inherent respect for life. But this was a matter of his life or hers. As she

felt him push his hips forward, his erection aiming to enter her roughly, his abdomen lowered itself onto hers. She pushed her hand in-between his belly and hers, and she hit the button on the switchblade.

His eyes opened wider in shock, as he felt the blade slice into him. She moved her hand up and sideways, trying to hurt him as much as possible before he had time to retaliate. He gasped, swearing incoherently, as his blood spilled all over her. She pushed at him hard with what little strength she had left in both arms and he fell backwards onto the ground next to her. A crack of lightening let her see the horror and anger in his eyes, as he realized just how seriously she had cut him. His hands attempted to stop the blood, but it spurted all over the ground now, the steady rain making it spread all around him in the mud.

Tanora got to her hands and knees, barely able to breathe, then felt herself gag, then retch. She forced herself to get to her feet, and watched as the man on the ground tried to grasp her leg to stop her. She moved her leg out of his reach, and willed herself to get away. She walked first, her legs refusing to move any quicker, her breathing so labored she was afraid she was going to pass out.

Gradually the sense of shock made her numb, and she was able to move faster. She ran for the woods, and prayed that she would be able to find her truck and that the keys would be in it.

Another crack of lightening made her look back from the edge of the woods, and she was horror-struck to see Pedro pushing himself up to his feet. That was the last time she looked back. She ran for her life.

Chapter Fifteen

Enrique got to the outskirts of town much faster than he had thought that he would. He drove through the small groups of shanties and mud-covered cabins, looking for Tanora's truck. At one of the last cabins, he saw something on the ground, barely visible in the crack of lightening. It was a body that appeared to be moving slowly, as if crawling. He swore under his breath, his heart pounding, and slammed on his brakes.

Ignoring the rain, he jumped out of the truck and ran over to see that the figure was a man, covered in blood from an abdominal wound. He collapsed again, as he had obviously been doing for a while, judging by the amount of blood that was mixed in with the mud and the rainwater. Enrique felt an instinctive need to tend to the man, and was just bending over, when another flash of lightning showed him some tan fabric close to the man's body.

Enrique straightened up and walked over to see the remnants of the khaki cargo pants that Tanora had been wearing when he saw her last. And over there, a short distance away, closer to the cabin, was her blouse...and was that her bra? He felt himself start to growl, and he ran over to the man and pulled him over, to lie on his back. He grabbed both of the man's shoulders and shook him.

"Where is she? What did you do to her? Tell me or I'll kill you!"

The man's head lolled back, his eyes shut; spittle dribbled out of his mouth into the mud.

"You bastard!"

Enrique threw him back down into the mud and ran up to the cabin, to throw the door open and yell, "Tanora! Are you in here?"

There was a soft moan and he turned in horror at the pain in the sound, only to see another man lying on the floor, clutching at his groin, retching and moaning, sobbing in anguish.

"Where is she?" Enrique nudged at the man with his foot, but the man ignored him to continue rocking and moaning.

Frantic, Enrique ran out of the door and down the stairs, and he skidded to a stop just inches away from the police car that was sliding down the road in the rain and the mud. The lights were flashing, and the siren was going, but all of that was barely noticeable over the continuous pounding of the rain, and the thunder and lightning that accompanied a major storm.

The officer grabbed his arm to yell almost into Enrique's ear, "What's going on?"

Enrique shook his head.

"I don't know! But she's not here, and I have to find her!"

The policeman saw the man lying on the ground and went over to look at him.

"Is he dead?"

Enrique shook his head again.

"Not yet. There's another one in the cabin too. But I have to find Tanora. She must have gone into the woods..."

The policeman nodded, "There's a road just over there that leads into the woods, over to a creek that's good for fishing."

He pointed, waving towards the man on the ground.

"But what about him?"

"Fuck him!"

"But you are a doctor! You save lives..."

Enrique shook his head.

"I'm also a man. See those clothes scattered all around? He was trying to rape my woman. If she's not breathing when I find her, you better keep me away from him, or I'll finish what she started!"

Enrique turned and quickly slid over to the truck and jumped behind the wheel. He started the engine and quickly backed up, then headed in the direction that the policeman had indicated.

Shaking his head, the cop bent over to grab his car radio and relayed a request for an ambulance for the two injured men. He headed up into the house to see what condition the man in there was in. A few minutes later, sickened by what he found, he raced back out and got back on the radio and demanded that they hurry, because this was a double emergency.

He got the first-aid kit out of his trunk and knelt by the man in the rain, to try to stop some of the bleeding.

~*~

Enrique drove slowly into the woods, once he found the entrance he had been told to look for. He scanned the ground in front of the truck, in his headlights, half-hoping he

would see her, and half-praying that he wouldn't. He wanted to find her, but he was terrified at what condition she might be in. She had obviously been able to fight both men, injuring them both severely, but at what cost?

"¡Dios mio! Let me find her! Let her be safe!"

The lights from his headlights glinted off of the metal of a truck, with the whole thing suddenly visible from another lightning streak. Praying that she would be inside of it, safe, he slammed on his brakes, sliding in the mud, to stop just inches from the back bumper of the truck. He threw open his door and jumped out, calling her name in the darkness.

"Tanora! Tanora!" He yelled into the forest, barely able to hear his own voice over the loud crack of thunder that had followed the last lightning.

He ran over to the truck and opened the door, but the keys were not in it...nor was the woman he sought. He leaned his head against the top of the doorframe and cursed, before he called out again.

"Tanora! Nora! Where are you?"

He looked up at as another strike of lightning lit up the surrounding area, and he saw frightened eyes peeking at him through the glass of the door on the opposite side of the truck.

"Nora!" He called hoarsely, as he rushed around to the other side of the truck to find her leaning against it, shivering, soaking wet, and naked, except for her shoes.

She appeared too weak to move, so he ran up to her and grabbed her, to enfold her in his arms.

"Nora!"

He shouted out her name, shaking with relief, as he felt her melt against him.

She was shaking and crying as she pressed herself against him, seeking warmth.

He held her while she sobbed, gently running his hands over her body checking her for injuries, while assuring himself that she was intact and whole and all there. Touching her reassured him, and he tried to ignore the fire that it lit in his belly and below, as he rubbed her naked, wet skin.

She pressed herself even closer against him. He tilted her face up to search her eyes, barely visible in the light from the headlights on his car that broke through the darkness of the woods at night.

"Are you alright?"

He didn't breathe while he waited for her answer.

Slowly, she nodded, staring into his eyes. To his surprise, a smile lit her face.

"Yes," she said almost too softly for him to hear.

"Yes," she said louder, her voice gaining in confidence as she spoke.

"I did what my dad told me to do to Juan, and I used Abuelo's knife on the other one. He tore off my clothes, but never got to do anything else to me!"

Enrique felt relief wash over him, drenching him like the rain that had let up a little, but still fell on them in a steady warm drizzle.

"I'm so glad, querida. Are you hurt?"

She shook her head.

She reached up with both hands to pull his head down, and obediently, Enrique lowered his head to meet her lips in a kiss he expected to be chaste and reassuring. To

his surprise, Tanora pressed her lips against his urgently, running her good hand along his body, kneading his butt cheeks as she pressed herself against his erection.

He leaned into the kiss groaning, as she began to move her hips, grinding herself against him, while her tongue stabbed into his mouth, and their kisses became more insistent.

Enrique tried to push her back gently, shaking his head.

“Nora, querida. What are you doing? We need to get you out of the rain. You must be cold from the dampness. We need to...unghhh...”

He groaned because her hand that had worked steadily to open the zipper of his pants succeeded, and she grasped his hardening cock while she bit at his nipple through his shirt.

“I want you now!” She gasped as she rubbed him along her belly and plastered her wet breasts against him.

“Here? Now? Woman, are you insane?”

“Yes,” she hissed against his chest, tearing open his shirt to lick at his skin.

“I’m crazy for you, Rick! You gave me back to myself! You showed me that I’m still alright, still sexy, and that I can still enjoy what I am. And right now, I’m a very horny woman, who’s got two years-worth of waiting built up inside of me! I want you, and I want you now, Rick! Here...now...out in the rain, where God can watch us make love! Take me now!”

All the while she was talking, she was grinding herself against him, and Enrique felt himself respond to her even as he was fighting himself not to, trying to be a gentleman who needed to take care of the damsel in distress that he had thought her to be.

She wrapped one of her legs up and over his hip, while she rubbed the tip of him against her slick folds, made even wetter by the drizzling rain. Helpless against her lust and his own, he felt himself push forward, and he sank himself into the core of her, into the center of the woman whose pulsating heat threatened to burn him alive.

“Yes!”

Her triumphant shriek was followed by a moan as they moved together, grinding madly against each other. Enrique wrapped his hands around her butt cheeks and picked her up, to fall forward, bracing her against the side of the truck door, as he pushed himself into her repeatedly, his hips bucking against hers, his balls slapping against her with each thrust, his cock sliding on the fluids she was producing as she came. Her breasts were mashed between them, and her eyes were squeezed tightly closed as she gasped out her pleasure.

He moaned as her inner walls tightened, clenching around him like a vise, as she screamed repeatedly. That was enough to make him lose any vestige of control over himself. He slammed himself into her over and over again, both of her legs wrapped around his hips now, whimpering coming from her as she worked up to another climax. With a shout torn from his soul, he roared as he felt the hot coil of sperm shoot up from his balls, at the same time as he felt her come again, her juices running down his legs as he flattened her against the side of the truck.

Spasms wracked her body as she spiraled into repeated orgasms, and he held on for dear life, feeling her vise-like grip milking him for every drop. Finally she collapsed, all muscles released at once, and she was limp in his arms.

“¡Dios mio, mujer!” Enrique gasped as he tried to breathe, his heart still racing madly.

“Are you alright?”

Tanora giggled and tried to shrug, but her shoulders only moved slightly, as if she still hadn't regained control over her muscles.

“I am now. Oh God, Rick...it's been so long for me...and I want you so much!”

Enrique rubbed his chest against her, enjoying the feel of her breasts on him, the nipples still hard, sitting on top of the softness pressed against him.

“Still?”

She looked up to see the teasing in his eyes.

Solemnly, she nodded.

“Yes. I've got two years of catching up to do, you know.”

Enrique smiled at her and bent his head down to kiss her, their lips pressed together softly, then with more pressure as they both leaned into it.

“No! Not here again!” Enrique muttered.

“No?” Tanora asked, sounding disappointed.

“No!”

“Then where?”

Enrique shook his head wearily.

“We have to get back...to see if the ambulance is there yet...probably you will have to give some kind of statement to the police. You almost killed both of the men, you know.”

“Just almost? Pity.”

Enrique felt himself softening and sliding out of her warmth. Momentarily both of them felt bereft, so he leaned forward again to claim her lips once more.

He drew back and smiled at her.

“We have to get back and do what we need to do. Then we will go to my house and make love until we fall asleep from exhaustion. Sound good to you?”

Tanora smiled as she watched him pull his pants back up and close them gingerly over his still enlarged member. He took off the shirt that she had torn open, and held it out to her, so she could cover herself with something. He took her hand and began to lead her to his borrowed truck.

She nodded.

“Yeah. Sounds like a good plan to me.”

As they started to drive back, he asked, “Do you have the keys to your truck?”

Tanora shook her head.

“No. I was hoping they'd be in it when I found it...so I could lock myself in it and drive it away from there. But I had just found out that the keys weren't in it, when I heard you come splashing up the road. I didn't know who it was, so I hid behind it, on the other side.”

He nodded.

“Smart move. In fact, you made one smart move after another, tonight. It probably saved your life.”

She shook her head.

“I made one really big dumb move, though. I should have listened to Raul and you...but I was just being stubborn. I didn't want to think that it could ever happen to me

again. Once it was happening, I knew I had to make it end differently this time. And thanks to you, I was able to.”

