



Paul Preston

Bella Lisa
& HER BEAST

The Adam & Eve Series Book Two

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The Adam & Eve Series, Book Two
by Paul Preston

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Chapter One

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Before the play started, as the house lights began to dim, Phillippe Williamson first encountered Bella Lisa Mauricio through his sense of smell. The alluring, feminine scent came from the lovely pink skin of the diminutive young woman seated in the row directly in front of him. In the fading light Williamson saw her look up at the stage and close her program. He followed the curve of her neck through the long silky strands of her light brown hair, from the pale white nape to the tantalizingly thin straps of her red evening gown. In his imagination, she preferred not to be confined by panties or a bra, so when he stretched the tight straps over her shoulders, the loose delicate material of her gown slipped away, falling like a feather to the floor, completely exposing her. Rather than covering herself in shame, she looked innocently over her shoulder at him with trusting eyes, keeping her hands and arms compliantly at her sides. She arched her back, allowing his shaft to slide in easily from behind, her moist lips opening for him like a flower in the morning sun. His palms caressed her quivering thighs, her firm torso and up and over the mounds of her soft ample breasts. His hands lingered there, his thumb lightly brushing the tips of her sensitive erect nipples. His hands came to rest on the smooth skin around her throat as his shaft slipped deeper and deeper into her womb. In the dark of the theater, he became immediately aroused.

As the house lights faded to black, he leaned forward and breathed in deeply, his lips only inches away from the tiny hairs on the back of her neck, drinking in her fragrance. Bella Lisa flinched slightly, tensing her shoulders. She thought she felt a wisp of breath on the back of her neck and could smell the strong musky aroma of men's cologne. As she turned to glance behind her into the dark, Williamson had leaned back into his seat and

glanced downward. As the stage lights reached full illumination, Williamson looked up directly at her with unsmiling and smoldering eyes. Emerging from the shadows, Bella Lisa saw a powerfully built, sharply tuxedoed, black haired man with a handsomely chiseled virile face. She guessed his age to be in his mid to late thirties, much older than herself. The sensual aroma of his cologne lingered in her nostrils, disorienting her, and she caught herself involuntarily breathing it in.

Looking back into those cold hard eyes, Bella Lisa lost herself for a moment, as several thoughts flitted through her mind. At eighteen years of age, she was by now used to the gazes of lustful men everywhere she went. All the boys in high school gaped at her cleavage, face and behind hundreds of times a day, it seemed. Having the combination of a sexy beautiful super model for a Mother and a famous attractive television actor for a Father made her popular and free-spirited at school, with the very pretty face of a young girl but the sensual and responsive body of a well-endowed older woman. She really didn't mind the sneaking glances of all the boys, or even the salacious looks of the older teachers. As she matured, Bella Lisa became flattered by all the attention men gave her with their hungry looks. Whenever she caught men staring at her, she would always smile graciously and demurely or even perhaps a trifle flirtatiously at them, secretly excited by how much they seemed to want her.

That's why God gave men eyes. And staring never hurt anyone.

As Bella Lisa got older, she dressed a little more provocatively, wearing sexy tight fitting clothes that showed off her well-proportioned body. She knew the attention she received from men made her feel a little less alone. Her parents were quite busy with their careers and rarely at home growing up. Since her father was cast in the play, she was able to spend her last summer in Seaside City

with him before going off to the University. *At least Dad has always tried to be there for me*, she thought.

The cold haunted eyes staring at her in the dark theater were intriguing, but she didn't want anything to distract her from missing the start of the play and the entrance of her father's character. Ordinarily she would've responded to the man's gaze with a gracious and innocent smile, but this time she raised her eyebrows to the gentleman in a disapproving if slightly fetching manner and turned back around.

"Pervert," she whispered, loud enough for him to hear.

Bella Lisa turned her attention back to the stage and waited for her father's character to appear.

One look was all it took and Williamson was literally stung by her beauty. In that brief moment his heart raced wildly and his breath stopped as he gazed into her face.