He smiled and patted her knee gently.

“You did it, Tanora. It was all you.”

She nodded and settled back into the seat.

Her brow temporarily knitted while she struggled to put her thoughts into words.

“You know, I was worried that I wouldn’t be able to use the knife on anyone, even if I was being threatened. I’ve never even hit anyone before. But when it came down to him or me...”

Enrique nodded.

“You found that you didn’t have time to think about it, you just acted.”

He reached his hand over and patted her knee.

“And I’m so glad that you did. I’m proud of you, Nora. You conquered your fears and emerged a hero.”

Her hand patted the back of his, then she curled her fingers to lace them in-between his.

“And now that you’ve cured me of my sex problem, doctor, I sure hope you are going to be able to help me with the therapy exercises I’ll need to do, to regain full use of all of my parts!”

Enrique lifted an eyebrow to smirk at her, as they pulled out of the woods.

“Oh, I think I can manage that.”

They rounded the bend to see an ambulance and two police cars, and they resigned themselves to doing what they had to do, for now.

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Enrique was right about what they had to do. The ambulance driver and his partner insisted that Enrique check both men out before they drove them away towards the hospital they were from. They had wanted him to ride with them, but he refused. They were shaking their heads, arguing with him, when he angrily told them just what the injured men had been trying to do to his woman. They looked towards Tanora’s shredded clothing in the mud, then both nodded and got into the ambulance and drove away.

Tanora meanwhile, was in the house being questioned by the policemen from both cars. The local cop was standing by the door when Enrique walked in to see Tanora perched on the edge of a chair, while one officer questioned her, and another wrote notes. He quickly walked over to her after grabbing her glasses off of the counter where they had been thrown; he passed them to her, and took her hand in his. He squeezed her hand and she shot him a grateful smile for his support, and for his having realized how off-balance she had felt without her glasses giving her better vision.

It was a couple of hours later before they walked exhausted into Enrique’s house. Trying to be an understanding lover, Enrique smiled at Tanora as they walked through the front door into his house.

“Querida, I will understand if you are tired...” he began.

Tanora gave him a wicked smile and shook her head.

“I want to take a shower with you, so I can wash off all of the mud. Then when I feel clean, I’m holding you to your promise to make love to me until we both fall asleep from exhaustion.”

Smiling at her, he locked the door and followed her down the hall to the bathroom. She already had the water running, and was just climbing into the shower when he got there. He quickly peeled off his shoes and his pants, then joined her under the hot water.

“I will always think of our first time together, whenever I’m feeling water on me,” he said as he claimed her lips, laughing at the shampoo that he tasted as she rinsed her hair.

They took turns washing each others’ various parts, paying close attention to their erogenous areas. Enrique had his mouth on one of her nipples while he stroked her outer labial lips, before he moved his finger to slide gently into her. She moaned when he used his thumb on her clit as he gently searched for the g-spot on her inner walls. He knew when he found it. Her inner muscles clamped around his finger and she thrust her head back and screamed, her entire body shaking with the force of her orgasm.

Once they were both satisfied that they were clean, they turned off the water and dried each other off with towels.

Giving Enrique an arch look, Tanora said, “Here, let me dry you off with something better than that old towel.”

She dropped to her knees and wrapped her lips around his cock. He gasped as it hardened once again to an almost painful stiffness. She used her tongue to lave him up and down, licking all of the water droplets off of him, sucking the moisture from his pubic hair, before pushing her nose and tongue down to his balls, to gently take first one then the other, into her mouth, swirling her tongue around them. He groaned out his pleasure, as he fell back against the wall.

“Tanora, stop,” he said finally, wrapping both of his hands in her hair to pull gently, forcing her to look up at him.

“My legs are buckling, woman! I can’t keep on standing up while you do that. Besides,” he added, “I want to come inside of your tight pussy again.”

She licked her lips as she smiled up at him and nodded.

“Race you! Last one in bed has to be on the bottom first!”

With that, she pushed herself back up to her feet with a giggle and ran through the doorway to the bedroom.

Enrique smiled and threw the towel he was holding to the floor before he followed her, resigned to being on the bottom for the first time. Then he was on top for the next time, and they switched back and forth for the rest of the night, falling asleep from exhaustion just before the sun was starting to rise.

Chapter Sixteen

Enrique woke up to realize that Tanora wasn’t in his arms anymore. In fact she wasn’t even in his bed. Momentarily taken aback, he listened intently and heard her speaking in the next room. He got up and went into the bathroom, then padded naked into the living room.

Tanora was smiling and nodded at him, as she continued speaking on her cell phone.

“So you will call me back today then? As soon as you can? I’ll be waiting to hear from you.”

She nodded at what the reply was, then said, “Adios,” and pushed the button to end the call. She turned to Enrique with a big smile.

“Good morning, sleepy-head,” she teased.

He gave her an injured look.

“It’s not even eight yet, and I don’t have to be at the office until nine. What got you up so early? I thought I wore you out last night.”

Tanora giggled.

“Me? After how long I’ve waited to be interested in anyone again? Not hardly, señor! But how about you...can you walk alright this morning?”

Enrique made a face and strode quickly over to take her into his arms.

He growled, “Oh, I can walk just fine, señorita. In fact, I was hoping for a quickie before I have to leave for the office.”

Tanora returned his passionate kiss, before pulling back to shake her head slowly.

“Afraid not, doctor. I have to listen for the phone. I called my contact at UNAM, and he is going to check with his grad students to see if any of them are willing to make the drive out here today, and to go with me out into the field. If he can get at least two of them to volunteer, then I’m going. I won’t be able to leave until tomorrow at the earliest. But I need to get out there and collect a lot more of the plants, so the testing can verify what I suspect. And the sooner the better.”

Enrique had walked into the kitchen and Tanora followed him. He got a pot of coffee going and poured two glasses of orange juice and offered her one. She smiled as she took it, and clinked her glass against his in a toast.

“There’s no champagne in it,” he said with a smile. “I have to go to work.”

She nodded.

“That’s fine. I’m going to have a whole lot to do, so I’ll be busy while you are working.”

“But you’ll stay here tonight?” Enrique asked hopefully.

Tanora smiled shyly at him.

“If you want me to, then yes.”

Enrique pulled her close again, and they spent a few minutes exploring each other’s bodies again as they kissed passionately. Both of them began to moan, grinding their parts together.

“¡Basta!” Enrique groaned as he gently pushed her away.

“I have to get ready to go to the office. I can’t go with a hard-on this big! I’m going to take a cold shower now and try to think about baseball, or anything else other than how much I want to pull you into the shower with me, so we can recreate last night in the rain. ¡Dios mio, querida! What you do to me!”

“Fine,” Tanora giggled as he staggered towards the bathroom.

“I’ll see what I can dig up for us to have for breakfast. Then I’ll have to pull on some of your clothes, so you can drop me off at the hotel without getting me arrested for indecent exposure.”

“That sounds like a plan,” Enrique said as he closed the bathroom door.

The sound of water running in the shower was soon heard, and Tanora smiled as she imagined the water running all over his body, and she shook her head to clear it of the feverish pornographic images she was seeing in her mind.

She busied herself cutting up some fruit and mixing it with some yogurt and granola, to make breakfast parfaits. By the time Enrique had emerged from the shower, she was already dressed in a pair of his shorts and a tee shirt. He leered at her nipples that poked through the shirt.

“Ooooh, my shirt has never looked quite that good before,” he growled softly, as he padded into the kitchen wearing pants, with his shirt flapping open.

Tanora turned to him and smiled as they kissed again, each one fondling their favorite parts on the other.

“But we don’t have much time to eat, so we’d better not get too involved, señor.”

Enrique nodded reluctantly.

“Sí, I am afraid that you are right.”

He gave her a long lingering look before shaking his head slowly, “Pity.”

They ate quickly. After that, Enrique drove her back to her hotel.

As Tanora got out of the car, she asked, “What should we do for dinner tonight?”

Enrique forced himself to look up from staring at her erect nipples that held his gaze like a magnet. He smiled guiltily when she laughed and shook her head.

“Today is Thursday, so Maria will be cleaning my house today. She always leaves something for me to heat up for dinner when she’s there. Maybe I’ll pop on over there early in the afternoon, when I’m not seeing patients anymore. I’ll ask her to make enough for both of us, okay?”

Tanora nodded, then she turned to walk away from the car.

“When should I pick you up?” Enrique asked.

“I’m going to try to get my truck back,” Tanora said. “I’ll let you know if I do. Then I can just drive myself over.”

“Okay. See you later, querida.”

Tanora blew him a kiss, then turned and walked into the hotel. Enrique sat in his car and watched her ass until she turned a corner and disappeared from his view. He smiled, marveling at how happy he felt; he put the car into gear and drove to his office.

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As it was, it was not until almost seven at night before Tanora appeared at the door of Enrique’s house. She was carrying an overnight bag, and a bottle of champagne.

As they ate the dinner that had been left in the fridge for them, they talked about what had happened to each of them during the day. Enrique had been questioned by the police again, during his office time after the patients had left.

And Tanora had spent quite some time explaining again just what had happened and how she had been defending herself. She had finally been given the keys to her truck, since they had been found in Pedro’s pants pocket. She was allowed to leave the police station, but had been cautioned not to leave the country until she was cleared to go. She informed them that she planned on heading into the countryside again, but that she would be back in town as soon as possible. And she would have her cell phone with her, in case they needed to speak to her before she returned.

Tanora had also heard from the contact at the University, and three biology grad students were already getting packed to leave in the morning, expected to arrive sometime in the early afternoon. They would all head out into the field early on Saturday morning.

“They aren’t all men are they?” Enrique had been as much jealous, as worried when he asked her that.

Tanora smiled and shook her head.

“No, one woman and two men. The woman is ABD, all-but-dissertation for her doctorate in molecular biology, so she is the senior of the three of them. And I will be the boss.”

She gave him a quizzical look then.

“Why? You’re not jealous, are you?”

He sheepishly shook his head.

“Only a little bit. I’m worried about you also. You haven’t had much good luck lately, and I don’t want you to have any other emergencies.”

“No good luck? I was able to avoid being raped for the second time in my life, and you don’t call that good luck? I have found a man who is an understanding lover, who is so hot he makes my toes curl, and he seems to feel the same way about me, and you don’t call that good luck?”

She shook her head and smiled at him.

“Señor, I think you need to think about that a little bit more.”

He smiled back at her ruefully.

“Still, I wish I could take the time off to go with you, though.”

She shook her head emphatically.

“No! You need to save the taking-time-off-thing for when I head to Mexico City with the plants. Remember, we are going to have some heavy-duty celebrating to do there, and lots of time to do it in!”

Enrique finally decided to broach what he had been meaning to talk to her about.

“Speaking of that, querida, we have to talk about birth control. You aren’t on the pill, are you?”

Tanora shook her head.

“No, why would I be? I wasn’t expecting I’d ever have sex again. I didn’t think it was an issue.”

Enrique now shook his head ruefully.

“I don’t have to be a doctor to know that continuing to have unprotected sex is a good way to get you pregnant.”

He looked deeply into her eyes as he spoke.

“How would you feel about that?”

There was a moment of silence, as she furrowed her brow before turning to him to smile shyly at him.

“I guess that would be okay with me, if it was okay with you.”

He smiled back at her, nodding.

“It would be okay with me because that way I could make you marry me. No Reyes baby has ever been born a bastard, and I’m not about to break with such a long tradition. What do you have to say to that?”

Her smile was more confident now.

“Don’t go yakking with a preacher yet, Rick. I don’t even know if I can get pregnant. I mean, they examined me after the rape and didn’t tell me there were any problems; but I have heard that some women can take a long time to get knocked up.”

He nodded while smiling.

“And some women don’t take any time at all. I guess we’ll just have to see which kind you are, huh, Nora?”

She smiled again while nodding.

“Yeah, we’ll see...”

Enrique held out his hand, and she moved over to perch on his lap as he ran his hands over her curves. He ran one hand down into the back of her pants, kneading her butt and poking the occasional finger lower down to stroke at the valley between her cheeks, making her shiver with delight and anticipation. The other hand was busy rubbing her nipples up under her shirt. He had undone her bra with that hand, then slid his hand around to the front of her to reap what he had sown by enjoying her newly-unfettered breasts.

He kissed her passionately before exploring her neck with his lips. He chewed softly on her ear lobe, making her squirm, then he poked his tongue into her ear.

He whispered, “I hope we can get a four-poster bed in that hotel. I’m thinking of tying you to all four posts, then licking you until you beg for mercy. Then I will make love to you repeatedly, and no one will care how loud you scream. I intend to make sure that you never even think of another man again. I want to fulfill your every fantasy, and be the man of your dreams. And maybe I’ll keep you tied up until I get you pregnant, so you can’t ever leave me.”

She had pulled back to stare into his face, but the heat in his eyes reassured her, the color in them all but gone, as passion darkened them almost to black.

They had decided to move into the bathroom to soak in the tub while drinking the champagne. They spent the rest of the night making glorious love in every position they could think of, before they finally fell into an exhausted sleep, drifting bonelessly off on the euphoric high of the sexually satiated.

Chapter Seventeen

The first week dragged by... Enrique had never realized that time could move so slowly. Tanora had left with the grad students on a Saturday, and it was now two Thursdays later. Tomorrow she would have been gone for two weeks already.

Enrique sighed with longing for his woman, as he stared at himself in the bathroom mirror above the sink in the public restroom in-between the examining rooms and his office. He had ducked into the small room to splash cold water on his face and to get a quick drink of water.

He was pretty sure that he was done seeing patients, and was trying to mentally prepare himself to deal with the pile of paperwork on his desk. So he was dismayed to walk out of the bathroom and see that the stern head nurse was putting a patient chart into the metal basket outside the door of one of the examining rooms.

“I thought I was done,” he began.

She turned and shook her head, then indicated the empty office area.

“No, doctor, all of the other patients and nurses have already gone. I am going now too. But you have one more patient that you have to see. It’s a last-minute emergency. You understand.”

Enrique shook his head in consternation. He looked back at her and thought he was imagining a small smile playing with the corners of her mouth, before she turned out the lights in the waiting room, and walked out through the main door, turning to say, “Adios” to him, before locking it behind her.

With a sigh he turned to the door and took the chart out of the basket. Once he read the name on the top of the chart, his heart started to pound, and he could feel himself harden from the sudden blood flow away from his brain. He quickly turned the handle and walked into the room.

Tanora was wearing a peasant-style dress that she had obviously bought from one of the stands in the local market. She had pulled the sleeves down onto her arms to bare her shoulders, and Enrique didn’t have to see the bra sticking out of her purse to realize that she had nothing on under the white dress. His dick twitched in excitement as he forced himself to look up from the nipples that hardened while he stared at them, making his mouth water to taste them.

Tanora was smiling at him with heavy-lidded eyes, her full lips pouting as she licked them...a picture of seduction.

“Señor doctor, I am so glad to see you. I have developed this itch, you see, and I haven’t been able to make it stop. I’ve tried everything, but it’s no use.”

She shifted around on the table, uncrossing her legs so he got a quick glimpse up her skirt to see that her panties must be in her purse with her bra. She crossed her legs again, and began to bounce the top one, kicking off her sandals and pointing her toes to shorten her calves, making her shapely brown legs look even more attractive as she wriggled her toes.

“See?” She asked breathily. “I can’t even get my toes to behave. They keep curling under, and the itch gets worse and worse! Isn’t there anything that you can think of to do, doctor, to make me feel better?”

Enrique was dazed, feeling as if he was in his favorite fantasy, but fully aware that this was really happening this time. His cock had grown so large it was jutting out against his pants, pressing painfully against the zipper. He was afraid that if he didn’t do something soon, he would explode without even touching her.

“Where...”

He cleared his throat and began again.

“Where exactly does it itch, señorita?”

She smiled at him and stood up on the ledge of the examining table, then turned around to pull her skirt up as she bent over the table, presenting her naked butt to him. She purred out her response as she wriggled her butt at him.

“Back there, doctor. Give me your hand and I’ll show you where.”

He took a step forward and she grabbed his hand to guide it to her steaming hot pussy, redolent with her arousal, already leaking her excitement down her legs.

He inhaled deeply, poking one finger, then another into her, feeling her muscles clenching around him as she wiggled her butt around. He turned his hand to use his thumb to rub at her clitoris, and she moaned louder, then shrieked as he felt her inner walls greedily grab at his fingers.

“Now look what you have done! You have just made it worse, doctor!” She cried. “And still you can’t reach the itch. It’s driving me crazy! Please help me!”

Enrique’s hands shook as he pulled his zipper down, raking along his massive rampant cock that sprang up and pointed towards her pussy like a compass needle seeking true north. He moved himself closer to her, and reached around to pinch and pull at her nipples. He pushed the thin cloth aside and felt the skin of her breasts burn his hands, as the tugging pressure on her nipples made her groan again.

The pressure at the base of his spine was building, and he was afraid that he was running out of time, that his orgasm was coming soon whether or not he was inside of her. And he was determined that he would contain himself until it could be in her hot, juicy body.

He took a step up onto the ledge and his throbbing tool aimed itself of its own accord. He felt her slick lava bathe the tip of him, then he squeezed his butt cheeks and pushed forward and buried himself up to his balls in hot woman.

“Yes!” She shrieked instantly, and he felt her inner walls tighten and squeeze him as she rode her orgasm, grinding herself against the front of him.

He gasped then slapped gently at her right butt cheek with his open right hand, then at the left one with his left hand, more to distract himself than anything else. He was surprised that he got so much more excited seeing the faint marks his hands left on her cheeks.

“You are such a bad girl!”

He was barely able to say coherent words anymore. His voice was so husky it didn’t even sound like his, even to him.

He grabbed both cheeks, kneading them as he pushed forward and pulled back repeatedly, trying to fight off the impending explosion, but losing the battle.

“You are going to kill me, woman! First you make me wait so long, then you are everything I have ever wanted! Oh god, oh god, oh god...!”

Enrique could feel his balls tighten right before the sperm exploded out of him with such force that he forgot how to breathe. He came so hard he felt like he lost consciousness. Tanora had screamed when she felt him ejaculate, and they hung in mid-air for what seemed like an eternity, as he pumped himself into her, his fingers digging into her ass, twitching reflexively, as she milked him for every drop.

They both collapsed forward at the same time, Tanora flattened against the examining table, and Enrique unable to stop himself from crushing her with his weight, since his legs had gone as limp as most of the rest of his body. But the one part of him that was not limp kept itself firmly planted inside of his woman, as they both enjoyed her continued twitching and moaning, while she rode out the repeated after-shocks of her own orgasms.

After what seemed like an eternity, Enrique whispered into her ear, since it was right in front of his mouth.

“I have missed you so much, querida. I felt like you had been gone forever!”

Tanora nodded, then pushed herself up slightly, causing Enrique to straighten his arms, to release her from having to bear his weight.

“I missed you too! That’s why as soon as I got to town, I dropped my stuff back at the hotel, changed, and drove right over here. I was hoping I’d find you here alone and surprise you in your office. But this worked out even better than I had hoped!”

By this time, Enrique had stepped back off of the ledge and collapsed onto the chair that he sat on when talking with patients, or writing out prescriptions. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, sighing in satisfaction. Tanora was sitting on the examining table, smiling wickedly at him, as she pulled her blouse back up over her breasts, onto her shoulders again.

Enrique shook his head.

“But how did you know that this is my favorite fantasy? The one I had feared I’d never be able to fulfill, because I wouldn’t dare have sex with a patient?”

Tanora looked at him with surprise evident on her face, from the raised eyebrows, to the curve on her lips.

“Your fantasy? It’s been mine ever since the first day you walked in here and I was able to lean against you and notice how you smelled so good, while you worked on my arm. I tried to convince myself that it was the pain-killers that you gave me that made me so susceptible to your sexy self, but it wasn’t. It was all you, plain and simple.”

Enrique laughed softly.

“Where have you been all of my life, querida? You belong here with me. We are two of a kind, you and me. Promise me that you’ll never leave me again.”

Tanora made a face at him.

“You know I can’t say that. Eventually I will have to go back up to the states, to report to my bosses about what I have found. Then they will send me back down here, but I won’t be staying with you long...I’ll be heading back out into the field to do more collecting.”

She shook her head at him.

“I may want to spend all of my time here with you, acting out naughty, kinky scenarios. But I have a job to do, and so do you. So we are going to have to make-do with whatever time we can grab for ourselves.”

Enrique sighed heavily.

“I suppose you are right, Nora my love. But I can dream, can’t I?”

Tanora got up and walked over to stand in front of him, using one hand to tilt his head up to look at her, and not at the nipples that were at his eye-level.

“We can both dream, señor, when we aren’t together. But we are just about to have a whole week to spend together, with only minimal commitments required from me, and a whole lot of down-time for both of us!”

She leaned forward and claimed his lips, as he groaned and pulled her closer, one hand wrapping around her to hold her right in front of him, the other moving up and down her body, fondling his favorite places, making her squirm with renewed anticipation.

She pulled herself back and spoke breathily while gazing into his eyes.

“And I, for one, am planning on the down-time involving lots of me going down on you, you going down on me, and both of us yelling until we are hoarse.”

Enrique nodded, then pulled her closer, to rest his head in-between her breasts as he listened to her heartbeat.

“Your heart is beating for me, isn’t it?”

She ran her fingers through his hair and nodded, then kissed the top of his head.

“Yes, Rick. Only for you.”

They were still and quiet for a few moments, as they both basked in the glow of being totally in love with someone who reciprocated their love.

Tanora spoke first, in a teasing tone.

“So, are you still planning on doing any paperwork? I mean, I can find something to do, to keep myself busy, if you are.”

Enrique looked up at her and smiled, shaking his head.

“No, querida. Not anymore. I can finish what I have to do tomorrow, in-between patients. And when I leave here tomorrow night, it will be to set off on the first whole week’s worth of vacation that I have had since I moved down here.”

He growled as his hands played up and down her curves, fondling and poking into his favorite areas on her body.

“And I plan on making you scream for so long that you won’t be able to do any talking in the morning. But that won’t matter, since you won’t be able to walk down to the lobby to talk to anyone anyway. In fact, maybe I’ll keep you tied to the bed for a few days, until I’ve had my fill of torturing you with pleasure. What do you say to that?”

She smiled at the challenge in his eyes.

“I think I want to be the first one to do the tying up...you know, just so I can see that it’s alright. I mean, if you are so gung-ho about bondage, surely you won’t mind if I tie you up and torture you with pleasure for a while, will you?”

He took her hand and placed it onto his twitching cock, smiling at her.

“What do you think? Does that answer your question, mistress?”

She giggled, then leaned down to kiss him quickly, before backing away, turning to grab her purse off of the patient’s chair.

“Why don’t you stand up, pull your pants back up so you don’t shock the neighbors when you walk out the door with me, and let’s go back to my hotel and get some dinner. Then there’s a bed with some clean sheets on it that I want you to help me mess up. What do you say to that, Doctor Reyes?”

“I say you’d better put your bra and panties back on first, señorita. I will already have to glare steadily at most of the men in the hotel, to make them realize that you are my woman. I don’t want to have to beat them off with a stick! Cover up those nipples, girl! Those are mine! No one else gets to look at them ever again.”