Her watery eyes were wide, light brown and invitingly vulnerable. Tendrils of her long curling brown locks fell past her high cheekbones and over her shoulders, coming to rest on her fully developed young breasts. By the look of her smooth teenage skin and visage, he estimated her to be seventeen or eighteen at the most, making him more than twice her age. Her slightly parted lips were full and bright red, glistening with a sheen of wetness.

When he heard her clipped, feminine, unintentionally flirtatious voice call him a pervert, it was as if some sort of poisonous creature had whipped its sharp tail into his groin, stinging his inner thigh. It didn't seem like it was just his overactive imagination acting up again. He could actually feel some kind of sharp pointed object, like a scorpion's barb, enter his skin and sting him in the pelvis, causing a painful swelling there. He wished he had an aisle seat so he could slip away without disturbing the other patrons and go check himself in the men's room. *I'll just have to wait until intermission*, he thought. Luckily she had turned away so he had the chance to instinctively rub the

area around the stabbing pain, feeling his hardness against the back of his hand. Glancing to his right and left, Williamson adjusted himself in the dark of his theater seat and rubbed the strange, rather painful inguinal ache. Caused by what?

An insect? A spider? An enchantress in the dark?

At intermission Bella Lisa remained in her seat, reading the program notes. Williamson could hardly concentrate on the first act, the area of his pelvis throbbing with pain. He slipped out of his seat and up the aisle, unnoticed by her. He crossed the lobby, waited for a stall to open up in the men's room, went in and shut and locked the door behind him. He removed his pants and observed his groin area in the bright florescent light. The skin was red and swollen, perhaps from how he was rubbing it, but he could find no evidence of the bite of an insect or spider. He did notice that the blue veins running across his pelvis seemed more pronounced. That seemed to be where the pain was coming from. He tried to recall if he may have pulled a muscle doing squats, leg lifts or running vigorously on the treadmill during his last work out session. Though he had worked his body into a lathering sweat, he didn't remember injuring himself there. Williamson used the facilities, zipped up, washed his hands and walked through the lobby, looking at photographs of previous theatrical productions mounted on the lobby walls. When the house manager rang the bell signaling the beginning of Act Two, rather than returning to his seat he decided to go to the courtyard outside the theater to get some fresh air and try to walk off the pain.

As he walked further away from the theater and the young woman, the pain thankfully subsided a bit. He watched as the courtyard was being set up for the opening night catered party, with each table adorned with fresh flowers and champagne flutes on top of elegantly pressed white linen, just as he requested. Williamson picked up a

glass of champagne from a silver tray on the buffet table and took a sip. He decided to take a walk through a grove of trees to wait for the show to end, trying to calm his throbbing pelvis and beating heart. He shut his eyes, resting the back of his head against the smooth bark peeling off of a eucalyptus tree. He loosened his black bow tie slightly. Breathing in the tree's fragrance, he was surprised, despite the dull ache in his groin, to feel a sense of lightness or even an expectation of happiness creep into the dark and deadened core of his soul. Williamson felt the wisp of a cool ocean breeze come off the Pacific Ocean as he sipped his Moet. He leaned back and tried to calm his mind with the visage of the unknown woman's lovely face.

As the lights faded on the final scene of the play, Bella Lisa was the first to begin the applause, her face beaming with pride for her father's performance as he took his bow with a flourish. She wanted to give her dad a standing applause, but felt a little embarrassed that she would've been the only one standing, since the applause had quickly died down and became tepid. As the house lights came up she stood, clutching her purse against her side. She inadvertently shot a quick glance behind her at the strange man, but the seat was empty.

Where was he? How rude of him to leave before the end of the performance.

Bella Lisa brushed her fingers through her thick hair and inched up the steps of the aisle with the crowd. She looked up toward the back of the theater and saw a man standing at the top of the steps. She focused her eyes and realized it was him, gripping the railing tightly with his fists and staring over the crowd and up and down each aisle with that same burning intensity in his eyes. Bella Lisa watched him surveying the theater with his mouth slightly open and lips parted, as if he was looking for someone or something he had lost.

When their eyes met, she could see him release his grip on the railing and the furrow on his brow became smooth.