Tanora did an exaggeratedly heavy sigh as she did what she was told. Enrique also made sure that his clothing was back on and closed up, so that they were both presentable to the public. They went out of the back door and Enrique locked up the office. They drove in both of their vehicles over to the hotel, where they ate an excellent meal that was almost totally wasted on them, as they fondled each other under the tablecloth, and whispered about the things they had been planning on doing with each other as soon as they were alone again.

As soon as they had paid the bill, they went up to Tanora’s room and spent the next few hours enacting as many of their fantasies as they were able to, until they both fell into an exhausted and dreamless sleep, locked in each others’ arms.

Tanora sighed heavily as she leaned back into the plush plane seat, designed to keep even the most impatient flyer comfortable for the long flights going from one country to another. She had jumped through so many hoops to get to this point that it was almost anti-climactic to be actually on the plane and heading back down to Mexico.

Since she was most decidedly not in the mood to talk to anyone, she closed her eyes and mentally reviewed the events of the past few weeks.

She and Enrique had accompanied the three grad students back to Mexico City, to the world-famous Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico. The colleagues that she had been put in touch with through the research arm of her university had been most eager to do the testing that would prove to them whether or not she had actually found something interesting and useful. Those same colleagues and the grad students were the perfect hosts, setting up sight-seeing tours of *La Capital* for Tanora, since she had never been to their city before. They had taken her and Enrique to all of the tourist spots, as well as to lesser-known, but even more beautiful and interesting places that were known only to the locals. She and Enrique had thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to experience everything the city had to offer, during the day and early evening hours.

At night, after they were in their hotel room, she and Enrique had enjoyed even more the opportunity to experience everything they had to offer to each other. To their amused delight, they discovered upon checking into their room, that the bed was indeed a four-poster, and Tanora had lost no time in using the extra neck-ties that Enrique had brought with him, to tie him to all four posts after their first dinner. They had both pleaded tiredness from traveling, then retired to have some of their own kind of fun.

Since he was naked, she had then taken her time, enjoying looking at him from all angles, taking pictures of him with her digital camera, and using the feather that she had picked up from the same local market that she had bought her dress from, to tickle him senseless. When he was writhing with excitement, laughing from her repeated stroking of his ticklish places with the feather, she had suddenly swallowed him whole. He had not been expecting that, and hadn't been able to stop himself from almost immediately coming, giving her such little warning that she barely had time to pull her mouth off of him, before he exploded, covering her face and shoulders with ropes of semen.

After that, she had used one of the extra ties on him, hitting him with it as she berated him for losing control over himself so quickly, and making him promise not to do it again. Then she had begun all over again, with the gentle explorations and applications of the feather. They had both thoroughly enjoyed themselves that night, and gone to sleep secure in the knowledge that they had discovered another way to heighten arousal and enjoyment for both of them.

The next night had been Enrique's turn to tie Tanora to the bed. He had given her some new lingerie, and watched as she changed into the matching black lace push-up bra and thong, along with a black sheer sleeveless robe trimmed with red ribbons, that hung open in the front. He was already wearing a matching black satin robe that he had belted closed, but his insistent and engorged manhood jutted out through the front, leaving little to the imagination, and making Tanora drool with anticipation.

He had gently coaxed her onto the bed, and proceeded to tie her to all four posts, making sure that her wrists were still able to slip out of the restraints if she wanted them to, so that she would not feel pressured to do anything that she didn't want to do. Then

he gave himself over to stimulating her in every possible way that he could think of, making up a few extras as he went along.

The feather had been put to use again, but so was the heavier tie that Tanora had used to punish him last night. He had licked, sucked and lapped at her for so long that Tanora was whimpering with eagerness, begging him to climb on top of her and take her. She was surprised to feel her labia being parted, then she screamed as he turned on the vibrator and plunged it into her, sending her off on a spiral of orgasms that lasted far longer than anything she had ever experienced before.

And when Enrique finally gave in to his own body and filled her with himself, he eased her wrists out of the loops and assured her that he wanted to feel her hands on him as they moved together, toward the goal of supreme mutual satisfaction. She screamed, he roared...and they both felt as if the earth was actually shifting beneath them, as their climaxes worked in harmony, hers keeping him twitching, and his keeping her riding the waves of pleasure that she would later describe to him as similar to a roller-coaster ride, with each climb up the hill faster, and each drop to the ground more intensely mind-shattering than the last one.

When they finally collapsed, spent, onto each other, there was the muffled sound of applause coming from the next room. They looked at each other in alarm at having been overheard, then they both laughed, delirious from the sheer joy of having found someone who loved them enough to share the many varieties of pleasure to be had from exploring each others' bodies.

The rest of the week was a blur of continuous pleasure. They spent their days exploring all that Mexico City had to offer, and their nights exploring each other. The week flew by, and all too soon it was time for Enrique to head back to his town and his job. For him, the parting was intensely painful, since he had no idea when he would be able to see his beloved again.

For Tanora, the pain of parting was offset somewhat by the exciting knowledge that her suspicions had been confirmed by all of the tests done by the research lab. The plant that she had found held great promise of being a treatment for a multitude of diseases, and she was being called back to Princeton to present her findings to her colleagues. She had promised to call regularly, and to return to Enrique as soon as possible. But even she had no idea of when that would be, so it was with a show of great reluctance that Enrique had driven away from her, and her heart was leaden as she realized how much she was going to miss the man who had become so much of part of her, in such a short time.

Soon after that she arrived back in the states, and had been kept busy almost continuously. There were meetings to attend, presentations to make, and research results papers to be filled out and filed. She had been feted by her colleagues as the most promising researcher to be a part of their department in over thirty years, and been interviewed by the local newspapers, as well as by the scientific journals that she had contributed to for years.

Her parents were thrilled for her as well, though her mother had demanded more information about Enrique than she had been willing to share. Whenever they were alone together, Tanora would try to keep the conversation on her work, but her mother would steer it back to the man that Tanora so obviously was missing in a visceral way. Emotionally she felt like a wreck, only half-alive with him so many miles away, unable to hold her, to calm her down and keep her centered. And physically, her body missed

him with an agony that was all the more painful for being so unexpected. She had been celibate for two years, so she was totally unprepared for the waves of longing that threatened to overwhelm her at odd times throughout the day, and almost continuously at night.

Their nightly phone conversations did little to ameliorate her pain, and offered him little relief as well. Even their attempts at phone sex only heightened for them both just how much they missed the totality of each others' bodies: the touch, the smell, the taste... none of that could be sent on-line, as their pictures could, or their words could be through the phone. Enrique would tell her each night just how many days it had been since he was able to feel wholly alive, with her in his arms. And Tanora would answer him with her own agony: the emptiness she felt, the tightening of her nipples each time she thought of him, the ache she felt deep inside of her, that could only be satisfied by him.

What Tanora had not told Enrique was that her body felt weird even to her. Her period was late, but this in itself was not that unusual for her. What was unusual was how hard and painful her breasts were feeling. She wrote that off to missing her man, and spending some time almost nightly, having to satisfy herself. She was horny almost continuously, and had had to replace the batteries on the vibrator that he had given her, twice already.

But by the third week back in the states, Tanora was suspicious that something else was happening to her also. And her mother was watching her closely each time they were together, as if she was studying her for signs that would prove that her suspicions were correct. Neither of them ever mentioned their thoughts to each other, but Tanora knew that if she was correct, she couldn't wait for the university's board of directors to send her back down to Mexico. So she had made her own reservations for a return flight, and told only Raul where she was going.

Raul had spent almost a week recuperating in the hospital in Mexico after his appendectomy. After that, since he was still unable to accompany Tanora into the field, he was flown back up to the states, so that he could at least help her fill out all of the incessant paperwork to explain where she had been, and how she had spent the university's money. She had been complaining to him even more than usual about how tedious she was finding the paperwork. But since he suspected just why she was chafing so much from being unable to return to Mexico, he was trying to be even more patient than usual with her.

His eyebrows had risen when she told him that she just needed a booty call, and that she would be back before the board even realized that she was gone. Since she was not the kind of woman who usually acted on those kinds of impulses, or even felt them, to his knowledge, he was even more surprised than he let on.

But she was not willing to share anything else with him, since she hadn't even talked with her mother yet. She was determined that she had to talk to Enrique first, and this was not the kind of thing that she wanted to attempt over a cell phone. She had not told Enrique that she was heading back to him, thinking that it would be the most fun to surprise him with her sudden arrival.

She sighed as she opened her eyes and looked out of the window, to see that already they were over the open countryside of Mexico, and that soon they would be landing, and she would have to think of how she was going to tell Enrique her news. She took a long

drink of water from the bottle in front of her, and brooded moodily as she gazed unseeingly out of the window.

Chapter Nineteen

After renting a truck at the airport, Tanora made the drive back to Enrique's town in record time. The weather was clear, so there was no reason for her to drive slowly. And her impatience made her foot leaden on the gas pedal. She felt her excitement rise as she got closer to the town, and by the time she was there, her stomach was full of butterflies, and her nerves were getting the better of her.

She drove directly to his office. Since it was Thursday, she knew that he would be done with seeing patients by mid-afternoon. She parked out back, and was just getting out of the truck when she saw him throw open the back door and look around expectantly. She was shocked. Even though they often anticipated each others' actions, she hadn't expected him to have any idea that she was there. She smiled, thinking that their connection must be even stronger than she figured, if he knew she was back in Mexico!

As she was getting out of the truck, she saw a taxi pull up, and a woman jumped out of the car and ran to Enrique's expectant arms. They embraced for a very long time, then she beckoned to him and they walked hand-in-hand over to the taxi. When Tanora saw them again, it was to see Enrique holding a baby and kissing its head, while the woman embraced them both.

Tanora was shocked beyond belief! Suddenly nauseous, she pushed herself back up into the truck and started the engine. Despite her arms shaking, she managed to drive all of the way to the hotel parking lot before she had to open the door and puke onto the nearby grass. When she was finally done vomiting, she leaned weakly against the door of the truck and moaned. She wiped her mouth with a napkin she had stuffed into her pocket while on the plane, then looked at herself in the side mirror. Her eyes were dull and her face was ashen.

"I look like hell!" She thought, "How appropriate, since that's how I feel! I fly all of the way back down here to see him, and what do I see? Him with another woman! And a baby! Oh my God! What do I do now?"

Tanora had to sit on the curb she had parked next to, in order to quiet her stomach down. She sat until she felt that she was able to walk again, and possibly talk long enough to register for a room. She resolutely grabbed her bag from the passenger seat, and headed into the hotel. She would stay the night, she reasoned, and drive back to Mexico City tomorrow. She would then catch the first flight she could back up to New Jersey and her mother, and then decide what on earth she was going to do after that!

~*~

After she registered, Tanora went up to her room to take a quick shower. She was still nauseated, but figured that was because it had been so long since she had eaten. She tried to lie down, but that only made her more acutely aware of how hungry she was. So she grabbed her purse and headed down to the restaurant.

There weren't any open tables when she got there, so she headed for the bar to sit and wait until she could eat. She ordered a coke, and nibbled on the pretzels out of the mixed snacks tray that was closest to her. She was carefully trying not to establish eye contact with any of the men at the bar, so she was not paying attention to anyone around her while she waited to hear her name called for a table.

She felt his presence behind her a moment before he said anything to her. He was so close to her that his breath was warm on the back of her neck.

"You are in my town, but didn't come to see me? Querida, why?"

She quickly whirled around to glare at him, meeting his welcoming and teasing smile with anger.

"Maybe I did! But you were too damn busy with another woman to even notice I was there!"

He gave her a shocked look while he shook his head.

"Another woman?"

"Yeah!" She spat out her words at him.

"Another woman, and her baby!"

Comprehension dawned on his face then, and he began to laugh, which only infuriated her even more.

"How dare you laugh at me? How long have I been gone? Barely a month? You counted the days to me at night, but found the time to be with other women too?"

She was suddenly overcome with nausea again, so anything she was going to say was going to have to wait. She got up from the bar stool and began to stride angrily away from him. She heard him throw some coins onto the bar to pay for her drink, then he was right behind her.

"Tanora, wait!"

"No!" She yelled without turning around, determined to get back up to her room to be sick in private. She didn't want to let him suspect anything. She just wanted to get away from him. She walked as fast as she could to the elevator door and pushed the button for up.

Enrique caught up to her and grabbed her upper arm, holding it like a vise.

"I wasn't laughing at you. We need to talk."

She whirled angrily to face him.

"I don't want to hear anything you have to say! Not now, not ever again!"

He shook his head, staring into her eyes.

"Remind me never to get you really angry!"

He used his free hand to brush back a strand of hair that had worked its way out of her ponytail.

"But you are so beautiful when you are angry..."

She slapped his hand.

"Don't you dare touch me!"

The elevator bell now signaled that the door was about to open, and when it did, a family passed by them on their way to the dining room. Tanora pushed at Enrique and got onto the elevator and quickly pushed the button to close the door. But not quickly enough. Enrique stuck his arm in-between the closing doors, and he got onto the elevator also.

A man tried to follow him in, but he glared at him, saying, “Sorry. There’s no room on this elevator for anyone else.”

The door closed again, and the elevator waited for further instructions.

“What floor?” Enrique asked.

Tanora was having to work very hard at controlling her stomach, so the thought of having it jump during the elevator ride was making her loathe to touch any buttons at all.

“What floor?” Enrique asked again, touching her elbow.

She shook her head silently, taking deep breaths and swallowing quickly.

“Fine, be that way,” he said with a long, heavy sigh.

He reached past her and pushed the button for the fifth floor. The elevator started to move smoothly upwards.

Suddenly Enrique reached past her again and pushed the stop button. The elevator glided to a stop and hung, expectantly, in mid air.

She turned to him angrily, praying that her stomach wouldn’t betray her.

“What are you doing?”

He smiled grimly at her.

“Ensuring we have some privacy to talk.”

“I told you I don’t want to hear anything you have to say!”

He shook his head.

“So, I’m tried and convicted and I don’t even get a chance to explain?”

“What is there to explain? I saw you with that other woman! I saw how happy you were to see her, how closely you hugged her, how happy you were to see the baby...”

To her shock, Tanora now felt hot tears behind her eyes, and she was horrified when a single tear rolled down her cheek. She tried to turn away from him so he wouldn’t see anything, but Enrique was too fast for her. He put one arm in front of her and rested that hand on the wall next to her. He used the fingers on his other hand to caress her chin, then he slowly raised her face up to look into his eyes. He used his thumb to wipe away the tear.

“Tanora, my heart, listen to me. There’s a reasonable explanation for all of this, and you are not being logical.”

She sniffed audibly.

“I don’t have to be logical. I saw you with another woman...”

He nodded slowly, “Yes you did. And the reason I was so happy to see her is that I haven’t seen my sister Rosa since her wedding last year. And I’ve never seen her first child. She’s my closest sister, so naturally I love her baby. In fact I got so carried away with admiring the baby and complimenting Rosa that I almost didn’t notice you until you were driving away. Then I yelled after you and tried to wave to get your attention, but you drove away like a bat out of hell.”

Tanora was still fighting her stomach, but slowly the words coming out of his mouth sunk into her consciousness.

“Your sister?” She asked in a small voice.

He nodded definitively.

“Yes. My sister. Remember, I told you I have five of them. She’s the only one older than me, so we are the closest in age. Her husband is down here on business, so she came along and brought the baby, so I could see him.”

Tanora felt like the elevator was stopping suddenly, as her stomach lurched and jumped. She had to swallow hard to hold everything down. Enrique watched her closely as she tried to form words.

“So the baby is your...”

He nodded.

“Nephew. He’s only four months old and his name is Peter. His father is Russian.”

Tanora shook her head, and realized that her body was shaking as well.

“I didn’t know how old he was...I didn’t even see him that well, since I was across the street. I thought...I thought...”

Enrique leaned closer to her, bringing his pelvis into contact with hers. He spoke in a low, urgent voice.

“How could you think I would be with another woman? All I can think of is you. When I close my eyes, I see you. I dream of you every night. You are the only woman I will ever want, for the rest of my life. We belong together, Nora. You and I are already a mated pair. You know that as well as I do. Don’t you?”

He leaned closer to her and gently touched her lips with his. This time when Tanora felt tears burn in her eyes, she didn’t try to fight them.

They pressed their lips together again, and both of them exhaled slowly, as their lips opened and their tongues dueled.

A sudden buzzer from the speaker over the buttons made them both jump.

“Are you all right in there? Do you need assistance?”

The voice was one of imperious authority, and the implication was that they had better be in trouble, or they were going to be in trouble!

Enrique said clearly, “We are fine. I must have hit the wrong button, that’s all.”

“Please continue on your way to your floor, señor, so that others may use the elevator also.”

“Yes, we will.”

Enrique turned to Tanora and raised his eyebrows.

“Floor?”

She reached over and hit the button for the eighth floor. The elevator smoothly resumed its journey.

Enrique used both hands to hold Tanora’s face, his fingers back in her hair, his thumbs gently wiping the tears off of her cheeks. He shook his head slowly.

“I love you, Nora. Only you. I live for you...only you. I burn for you, and only you. How could you even think otherwise?”

The elevator stopped moving and the bell signaled the door opening. Enrique and Tanora stood still, gazing deeply into each others’ eyes. The door chimed that it was closing, and Enrique reached his leg out to stop the doors.

“Which way?” He asked her as they got out of the elevator.

She pointed towards her room, and they headed off down the hall.

When Tanora fumbled with the key, her hands shaking, Enrique took it from her and opened the door. He gently pushed her through the open door, then followed her in and turned to lock the door.

With a cry, Tanora reached for him and he gathered her into his arms. Their lips met again, this time in a passionate kiss, and their hands roamed over each others’ bodies with frenzied abandon. Suddenly Enrique bent down and used one arm behind her knees to

lift her up and into his arms. Still kissing her, he carried Tanora over to the bed and unceremoniously dumped her into the center of it. She giggled as he tore at his own clothing, trying to get naked as quickly as possible. Buttons flew off of his shirt, and he didn't bother to remove his socks, but crawled up onto the bed as soon as he had his pants off.

“Some help here, girl,” he panted as he reached for her.

She giggled again as he tore her shirt up over her head, and reached around behind her to unclasp her bra with one hand. Then he pushed her over and his mouth found her breasts, and Tanora forgot all about her stomach, and felt only an all-encompassing need to have her man inside of her again.

They both worked at getting her naked, and soon she was, while Enrique's hands roamed all over her body, as he made sounds of satisfaction and admiration. He clamped his mouth onto her nipple again, and his hands alternately stroked, then poked their way into her various parts, as if he had to touch all of her, to reassure himself that she was all there. But Tanora hadn't traveled thousands of miles for him to only fondle her, as much as she was enjoying his touch. She needed more! She needed him!

She pulled him on top of her and spread her legs wide, as he aimed himself, then thrust himself into her core. There was no need for foreplay, when it had been such a long time for both of them! Tanora felt herself start to vibrate, then she moaned as her orgasms began, almost from the instant he was flush against her body.

Enrique held out as long as he could, but it had felt like an eternity since he had last enjoyed his woman. Way before he was ready to let go, he felt the pressure building, then he howled out his pleasure as Tanora screamed. He felt her squeezing him as she felt him spurt against her cervix...and still she screamed as she rode the waves of her orgasms, and she pulled Enrique along with her.

After what seemed like an eternity, Tanora finally collapsed, with every muscle in her body suddenly limp. Enrique used his arms to hold himself up and off of her, and rolled to collapse next to her, then he pulled her into his arms. They lay like that for a while, as they felt their own breathing gradually return to separate rhythms, and their hearts resumed normal beating patterns.

Tanora snuggled against Enrique, and he lifted his head up to kiss the top of her head, holding her close to his heart, caressing her gently with his other hand.

Finally he spoke.

“Is that why you came back to me? To tell me?”

She picked up her head to look at him in surprise.

“Tell you what?”

Enrique's smile was lopsided, even boyish-looking, and his eyes were soft and filled with adoration. He shook his head at her.

“Querida, I've certainly done enough pelvic exams to know a pregnant cervix when I feel one...” he began.

She made a face.

“Oh? And do you always use that special tool of yours for pelvic exams?”

He laughed softly.

“Are you always going to be so jealous of me?”

She nodded solemnly.

“Probably. I think you are the sexiest man who ever lived. So I assume every other woman thinks the same thing too.”

He sighed loudly, as he toyed with a curl in one of the locks of her hair that had worked itself loose from her pony tail.

“Welcome to my nightmare, Nora. I have met the woman of my dreams, and she is the sexiest woman on the planet. I will have to spend the rest of my life beating other men off of you with a large stick. But I will do it, because I love you, and because you belong to me and me alone. No one else.”

She leaned forward to kiss him, and they both sighed as their lips and tongues expressed deeper feelings than words could manage.

Finally they separated, and she put her head back down onto his chest, with a satisfied sigh.

“Besides,” he continued as if they had never stopped talking, “I slid a couple of fingers into you early on, to be sure you were as juicy as you always are. And fingers are what I always use for pelvic exams. So there’s no point in trying to pretend that you are not carrying my child. I know better.”

Tanora smiled so broadly that he could feel her lips move on his chest.

“Guilty as charged, doctor.”

He placed a finger under her chin and raised her head up so that he could look into her eyes.

“What were you drinking in the bar?”

She smiled.

“You mean when you over-paid for my coke?”

He nodded.

“Just plain coke?”

She smiled and nodded back.

“Uh huh.”

“And you are not going to go rushing back and forth between here and Princeton anymore either, young lady. Too much flying isn’t good for the baby. And no going out into the field again...”

“What?”

Tanora sat up to glare at him.

“Now wait just a minute!”

Enrique sat up also.

“No, you wait just a minute!”

“You’re not the boss of me!”

“No, but I am your doctor! You have to listen to me now...”

She shook her head.

“No, you’re the father. You can’t be the doctor too...”

He smirked at her.

“Oh yes I can. And I intend to be. I told you, no other man gets to see you naked anymore. Just me. I put that baby in there, I’m going to help you push it out too. No arguments from you, Nora, I’m warning you...”

She got up from the bed and stood next to it, yelling at him.

“You are not going to tell me what to do! I’m pregnant, not incapacitated! And if you think I’m going to act like some little, helpless woman just because I’m pregnant, then you can just think again!”

Suddenly all of the anger drained out of her face, and she was ashen once again. Tanora turned and ran to the bathroom, and Enrique sighed as he heard her puking. He waited until she had flushed the toilet, then he called out to her.

“Querida? I’m ordering us up some soda and crackers from room service. I know you feel really rotten now, but you need to eat to keep up your strength. And I’m supposed to meet Rosa and Greg for dinner downstairs at seven. Do you think you will be up for that?”

He looked up as she appeared in the doorway, leaning weakly against the jamb.

“Just order whatever. I’ll see what I can stomach when it gets here.”

Enrique blew her a kiss as he spoke into the phone.

Chapter Twenty

A little over an hour later, Enrique led Tanora into the dining room. She had showered, changed, and eaten a little, so the color had returned to her face. Enrique waved when he saw his sister and her husband, and he took Tanora’s elbow to lead her over to their table.

As they approached the table, the tall blonde man rose to grasp Enrique’s hand warmly.

“Enrique, it’s good to see you again.”

He nodded.

“Greg, thanks for bringing my sister and your gorgeous baby down to visit me. But I want to introduce you both to Tanora Doyle.”