Was he actually looking for me?

She stared up into those hard brown dead eyes and responded to the man's attentions without her usual warmth. Instead, Bella Lisa shivered. She broke off eye contact for a second to wrap a thin black silk shawl around her bare shoulders. When she looked up again he was gone. She slowly made it to the top of the stairs, chiding herself for giving him the cold shoulder again. After all, he was only looking at her as every other man had done. But there was something in that look that disturbed her, as if she was looking into the eyes of a caged and hungry animal.

Lurking in the shadows of the trees, Williamson watched Bella Lisa make her way into the courtyard, gracefully sipping a flute of champagne. She greeted several people, mostly men, smiling at each one pleasantly and flirtatiously. She chatted in a charming and open manner with each gentleman who greeted her, wrapping the silk scarf tightly around her white shoulders, causing her breasts to press upward and outward, allowing more of her deliciously abundant cleavage to spill out of her loosely fitted red gown. Williamson's pelvis once again began to throb painfully at the lovely view and he rubbed the sore spot, hidden in the dark of the trees. Other men continued to notice her and make ever decreasing circles around her like a school of tuxedo clad sharks, smelling blood. He could see her occasionally looking through the crowd before another man would demand her attentions, hoping to make her his mistress. After a few minutes her father came out with the other actors from the dressing rooms to join the opening night party. Bella Lisa immediately ran over and gave Marc Mauricio a warm embrace and kiss on the cheek. Mauricio smiled, grabbed a champagne flute from a silver tray and took a long deep drink from it.

Of course. What good luck. She's the daughter of Mauricio!

The resemblance was unmistakable. Williamson immediately felt a rush of excitement, his heart pumping, his blood surging through his veins. Now he would be able to see the beautiful young woman again, and soon. He remembered publicity shots of Mauricio's ex-wife, a brown-haired slender super model, whom Mauricio had married and quickly divorced at the height of his popularity during the five year run of his popular TV show.

That's where she got those stunning looks from.

Williamson never felt his cold heart pound so powerfully in his chest. Though he was immensely successful in all facets of his professional life, he still felt empty inside and alone. He smiled, looking down at his feet, chuckling out loud at his folly, as if he had cast himself in some seedy romance novel in the role of the dashing rich entrepreneur who had found everything he wanted in life, except love. He rubbed his eyes, trying to shake off the effects of the champagne.

There's no way a woman of her age would want anything to do with me. What do I have to offer, other than money? I'm just another one of the desperate sharks, circling the waters.

Glancing through the trees at his limo, idling in the parking area, Williamson fought the instinct to slip through the grove and disappear. He would've gone off to his club to try to forget her, but he knew the Artistic Director expected him to make a fundraising pitch in a few moments.

As Williamson remained cloaked in darkness, he saw Bella Lisa sidle through the crowd to stand in the front row as the Artistic Director of Seaside City Playhouse began his speech to the assembled crowd of donors and media, introducing the playwright, director and actors. As the Director spoke, Williamson's mind wandered back to the

moment he gained access to the theater's inner circle. It was his good fortune that he answered his phone when the telemarketer called his condo, asking for a donation to the year-end fundraising drive. The theater got his private number when he bought tickets to support a wealthy client whose stock portfolio he managed, whose son was cast in a show. Williamson was reading the earning results of the fourth quarter when the phone rang. The combined net profit from Williamson Investments, Inc., Williamson Real Estate Holdings, Inc. and the A and E Club had risen over 25 percent, reaching the fifty million dollar mark for the first time. He answered the phone as he was going over the numbers. After listening patiently to the earnest young man's long monotonous scripted pitch asking for a \$150 dollar donation, Williamson spoke up.

"Excuse me for interrupting, I know what you're doing is tough. I started out as a telemarketer, just like you."

"You did, sir?"

"Yes. And I understand what it feels like, people hardly listening to you, saying rude things, hanging up on you all the time."

"You got that right, sir. You're the first person all night that's even talked to me."

"Is that right? Well, you gave a very convincing presentation and because of you I want to help support the Arts. I'd like to donate \$25,000..."