Enrique rubbed his hand up and down the back of Tanora’s upper arm while he continued speaking.

“Tanora, this is Rosa, my older sister, and Greg Lubovich, her husband.”

He smiled and waved towards the baby carrier that was propped up on the chair next to Rosa.

“And that is Peter, their first child.”

Greg shook Tanora’s hand as well, and Rosa got up to take both of Tanora’s hands in hers to pull her close for a quick kiss on the cheek. Enrique then led Tanora to the chair on the other side of the baby’s seat, and he gallantly pushed her chair in when she was seated, before he sat in the chair next to her.

“So, you are both joining us for dinner?” Greg asked.

Enrique nodded.

“If that is alright with you two,” he began. “I’ll buy, since you are in my town.”

Greg snorted.

“The hell you will! I’m on a business trip. I have an expense account. My company will be glad to buy for all of us.”

Enrique shot a dark look at Greg and leaned over to argue with him

Rosa, meanwhile, was studying Tanora's face closely. Tanora was gazing at the sleeping baby with adoration on her face.

"He's beautiful!" Tanora sighed. "How old is he?"

Rosa smiled with motherly pride.

"Seventeen weeks. They reckon it in weeks all the way up until the baby is a year old, I think. Enrique would know."

"He's big, isn't he?" Tanora asked, continuing to stare admiringly at him.

Rosa nodded.

"He was almost ten pounds of screaming boy when he was born! Thank God for epidurals, is all I have to say!"

Tanora looked up quickly, with a worried expression on her face.

"Why?"

Rosa grinned.

"Because giving birth was the single most painful experience I have ever had!"

Tanora blanched visibly.

"It was?" She asked weakly.

Enrique now interrupted.

"Now Rosa, stop scaring my girlfriend."

He reached over to pat Tanora's hand.

"New mothers always want to share horror stories about the baby's birth. But you know what? They forget all about it as soon as the baby starts to smile. And by the time they get pregnant the next time, it's like some kind of genetically-programmed amnesia hits them, and all they can talk about then is how much they are looking forward to doing it again!"

Rosa stuck out her tongue at her brother.

"Spoken like a man, who won't ever have to experience childbirth!"

They all laughed.

Enrique shook his head.

"No, spoken like a doctor who has delivered more babies than I can count."

At that, the baby seemed to realize he was being talked about, and he started to whimper and squirm around in his carrier. Even though Tanora watched every move he made, she still jumped when he let out a hearty yell, demanding attention.

Rosa reached over to pick him up and croon to him, then she smiled around the table as she fumbled with a button that appeared to be in a hidden placket on the front of the blouse that she was wearing.

"I'm going to have to feed him now, or he won't be quiet long enough for me to eat. That alright with everyone?" She looked pointedly at Tanora.

Enrique chided her.

"I'm a doctor, remember? And your brother. I don't care. Tanora?"

She nodded.

"I don't mind."

She looked curiously at the blouse that had become open at just the right spot for the baby to be able to latch onto Rosa's right nipple.

"So the blouse has pleats in front, so no one can see the buttons for the opening?"

Rosa nodded.

The waiter arrived to take their drink orders, and Tanora was relieved that she wasn't the only one ordering a non-alcoholic drink, when Rosa also ordered a plain coke. Enrique ordered a beer, then looked at Greg in surprise when he ordered a plain coke also.

Greg smiled in explanation.

"I gave up alcohol when Rosa got pregnant. Kind of like showing solidarity with her. And she can't drink while Peter is still nursing, so I don't either. At least not when she's with me."

Enrique nodded.

"Sensible. That's a good way to encourage her to make healthy choices."

Rosa snorted.

"Healthy, schmealthy! Hey, it takes two to tango! If I can't drink, neither can he!"

Rosa continued to nurse the baby until he fell asleep. Then she excused herself to take him into the bathroom so she could change his diaper. Tanora asked if it would be alright if she accompanied Rosa, and they went off together, while Greg laughed out loud at them.

"Women! Always needing to go with each other into the bathroom!"

Rosa turned back and stuck her tongue out at him, then she and Tanora headed off.

Enrique watched them, smiling, as they walked away from the table. Greg watched him for a long moment, before he spoke quietly.

"You are going to have to give her a baby of her own, and soon, if she keeps on looking at Peter like that! I haven't seen such naked *baby-lust* on a woman's face since Rosa used to watch Theresa nurse Ricardo."

Enrique's eyebrows rose as he turned to regard him with surprise. Then he smiled.

"Actually, I already have. But don't mention it in front of Rosa. I only just found out an hour or so ago, when I tracked her down to the hotel. She had just snuck back into town to surprise me, when she saw me greet Rosa in back of my office, and she saw me holding Peter."

Greg smiled at Enrique as he raised his glass in a toast.

"Then congratulations to both of you!"

Enrique clinked his beer bottle against Greg's glass, before he continued.

"She thought I was cheating on her with another woman, since she had gone back up to the states. I had to do a lot of fast talking to get her to listen to me long enough to realize that Rosa is my sister, and the baby is my nephew. That's when she admitted to me why she had returned so unexpectedly and why she over-reacted like she did. Hormones can really do a number on a woman's logic, especially when they are first pregnant."

Greg rolled his eyes.

"Don't I know it?"

They both laughed, then looked up as the women returned to the table, with Tanora holding Peter gingerly, and Rosa smiling broadly at all of them. She strode up to her brother and leaned over to give him a big hug.

"Enrique! I thought you and I were best buds! When did you plan to tell me about it? And when are you getting married?"

Enrique smiled sheepishly as Greg laughed out loud.

“See, that’s what happens when they go to the bathroom together! I guess there’s no secret that women don’t share, even when they’ve just met, huh?”

Enrique nodded before he attempted to defend himself.

“Hey, I only just found out myself. I’m still getting used to the whole idea.”

He watched closely as Tanora crooned to the increasingly agitated baby, then reluctantly handed him back to his mother, who sat down to open the other side of her blouse.

Tanora now sat back down and smiled back at Enrique.

“What? What are you staring at?”

Enrique leaned over to give her a quick kiss.

“At my beloved, who is carrying our first child. You are showing great promise for being as wonderful at being a mother, as you are at pleasing your man!”

Tanora blushed deeply.

“Enrique!” She said in a shocked voice.

The other three adults at the table laughed at her.

“Querida, you are going to have to get used to the Reyes family, now that you are a part of it. We love with great passion, since that’s how our parents are about each other. And we don’t really care who sees what or where. In fact we are proud of our ability to love so deeply, and so well.”

He leaned over conspiratorially, to speak only slightly quieter.

“Remember? Like when we got that applause from the next room, while we were in the hotel room in *la Capital*?”

Greg’s eyebrows rose up to his hairline.

“Applause?”

Amidst the general laughing, the waiter reappeared to take their food order, so Tanora was saved from the others continuing to notice or remark on it as she blushed even more deeply from embarrassment.

Enrique reached a hand under the table, to rest it on her upper thigh. Her first instinct was to hit his hand away, since they were, after all, in a public place, sitting at a table with his sister and her husband. But then she rationalized that it would probably draw even more attention if she hit him, so she resigned herself to having to learn how to be more open about affection than her parents had ever been in front of her or anyone else. And when Rosa was done nursing the baby, and was able to put him back into his carrier, Tanora was not at all surprised to see that her hand moved under the table to rest on some part of Greg that wasn’t visible to the others at the table.

Then the food arrived, and everyone turned their attention to enjoying their dining experience. The conversation was general, with Enrique asking lots of questions, to catch up on what was going on with the various members of their family.

At one point, over dessert and coffee, Tanora sighed audibly while Rosa and Enrique animatedly discussed their sister Theresa, who was younger than them, but married with a child a few months older than Peter.

Instantly attuned to her, Enrique leaned over to ask, “What’s wrong, my love? Are you nauseated again?”

She shook her head.

“No. I’m just wondering how on earth I’m ever going to be able to remember all of the names of your brothers and sisters, since there are so many of them! I’m an only child, you know. When I go see my parents, it’s just the three of us.”

“Me too,” Greg interjected. “I’m an only child also. And it was really hard to get used to the very large gatherings of people every time there is a family event in the Reyes household. But since we go there for Sunday dinners fairly often, eventually I got used to it.”

“But you knew all of us from back when you dated Rosa before,” Enrique pointed out. “So when you re-connected, it was just a matter of remembering who was who.”

Greg shook his head.

“No, remember when I was dating Rosa before, you were all still mostly children.”

Enrique raised his eyebrows.

Greg smiled.

“Well, not you, of course. But your brothers were still in high school, and some of the girls weren’t even teenagers yet. They all look a whole lot different now. In fact, when I saw everyone at your Abuelo’s wake, I didn’t even recognize some of you.”

Rosa leaned over to explain to Tanora.

“Greg and I dated back when I was still in college. We even moved in together after I graduated. Then we had a falling out, and went our separate ways. We didn’t have any contact with each other for seven years...”

Greg sighed exaggeratedly.

“The longest seven years of my life.”

Rosa smiled at him, and he picked up her hand that was resting on the table and kissed her knuckles. She turned back to Tanora and continued.

“Then he hired my design firm to remodel the mansion he had bought, and I was the designer assigned to work with him. We agreed to keep our relationship just business until the mansion was done.”

Greg sighed again.

“The longest four months of my life.”

Rosa giggled.

“And the rest is history.”

Tanora nodded.

“Obviously the mansion got done, you got back together again, and got married and have a beautiful son. What a marvelous happily-ever-after story! Just like in a romance novel!”

Greg now laughed.

“Oh, I had to really work at it to convince her to move into the mansion with me, I can assure you. She was a tough customer, but I’m a very persuasive salesman. And much of my technique involved stuff that couldn’t be written in a novel without setting the pages on fire!”

Enrique took Tanora’s hand and linked his fingers with hers.

“Stop it, you two. You are going to make mi querida blush again.”

Tanora gave him a grateful smile.

“But yours was the second wedding in our combined backyards, wasn’t it?” Enrique asked to change the subject.

Rosa nodded.

He turned to explain to Tanora.

“Our Tío Alejandro bought the house behind ours, and he and Dad tore out the fence between the yards. Then we held a huge wedding celebration for Tío Alejandro and Tía Tegan. They had the actual ceremony under a tent, with a dance floor and a buffet in our two yards. It was the greatest party ever!”

Rosa nodded.

“Yeah, I was sixteen, and you were fourteen, right? Tía Tegan’s business partner Patti did all of the catering, and it was the best party the neighborhood had ever seen!”

Enrique nodded.

“Yeah, and that’s when we all met J.T., remember?”

“Patti’s husband?” Greg asked.

Rosa nodded.

“Yeah, she had advertised for an assistant to help her do all of the cooking. He rode up on his Harley to apply for the job. Once she got a look at that big, bald Roma, she never let him leave. They got married about a year later.”

“Roma?” Tanora asked.

Enrique nodded again.

“Yeah, it’s the name they prefer to gypsies.”

“Did they get married in your backyards too?” Tanora asked.

Rosa shook her head.

“Nah. They all went out to the reservation in South Dakota, where his family was staying. Patti’s kids went with, of course, but Tía Tegan was not about to miss her best friend’s wedding, so she got Tío Alejandro to take her and her kids out there too.”

Greg smiled.

“Then our wedding was the only other one held in the yards?”

Rosa nodded.

“Um hmm.”

Enrique leaned forward.

“Just out of curiosity, how long did it take to plan the whole thing?”

Tanora gave him a surprised look, but was silent.

Rosa shrugged.

“A couple of months, right, Greg?”

He nodded.

“I asked you to marry me at the Sox game, remember? We were there for my birthday, so it was in April. And we got married the end of June.”

Rosa looked closely at her brother.

“But won’t you get married down here? This is where you live.”

Enrique shook his head.

“I’ve been thinking about that.”

Tanora turned to look at him steadily.

“You have?”

He smiled back at her.

“Of course, querida. I’ve missed you so much, I’ve probably planned every instant of our wedding a hundred times.”

Rosa snorted.

“The wedding night, anyway!”

Tanora rolled her eyes.

“Honestly! She’s as bad as you are!”

Rosa smiled and tried to look innocent, rolling her eyes towards heaven, and using her index finger to make herself a dimple in her cheek as she smiled.

Enrique continued.

“But it would be a really big pain in the ass to have to have everyone who wanted to be at our wedding fly down here. Getting everyone’s schedule to mesh, everyone getting time off, paying for hotel rooms. It would be a logistical nightmare.”

“But my parents live on the east coast,” Tanora interjected. “Why not have it out there?”

Enrique spoke in his most persuasive tone.

“But Honey, there are only two of them, right? Even if we just invited our parents and siblings only, there would be nine people’s schedules we’d have to accommodate. Then there’s spouses...children...extended family...”

Greg chuckled, turning to Tanora.

“Believe me, whenever there’s a Reyes family celebration, they have to rent a hall! You need a really big space to hold that many relatives.”

Rosa turned to slap her husband’s arm gently.

“That’s true, but you know you wouldn’t have it any other way.”

He held up his hands in surrender.

“Of course not! I love your family! Every last one of them! And Patti’s family too.”

Rosa chuckled evilly.

“Even Tío Alejandro?”

Greg smiled back at her.

“Yes, even him. We’ve come to terms with the past. And I finally got a ring on your finger, so in my mind, I won.”

She leaned over and kissed her husband.

Enrique took that opportunity to lean over to kiss Tanora.

“Querida, think about it, alright? That’s all I’m asking. My parents would love the opportunity to plan another wedding. Tía Tegan and Patti would be thrilled to do the catering. Dad has an uncle who is a priest, so all we’d have to do is make sure he’s available on the date we picked...”

Rosa added, “And you could get married in June, too. It’s lucky to be married in June, you know. Or so I’ve heard.”

She patted Greg’s knee.

Tanora smiled at all of them.

“Okay, I’ll think about it.”

Rosa nodded, then got up, saying briskly, “Greg, it’s later than I thought it was. We need to get up to our room and try to get some sleep before Peter’s stomach alarm clock goes off again.”

She turned to speak to the others.

“He’s not waking up every hour these days anymore, but still he usually never sleeps more than a couple of hours before he wakes up hungry.”

Greg did an exaggerated stretch and yawn.

“Yeah, sleep, that’s right. We need to get some...uh...sleep...right now!”

He waggled his eyebrows, then winked at Rosa.

Enrique got up and pulled Tanora's chair away from the table solicitously.

"And I have my newly-pregnant fiancée to consider. We should call it a night too, right my love?"

Tanora nodded gratefully.

"That's a good idea. My stomach is feeling a bit queasy again, and being able to relax is a very attractive proposition right about now."

Enrique walked over to give Rosa a quick hug and kiss on the cheek.

"So since I have to work tomorrow, I won't be able to see you until dinner. How about you guys come over to my house tomorrow night, and I'll grill something up for us, okay?"

Rosa smiled.

"Sounds good. We were planning on driving to Mexico City early on Saturday, so we could see some of the sights. We are flying back home late on Sunday from there. So that gives us a couple of days to look around."

Enrique nodded.

"And since we were just there a month ago, we can give you the names of some good restaurants, and some really cool places to go see, some of which are off the beaten path, so not too over-run with tourists."

"And can you recommend a good hotel too? One with really thick walls, so no one can hear what goes on in your room?"

Greg's face was innocent, but they all laughed at his words.

Enrique leered at Tanora as he spoke.

"Oh it's a good hotel, alright. With four poster beds so you can get all tied up..."

"Rick!" Tanora shouted.

Rosa laughed.

"Stop scandalizing the girl, Enrique, you cad."

"Four poster beds, eh?"

Greg leered at Rosa. She pointedly ignored him to quickly embrace Tanora.

"Good night, Tanora. It was so nice meeting you. And I feel so special, because I will be the only one who has met you, so I will be the one they all have to toady to, or I won't tell them what you are like!"

Tanora laughed.

"Nice meeting you too, Rosa. At least I will know a couple of people, when I get introduced to everyone else."

Rosa nodded.

"Don't worry. You have e-mail, right? I'll send you a bunch of pictures, with everyone's names on them, so you can start learning who they are before you have to meet them all, okay?"

Tanora smiled and nodded, saying, "Thanks."

With that they all went out of the dining room together, and retired up to their respective rooms.

And much later, when Tanora and Enrique were once again lying in each others' arms, covered in sweat, but immensely happy, Enrique lifted his head up to kiss the top of Tanora's head.

"I've never been so happy in my life," he murmured. "And it's all due to you."

Tanora snuggled closer to him, already half-asleep.

“Um hmm,” she sighed, then her breathing became regular, and Enrique smiled into the darkness, before he too, succumbed to the night.

Chapter Twenty-one

Two nights later, while her husband was still talking on the cell phone to their daughter, Elinor Doyle got up out of bed and walked over to look out of the picture window overlooking the nearby park. She was still standing there, moodily staring out but seeing very little, when her husband walked up behind her and put his arms around her shoulders. He leaned his head down to kiss the side of her neck gently, before he spoke.

“We knew it would happen sooner or later,” he began.

“I know,” Elinor sighed out her answer.

“Then why are you not acting like the excited and happy mother of the bride-to-be?”

“I don’t know,” she said slowly, “It’s complicated. I mean, after the rape, I was afraid that she’d never recover enough to let someone into her heart. But when she was back last month, I could hear something different in her voice when she talked about this doctor that she had met. And she was acting weird...I’ll bet she is pregnant.”

Shamus turned his wife around and looked into her eyes.

“So what if she is? She’ll tell us when she’s ready to. But from what she says, he’s a good man, and they are both in love. I’m ready to give him the benefit of the doubt, for now.”

“But she’ll be living down there in Mexico! She’ll be so far away from us!”

“She’s traveled for her work for a long time now,” he observed, but his wife interrupted him.

“But she always came back home. And this was home. Here...in New Jersey. Where her parents are. Now her home will be so far away. When I want to hug her, I’ll have to fly half-way down the planet! And any grandbabies will be down there too! I miss her already, and she hasn’t even moved yet!”

She buried her face in her husband’s chest and inhaled deeply, to stop herself from crying. They stood like that for a while, both thinking over their feelings, taking comfort in the familiar solid feel of each other’s bodies.

Finally Shamus sighed and spoke slowly.

“We could have had a bigger family, I suppose. But you had so many problems with her, that I was too afraid of losing you to risk it. You are my life. I’d be lost without you.”

Elinor looked up to smile through unshed tears at her husband.

“I know. I feel the same way about you too. After all we’ve been through, all of the times we could have lost each other...”

They gazed deeply into each other’s eyes, both remembering the way they had met so many years before.

Deeply moved, Shamus had to clear his throat before he spoke again.

“One of the happiest days of my life was when you agreed that we were both getting too old to stay in the service...that it was time for us to live like normal people, without having to hide who and what we were from everyone. Then it took so long for both of us to get permission to leave, that I worried I’d lose you, when we had just found each other. And then our wedding was the next happiest day of my life. Followed by months of constant fear that I would lose you to complications from your pregnancy. When Tanora was born, I cried for sheer joy at having two females to love so much.”

Elinor reached up to gently touch the side of his face, rubbing her hand along the dark stubble that always appeared almost the instant he was done shaving. She wiped off the one tear that was on his cheek, and licked her finger.

“You are such an old softie, Shamus Doyle. I’m so glad I married you!”

He pulled her closer into his arms and they stood holding each other for a short time, taking comfort from familiar arms. Finally Elinor sighed and spoke against her husband’s chest.

“Well, I suppose if she’s happy, then we should be happy also, don’t you think?”

He nodded.

“I do indeed. Though I intend to find some way to impress upon this doctor of hers that if he mistreats my little girl, there is no place on the planet that he will be able to hide from me, and no medical procedure yet invented by man will be able to fix what I will do to him!”

Elinor giggled.

“Shamus! You can’t tell him that! We can’t risk anyone guessing that your books are not so much fiction, as a fictionalized re-telling of actual events that took place in your former life. And mine.”

He nodded.

“Agreed. But I could always tell him that in the course of my research for my novels, I learned things...” He paused significantly. “And that these things could conceivably result in painful and disfiguring accidents occurring to anyone who might have the audacity to not worship my daughter in the manner that she deserves.”

Elinor now pressed her pelvis forward, to rub against her husband’s, as she enjoyed his immediate and predictable response.

“All of this talk about our past is making me remember the really hot times we had back then,” she gave him an arch look.

He smiled.

“Oh, is it?”

“M-hmm,” she murmured while her lips traced a path from the center of his chest to his left nipple, and her hands continued to unbutton the half-opened pajama shirt that he was wearing.

He cleared his throat.

“Then may I suggest, Mrs. Doyle, that we move this discussion to yonder comfortable king-sized bed, where we can have plenty of room to closely examine the... uh...issues that arise.”

“Race you!” She said

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Much later, as they lay in each other’s arms, Elinor spoke softly.

“I will really miss her, though.”

Shamus nodded.

“Me too,” he murmured, sounding half-asleep.

“I think it will be fun to go out to Chicago to meet his family, though. We haven’t been there for years. And from what she says, it’s a big, fun-loving family. So she will be marrying into what we couldn’t give her.”

“M-hmm,” was his only response.

Elinor smiled and snuggled closer against his side. She sighed once more, before she also fell asleep from the tiredness born of giving and receiving pleasure, and the lateness of the hour.

Chapter Twenty-two

Three months later, Tanora led her parents through the O’Hare airport terminals, heading for the main concourse where they were to meet up with her fiancé.

She had returned back to her job and her apartment after she and Enrique decided to get married in June, in his parents’ backyard, as he had suggested. That gave her three months to work out the details of how she would be able to continue her research under the aegis of both universities: Princeton and The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico.

At first her immediate supervisors had balked at the idea, but when she threatened to just quit, they realized that since she was the one who had found the plants, they were in a delicate position. Trying to sue her or UNAM for the rights would tie everything up in court for a very long time, which would ultimately slow down the research and benefit only the lawyers. Working out a deal with her and the administration at UNAM was a very good choice for many reasons.

This allowed for Princeton to be at the forefront of cooperative research being done by representatives of both the U.S. and Mexico. Tanora didn’t care who took the credit at either university, for thinking of the idea. She just wanted to be able to marry Enrique, live with him in Mexico, raise their child, and still be involved with her life’s work.

She was also very happy that her parents had no objections to the wedding taking place at Enrique’s parents’ house. In fact, they had immediately made plans to extend their stay in the Chicago area, so they could revisit places they claimed had special significance to them from the early days of their relationship. As always, they were not forthcoming about those early memories...but Tanora had learned a long time ago not to ask too many questions. She was just relieved that they were not upset about not being able to participate in all of the wedding planning.

As for her, Tanora had long ago faced the fact that, unlike most of her girlfriends, she had not spent much time during her girlhood planning her wedding. She had never imagined herself floating down the aisle in an elaborate church ceremony, or in a fairy-tale-like dress suitable for a princess. So she was not at all upset that the selections she could choose from were hampered by her expanding belly.

“Empire-style it is,” she had announced, after going with her mother to a wedding dress salon and discovering that many of the dresses her mother liked, were much too fitted in the waistline for a pregnant bride.

“After all, Mom,” she had said, “By June I will be almost five months along. There’s no use picking a dress I won’t be able to squeeze into anymore.”