"Wh... What did you say, sir?"

"\$25,000 dollars. You get roughly 10 percent, I would guess? That's \$2,500 in your pocket. Not bad for a two minute phone call. Merry Christmas."

"I... I can't believe it! That's so generous of you, Mr. Williamson."

"Are you ready to write down my Amex number?"

The impulsive donation turned out to be one of the best business decisions Williamson had ever made. It put him on the Board of the theater and gave him instant access to a

new potential pool of wealthy patrons of the arts, their families and their friends who may be in need of his investment and real estate services. The donation also allowed him to sponsor one show per year out of the season. When Williamson found out the wealthy actor, Marc Mauricio, had been cast in the show he was assigned to sponsor, he tried to get to know him by attending a few rehearsals and giving him encouraging comments. One evening they decided to meet for a drink to get to know one another. When Mauricio told him that he dappled in the market, Williamson offered to do an analysis of his investment portfolio. The subject also came up that Mauricio was looking to move away from the noise and traffic of Los Angeles, so Williamson showed him a few days later a three bedroom condo with wrap around views that was currently on the market in the oceanfront building Williamson owned and lived in. Williamson closed him on the deal that day.

The escrow period passed smoothly and his home loan was approved easily. The key exchange was scheduled in two days for Sunday afternoon. His assistants usually did such menial tasks, but perhaps he could shift some appointments around and do it himself. Williamson wondered if Mauricio's daughter would be there when he dropped off the keys.

As if on cue, Williamson stepped out of the shadows just as the Artistic Director looked in his direction and continued his speech.

"Ah, there he is, always lurking in the shadows, watching us, behind the scenes, like the Phantom of the Opera, pulling all the strings! So at last but certainly not least we wish to give a big shout out to our board member, successful entrepreneur and philanthropist, Phillippe Williamson, for underwriting this production. Without his generosity, all this would not have been possible. He's notoriously shy and elusive, hiding over there in the trees,

the handsome devil, and by the way ladies, Seaside City's most eligible bachelor, but maybe if we put our hands together we can encourage him to come up here and say a few words."

The audience applauded warmly as Williamson made his way to the platform. As he passed through the crowd he playfully arched an eyebrow at Bella Lisa, observing her surprised expression with a half-smile meant only for her

Bella Lisa watched Williamson stepped up on the platform, greet the Artistic Director, shake his hand and put his arm around the shoulder of her father. The three men posed for a photograph and the light flashed, momentarily blinding Bella Lisa.

Who is he? And how does he know my father?

Williamson looked out at the crowd and made his speech.

"Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for coming tonight to attend the opening of "The Last Petal of the Rose". I won't keep you from enjoying the buffet table, catered by Wolfgang Puck. Just one thing. There was an envelope placed in your program this evening. As you leave the opening night party I ask each one of you to consider making a donation to help Seaside City Playhouse continue its mission of premiering original and audacious new plays and musicals, as well as to support the theater's education programs for our Seaside City schools. There is a box on the pathway leading to the parking area you can drop your donation in. Now let's raise our glass to the success of our play!"

Williamson raised his champagne with the crowd and took a sip, staring at Bella Lisa and smiling. Bella Lisa responded with a quizzical little smile of her own and tentatively joined him in the toast. As the crowd started lining up at the buffet tables, Mauricio touched Williamson on the elbow and spoke to him. Bella Lisa tried to listen in on the conversation.

“Phillipe, there are a few people here I’d like to introduce you to.”

“Thanks, Mark. Maybe next time. I’ve got to be at the office early. I wanted to mention to you that the real estate agent that’s been handling your transaction is busy this weekend so I’ll be meeting you instead on Sunday afternoon at 3 to transfer the keys for your new condo.”

“Great, Phillipe. Sunday at 3 is perfect. I can’t wait to move in.”

“You’ll love living in Seaside City.”

“Thanks for setting it all up.”

“It was my pleasure. Also I took a quick look at your stocks. Your holdings are kind of risky. You’re overexposed in the Health Care Sector.”

“I’ve done pretty well by them so far. High risk, high return, right?”