Noting her mother’s disappointed look, she suggested, “But why don’t you try on that one, Mom? They can make it in other colors, and as long as you don’t wear white, I don’t think it matters what color or style the bride’s mother wears. I mean you have to look nice, and that dress in, maybe a pale pink, or light green, would be spectacular with your skin color, don’t you think?”

So her mother had gotten the dress she liked the best in a light green, and found her father a shirt in the same shade, to wear with his best suit. And Tanora got a dress that she liked, that would not exactly hide her condition, but would fit so well that it wouldn’t be the first thing everyone noticed about the bride.

And now they were making their way through the world’s busiest airport, each of them carrying and pulling their luggage, as they looked for Tanora’s intended, who was to meet them in the main concourse.

Suddenly a man’s voice yelled, “Tanora!”

Her parents turned expectantly, to see a tall Hispanic man with short, curly black hair run up to Tanora to fold her into his arms. He held her closely to kiss her repeatedly, running his hands up and down her back in a show of great emotion more effusive than anything they had ever expressed in public, or even in front of their daughter.

He was accompanied by a taller Hispanic man and a strikingly beautiful Hispanic woman. The woman smiled at them as they watched the happy couple embrace.

“You’ll have to excuse Enrique’s lack of manners,” she said casually to them, holding out her hand to take one of the bags that Elinor was having difficulty not dropping due to having too much in her hands at one time.

“He’s really missed Tanora. In fact, he’s been boring the ass off of us, telling us all about how wonderful she is, and how our formerly bleak lives will be enriched for meeting her. Honestly, how you can let a paragon of all virtue like that out of your sight is a mystery.” She rolled her eyes in mock disgust.

Despite herself, Elinor laughed at the friendly woman who would soon be one of Tanora’s sister-in-laws.

“I’m the mother of that paragon of all virtue. I’m Elinor Doyle, and this is her father, Shamus Doyle.”

“I’m Catalina Reyes, and this other guy with me is Miguel, our brother. We came along to help you with all of the luggage and stuff that you would have. And good thing we did, huh?”

Elinor thought she was imagining the attractive woman giving her husband a quick once-over, but smiled when she noticed him straighten himself up a bit to appear taller. The woman was so friendly that she didn’t take any offense, but tucked away that memory to share with her husband later, when she would tease him about flirting with someone who would soon be a part of their extended family...in fact, a woman younger than his own daughter.

At that point, Tanora and Enrique seemed to remember where they were, and they separated enough for Tanora to introduce them.

“Mom, Dad, this is Enrique. Enrique, these are my parents, Elinor and Shamus Doyle.”

To her great surprise, Enrique let go of her to bow respectfully to her parents.

“I am honored to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Doyle. I am Doctor Enrique Edgar Reyes Hernandez, and I ask your permission to marry your beautiful daughter.”

Shamus looked at Enrique in surprise, then he smiled as he shot a quick glance over at his wife, who looked equally surprised.

He dropped the bags he was carrying to reach out a hand to firmly grasp Enrique’s right hand and shake it warmly, covering it with his other hand.

“Sure’n you were raised to be a proper gentleman, Enrique me lad. And it’s pleased that I’ll be, to see me daughter made an honest woman by such an honorable man.”

Tanora gave her mother a surprised look, before they both laughed out loud.

“Honestly, Rick, he rarely lets his accent bleed through like that. I think he really likes you!”

Elinor now moved forward to give Enrique a brief hug, and to say, “I think it was the bow, dear. And the formally asking us for permission, even though there’s precious little we could do to stop you now.”

She shook her head and smiled at everyone.

“You see, ever since she was a little girl, once Tanora got an idea into her head that she was going to do something, there wasn’t anything on earth we could do to stop her.”

Catalina snorted.

“Sounds like me! Gee, Tanora, I think we are possibly going to be really good friends!”

Everyone laughed, and the baggage was divided among the non-pregnant people, and got carried back to the suburban that was waiting for them at the curb. Behind the wheel was yet another attractive Hispanic man, who was busy arguing with one of the security guards who was obviously trying to get him to move the vehicle.

When he saw them approach, the driver pushed the door open and jumped out, saying loudly, “See, I told you they’d be right back, and here they are.”

He turned to the newcomers to say, “Hi, I’m Pablo. The other brother. I’m glad to meet you all, but we had better get out of here fast, before that uniformed guy makes good on his threat and calls the cops on me.”

While the Reyes family members got all of the luggage into the SUV, Shamus busied himself chatting up the security guard, animatedly asking about the health of his close personal friend, Richie Daley, and the various amenities he wanted to enjoy while he was in “da great city of Chicagah”. By the time they were all loaded into the suburban and ready to leave, the guard was giving Shamus directions on whom to ask for to get the best seats in some of the finest restaurants in the downtown area.

Shamus then climbed into the SUV to sit next to his wife and waved out the window at the guard.

Tanora shook her head in wonder, turning to her mother.

“How does he do that?”

Elinor laughed.

“It’s part of his folksy-Irish charm, Honey. He doesn’t use it very often, but when he turns it on, look out! Someone’s going to be missing a wallet...or their panties!”

“Mom!” Tanora said in a scandalized tone, as all of the other occupants in the vehicle laughed.

The ride was pleasant, with all of the passengers on their best behavior, and eager to get to know each other. It didn’t take long before they were in the suburb of West Chicago, pulling up into the driveway next to a modest two-story house. The driveway had two cars in it, but they were both parked on the same side, so the suburban was parked on the side closer to the front door, and all of the occupants spilled out to gather up the luggage and carry everything into the house.

The front door was unlocked, so the first one to get to the door opened it to yell into the house, “Mom? Dad? We’re here!”

Suddenly the front porch was filled with people who spilled out of the house, and the noise level was raised considerably. Edgar and Juanita managed to make their way through their children, over to the Doyles to introduce themselves.

Enrique spoke first.

“Mom, Dad, this is Mr. and Mrs. Doyle, Nora’s parents. And this,” he held out his hand and put his arm around Tanora when she moved next to him, “This is the love of my life, Tanora Doyle.”

“Enchanted to meet you, my dear,” Edgar said with a smile. Then he turned to the other parents.

He made a quick bow and said, “I am Edgar Santiago Reyes Solis. And this is my lovely wife, Juanita Maria Hernandez de Reyes. Bienvenida a nuestra casa. Welcome to our home.”

While the dads shook hands warmly, the moms gave each other quick hugs.

Enrique smiled at them and said to Tanora, “See Nora? I told you they would like each other.”

Tanora smiled also.

“Rick, I didn’t doubt you for a moment.”

Shamus looked over from shaking hands with Juanita to ask, “Did you just call him Rick? And he called you Nora?”

There was a small smile playing on the lips of both of the dads now, as Enrique and Tanora nodded together.

“Yes...why?” Tanora asked.

“Are you planning on getting a small terrier dog?” Shamus asked.

Edgar was beginning to laugh now.

“And you can name it Asta?” Edgar interjected.

Shamus continued, while he was also laughing, “Well, after all,” he said, pointing to Enrique, “He is a *thin man!*”

With that, both dads broke into peals of laughter, as they walked together into the house. The rest of the people stood on the porch befuddled, as they heard the two men still chuckling over their obscure joke as they walked.

“Rick and Nora! Asta! Thin man! Ha ha ha!”

“Ha ha ha! That’s rich! Say, Shamus, would you like a beer? Then I have a stack of books I’d like to ask you to autograph for me...”

“Mom?” Tanora asked.

“Madre?” Enrique asked.

Both moms smiled as they shook their heads.

“Men! Honestly!” Elinor said in mock disdain.

Juanita nodded.

“Too much TV viewing going on there, if you ask me. I’ve never been much of a fan of old black and white movies...unless, of course, they had Sean Connery in them! Now why don’t you let me show you the room you’ll be staying in? Boys, please bring Mr. and Mrs. Doyle’s luggage up to our room.”

“Oh, no! Señora Reyes, we can’t put you out of your own room!”

Juanita smiled, “Call me Juanita, please. And you’ll only be staying for a couple of nights. It’s the only king-sized bed in the house. We don’t mind sleeping on the double bed downstairs for a few nights.”

“You must call me Elinor. And thank-you very much. You know, we are planning on getting tickets to see some of the shows downtown while we are staying there. Please consider joining us at least once as our guests.”

Juanita put her arm around Elinor’s waist as they walked together into the house.

“That would be lovely! But first we have a wedding to run. Now I wanted to ask you about how you feel about the dinner choices...”

Their voices faded as they walked into the house.

Catalina was studying Tanora’s face; suddenly she winked at Enrique.

“Susa? Ama? Can you come with me a minute? There’s something I need to talk to you about.”

The three sisters all smiled at Tanora before they too, walked into the house.

Enrique looked closely at Tanora and asked, “Would you like to sit out here for a minute? To catch your breath?”

Tanora nodded and smiled back at him gratefully.

“Thanks. It’s kind of exhausting, being around that many people when you’re not used to it...especially since I don’t know them yet, except from the pictures that Rosa sent me.”

Enrique led her over to the comfortable chair swing, plumped up the cushions, then sat down and pulled her next to him, to begin gently rocking it back and forth.

“Cat figured you were kind of overwhelmed. That’s why she dragged Susana and Amalia into the house with her.”

Tanora smiled at him and he leaned over to gently kiss her lips.

“So the flight was fine? Everything is settled back in New Jersey?”

Tanora nodded.

“Yup. The universities have come to an agreement, and I shipped some of my things down to your house yesterday. The guy said it would probably take a couple of weeks, so they shouldn’t get there before we do. I’m all out of my apartment now, so I’m temporarily homeless.”

Enrique laced his fingers with hers and leaned over to kiss her again.

“No, querida. You are not homeless. Your home is wherever I am. This is where I used to live. We have a room rented at the Hyatt by the tollway for our first night together. Then we will fly down to Miami to get onto the cruise ship, so we can spend our first week together as a married couple exploring the Caribbean. Then we will fly from Miami back to our home. Back to the town of mi Abuelo, where we met and fell in love. And where we will raise our family.”

Tanora sighed happily.

“I’m so glad the morning sickness is pretty much done now.”

Enrique nodded.

“The second trimester is usually the easiest one. Lucky for us.”

“But if there are any problems, it makes me feel really secure to know that I will have my doctor with me.”

Tanora smiled at Enrique as he used a finger to lift her chin so he could gaze into her eyes.

“Tanora Doyle, I love you with all of my heart and soul. Every breath I take is a continuation of my love for you. I can’t wait until you are my wife, so the whole world will know that you are mine.”

Tanora smiled back at him, the light of love shining in her eyes.

“I’m so happy, Rick. When I met you, I was still so scared...I was afraid of everything. It wasn’t only my wrist that you healed, doctor. It was my life. You gave me back myself...my confidence, and my joy. Falling in love with you was the perfect prescription for healing me back to health.”

Enrique nodded solemnly at her.

“Even a doctor needs someone to love, Nora. My life was empty before you were in it. Now it is complete. And soon,” he patted her belly, “we will have someone else to love also.”

Suddenly Catalina appeared at the picture window next to the swing they were sitting on, and yelled at them through the screen on the side of it.

“Are you two going to sit out there all day? Sheesh! We have a wedding to plan, you know! This does involve you...so get your butts in here and help out!”

Enrique smiled at Tanora as he stood and held out his hands to help her get up. Then they walked, holding hands, together into the house.

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About the Author

I have always had stories in my head. I used to think that everyone else did too. Now I realize that is not true, so I like to share my stories with you! I write about independent contemporary women who are busy living their lives. When they meet equally strong independent men, the sparks fly! Eventually one or both of them realizes that they belong together. I truly believe in happily-ever-after endings, since I've been married for almost 30 years to the man of my dreams. I've grown really fond of the whole Reyes family, since so many of them have *told* their stories through me. I hope you enjoy reading about them as much as I enjoy writing about them!

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