“Yes, but listen, Marc. More often than not I’ve seen Health Care stocks drop quickly in the wrong direction. After the corporate officers and institutional investors sell off their shares, if you’re not paying close attention, individual investors like yourself are left holding the bag. They have a saying in this business, “You can’t catch a falling knife.” I should know. I’ve tried and gotten cut. More than once. When things go bad, they can go bad in a hurry. I’d like to talk to you at a better time about diversifying your portfolio.”

“Sure, Phillipe. Sure.”

Mauricio seemed distracted, looking for someone in the crowd. Williamson took that as his cue to leave.

“Anyway, Marc, I’ve got to go. You go enjoy the party. Congratulations on a great opening. See you Sunday.”

“See you then.”

As Mauricio and his daughter walked over to the buffet table, Williamson disappeared through the eucalyptus grove.

“Have you seen my agent, Bella?” Mauricio asked.

“I forgot what he looks like Daddy.”

“That’s OK. Did you like the show?”

“I loved it! You were great in it. I bet you’re going to get glowing reviews.”

“I don’t read reviews.”

Bella Lisa grabbed a plate and looked to see a tall man in a clearing between the trees, standing beside a black shiny limousine, looking in her direction. As soon as she noticed him, he turned away. Another man opened the door for him, he got in and the limo sped away.

When Williamson had returned to his penthouse condo, he dismissed his private security team, Cogworthy and Luman, for the night. He went to his bedroom, stripped off his clothes and looked once again at the peculiar and tender veins bulging from the skin of his pelvis. He got out some lubricant and rubbed the sore spots, deciding to have his assistant Firmin call his physician first thing in the morning to see if he could set up an appointment, after the market closed at 1PM, to see him.

Williamson could not stop thinking of Ms. Mauricio. He wished he knew her first name. The more he thought of her, the more his groin ached. It had been a long day and he was exhausted. He got into bed and fell asleep thinking of her chatting with a gentleman in the courtyard of the theater. The man had made a joke and her body shook with girlish laughter. As she leaned forward, her arms wrapped around herself, her rounded pert breasts bounced with each laugh, nearly falling completely out of her dress, her light brown aureoles clearly peeking out from under the red fabric. He slept fitfully.

At one point in the early morning hours, he woke up in the middle of a wet dream, grinding his painful pelvis into his soaked bed sheets, imagining the sexy young woman below him. She looked innocently into his eyes, turned out her wrists and stretched her arms over her head, offering herself to be bound...

On Sunday afternoon he met Mauricio to sign the final documents, officially transferring ownership of the condo to him and to hand over the keys. Williamson bought Mauricio an expensive bottle of French wine and four crystal glasses as a housewarming present.

“You mentioned you were driving your daughter to college next weekend,” Williamson said as the crystal glasses clinked together.

“Oh yes. Bella Lisa got accepted at Stanford University. We always provided her with private tutoring and she did exceptionally well on her SAT’s. She’s an excellent student. Her Mother and I are really proud of her,” Mauricio boasted.

Bella Lisa. So that was her name. Williamson wished he were alone to say her beautiful name out loud. Bella Lisa Mauricio.

“Stanford. That’s really impressive. She must be a very bright young woman. What’s her major?” Williamson asked.

“I think she said Sociology or Social Work, something like that,” Mauricio said, swallowing the rest of his wine.

Mauricio was in a rush to attend a meeting across town and left soon after finishing the wine. Even though he was disappointed Mauricio’s daughter had not shown up for the appointment, Williamson felt the meeting was a success. He learned her first name, her area of interest and where she was going to be for the next four years.

From Sunday evening until Tuesday morning Bella Lisa was occupied helping her Father move into and decorate his fancy new beachfront condo. It was modern and chic inside, renovated with marble countertops and wood flooring. The kitchen had brand new stainless steel appliances. Each large bedroom had floor to ceiling glass windows and balconies with tremendous views overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the skyline of downtown Seaside City. The place must’ve cost a fortune. It was so luxurious that

she wished she had more time to enjoy it, but she had to leave for college in just a few days.

She hoped her dad would be able to manage the mortgage payments. She knew he was made wealthy by the residuals of his TV show, but she never felt comfortable discussing financial details with him, and Mauricio never volunteered any information. After the success of his show, he never was able to find a permanent acting job again, though he kept himself busy playing small parts in films, doing commercials, plays or looking for his next job. Her Dad had always been very generous with her and she was thankful to her parents for saving up enough money to completely pay off her tuition and living expenses for all four years at Stanford in advance, so she didn't have to take any student loans. She did agree to get a job off campus during the summers to give her a little extra spending money, so she would be living upstate all four years. If they were free, her mom or dad would fly her out during Christmas and Spring breaks to visit her. At least that was the plan.

After they were finished moving in, Bella Lisa took a walk on Tuesday afternoon to check out the new neighborhood. She found a Starbucks around the corner, ordered a coffee and sat down to relax. Even dressed in dirty jeans and a sweaty t-shirt, three or four men of various ages hit on her, trying to find out her name and engage her in meaningless conversation.

Why am I a magnet for every lonely, horny man in Seaside City?

Bella Lisa tried to keep her answers short while checking her cell phone for messages. She finally got a text from her mom in St. Tropez on a photo shoot, congratulating her for graduating high school and apologizing for not being able to attend the ceremony. She had promised to visit her soon at Stanford. She fended off admirer number four by pretending to look at sections of

the newspaper that had been left in a communal pile. Her eyes drifted over the pictures as she flipped randomly from page to page in the pile. She saw it completely by accident. The photo was on page 3 in last Sunday's Arts Section. She first saw her father's charming smile, then the Artistic Director as he shook the hand of the strange man.

What was his name, Phillip or Phillipe?

She smoothed over the creased picture of her Father on the slightly stained and torn newsprint, proud of him for getting his picture in the paper. She read the caption under the photograph.

"Artistic Director, Geoff Josephson, Board Member, Phillipe Williamson, and actor, Marc Mauricio celebrate at the opening night of "The Last Petal of the Rose" currently playing at Seaside City Playhouse."

Her father and the Artistic Director took a good photograph, looking directly into the camera lens and smiling. But for some reason Williamson's eyes were focused elsewhere, to the right of the camera and slightly downward, capturing his strong jaw.

She had to finally admit to herself that he was an exceedingly handsome man, it was plain to see. Though she wanted to look at her father in the picture, her attention kept drifting back to Williamson. There seemed to be a heat and desire emanating from his eyes, or a hunger, as if whatever he was gazing at he wanted to swallow, whole. His lips were parted and she could see his teeth were firmly clenched together. Bella Lisa wondered what he was concentrating upon so intently. Then it struck her.

Could it have been me?

After the camera flashed, Bella Lisa thought she remembered seeing him through the spots in her eyes, looking down at her from the platform. The passion in his eyes was there for all to see, but was the heat and desire directed at her?

Or is it all just in my imagination?

She looked over her shoulder, carefully tearing the page out of the newspaper.

Perhaps Dad would like to see the picture.

Before she folded the inscrutable photograph up into a square, she looked at it once more, imagining the deep voice of Williamson speaking to her from the picture.

It is you, Bella Lisa Mauricio. You were the one I was looking at. You're the one I want...

Shaking her head and smiling at her silly thoughts, she slipped the photograph into the back pocket of her jeans. Bella Lisa took a sip of coffee. Remembering the theater reviews usually came out in the Tuesday paper, she bought an LA Times and returned to the condo. Even though her dad never read reviews, Bella Lisa was excited to see them. She hoped they would be positive.

After the market closed on Thursday, Williamson read the thorough report he asked his security team to email him. They conducted a surveillance of the movements of Bella Lisa Mauricio from Sunday through Thursday. Luman was positioned in the condo's security office, monitoring the lobby and parking area cameras and Cogworthy was stationed on the street outside of the building's entrance.

8/16/08 7:30PM - Subject arrives with M, parks in assigned space; both take elevator up to condo. They both leave condo in car at 7:55PM.

8/17/08 11:15AM - Subject arrives with M at condo, parks in assigned space, both take elevator up to condo. 12:10 PM moving truck arrives and double-parks in front of condo. M greets two men in lobby and all three men take elevator up to condo. From 12:25PM until 3:15PM the two men move belongings up to condo. The two men leave at 3:30PM. At 4:45PM Subject leaves condo with M. At 5:55PM subject returns with M, park in assigned space. They carry several grocery bags and both take elevator up to condo.

8/18/08 10:35AM - M leaves condo with car. At 2:45PM Subject leaves condo, walks around the corner and enters a Starbucks. At 3:20PM she returns with coffee, takes elevator up to condo. At 7:17PM M returns, parks in assigned space, takes elevator up to condo.

8/19/08 9:03AM - Subject leaves condo, walks around corner to Starbucks. At 9:14AM she returns with coffee, takes elevator up to condo. At 11:19AM M leaves condo with car and returns at 6:16PM, parks in assigned space, takes elevator up to condo.

8/20/08 9:01AM - Subject leaves condo, walks around corner to Starbucks. At 9:16AM she returns with coffee, takes elevator up to condo. At 10:47AM M leaves condo with car and returns at 5:41PM, parks in assigned space, takes elevator up to condo.

Williamson clicked delete and the email disappeared.

If she is a creature of habit, this should work.

He knew he had only one chance on Friday morning, since Mauricio was driving his daughter to Stanford the next day. Williamson shifted around his business meetings and left his most trusted and competent employees in charge of both of his enterprises until 11AM Friday morning. His assistants at the investment firm whispered to each other how odd it was that Mr. Williamson was coming in late Friday, as he was always behind his desk with his three computer screens fired up by the opening bell.

At 8:30AM Friday morning Williamson took the elevator down from his 25th floor Penthouse and walked through the sliding glass doors into the Fitness Center, which was located directly across from the elevator in the lobby. There were only two other people currently working out, a man on a stationary exercise bike and a woman on an elliptical machine. Williamson felt fortunate that the machines they had chosen to work out on were located far to the side and closer to the back of the large room. He got on the

treadmill located directly in front of the entrance and started warming up by walking at a steadily increasing pace. Luman called his cell from the hallway on the fifteenth floor at 9:03AM.

“She’s on her way, boss.”

Williamson breathed out a sigh of relief and smiled.

This might actually work.

Williamson propped open the Fitness Center’s front doors.

“Good. Inform Cogworthy she’s coming and take the elevator up to my Penthouse. Hold the elevator there until you hear the signal from Cogworthy,” Williamson instructed.

“Yes, sir,” Luman said.

Williamson cranked up the speed of the machine to its highest level, his muscular legs flying at a full sprint. His Nikes pounded loudly on the rapidly spinning and whirring treadmill and his strong arms pumped like pistons at his side to keep pace. Sweat had already started beading on his forehead and dampening his clothing.

When the elevator doors slid open Bella Lisa stepped out into the lobby and immediately stopped reading her magazine when she heard a very loud and repetitive slapping sound. When she looked up toward the noise, she couldn’t believe what she saw.

It’s him! What’s he doing exercising in Dad’s building? Could he live here too?

Bella Lisa held her breath and paused momentarily in the middle of the lobby to stare at him, running like an Olympian on the treadmill. As soon as she made eye contact with him, he smiled nonchalantly at her, with sweat dripping off his face, as if he had seen her there every day of his life. Bella Lisa nodded back with a blank look and without her customary warm smile. In that brief moment she couldn’t help but be impressed. *Pushing himself to such extremes must come easily to him*, she thought. His

lithe and athletic body moved with the youth and power of a man half his age. She observed how his thickly veined and muscular arms pumped vigorously in unison with his flying legs. He wore a form-fitting classy blue polo shirt that seemed painted upon his barrel-shaped chest and sleek tight black Nike sweatpants that showed off the well-cut ridges of his calves and thighs. He continued to look at Bella Lisa in a pleasant and non-threatening manner as he tore up the treadmill.

Suddenly, she felt embarrassed for standing there for so long and staring at him, so she gave him a strained smile, looked back down at her magazine and continued to walk out of the lobby. As soon as she left the building, Williamson powered down the speed to a walk, grabbing the handrails to keep from falling, taking deep gasps of air. He dried off his face with the towel. When his breathing returned to normal, Williamson's cell phone rang.

"She just arrived at Starbucks, sir."

"Thanks, Cogworthy."

Williamson got off the treadmill and spoke quickly to the front desk clerk who made a call. Within a minute or two a custodial worker came into the lobby and sprayed glass cleaner on the mirrored elevator doors and polished them until they sparkled.

Williamson picked out a pair of the largest barbells on the rack, put them down in the space between the front of the treadmill he had just worked out on and the entrance of the fitness center. Then Williamson waited. In a few minutes his cell phone rang.

"She's on her way, Mr. Williamson," Cogworthy said.

"OK. Follow her to the door and call up to Luman on my signal."

"Yes, sir."

Unable to refrain from smiling like a mischievous boy, he picked up the barbells and started his reps, alternating arms. Bella Lisa came into the lobby a moment later.

To avoid further embarrassment as she entered the condo, Bella Lisa decided to resist the temptation to watch the beefcake any further, keeping her head down and walking directly to the elevator. She pressed the up arrow and waited. It seemed to be taking forever to come down.

Was it stuck?

She didn't feel like walking up fifteen flights of stairs, so she pressed the arrow again, tapping her toe on the floor. She breathed in the strong smell of ammonia sprayed on the closed elevator doors. Looking up, she saw him again, lifting weights in the reflection of the polished mirrored glass. He stood directly across from her and appeared to not have seen her come back into the building. Since she could spy on him this way in the reflection without him knowing it, Bella Lisa watched as he pumped large steel free weights in each fist as if they were light as air. She could not take her eyes off his massive arms, the muscles rippling, and especially the thick blue veins bulging out from his skin. You could almost see the blood surge through those veins as the curling muscles expanded and contracted. Following the veins down his arms, she noticed how the sweat made his shirt cling to his striated abdominal muscles. As if no longer in her control, her eyes drifted lower and she noticed an enormously thick bulge under his tight sweat pants. It snaked a third of the way down his long right thigh, pressing against the thin silky material, as if it were trying to escape. Each movement of his arms caused the shaft to thrust upward and outward, the ridged bulbous crown clearly evident to her eyes.

With lips slightly parted, she let herself stare.

Men stare at me all day long, why can't I be the one who stares for a change?

Though she was experienced in fighting off boyfriends who always insisted on getting naked with her, she had never seen a physical specimen of that size and girth before, even in the naughty magazines her girlfriends

surreptitiously passed around at school. She kept checking his eyes in the mirror every few moments to make sure he didn't catch her looking. He stood stiff and straight as a statue as he pumped the iron, his eyes focused on a point above her head. Bella Lisa intuitively knew the instant a man was ogling her, even if he was doing it from behind her. But he seemed completely oblivious to her as she watched his rippling muscles, his thick blue veins, his striated abs and the outline of his enormous erection. Her mouth was dry and she caught herself licking her lips. She took a sip of coffee, smiled and enjoyed the view.

After Williamson was quite sure Ms. Mauricio had gotten an eyeful, he put the free weights back on the rack and placed his palms on the glass surface of the wall, leaning forward to stretch out his hamstrings. Peering into the front door of the lobby, Cogworthy placed a call to Luman, who sent the elevator back down. The whoosh of the door opening startled Bella Lisa back to reality. Williamson watched her take another sip of her coffee, step in, turn around and press her floor. He resisted the strong temptation to look at her one last time. The elevator doors closed and she was gone. Out of habit and an ingrained protective instinct, Williamson checked over his shoulder to make sure no one could hear him talking to himself, before he spoke out loud.

“Have a good four years of college, Ms. Mauricio.”

Chapter Two

Four Years Later, Day One: Saturday

Bella Lisa quietly sat in the front seat next to her father, sipping on industrial strength gas station coffee, on the long drive from Stanford to Seaside City. He had made it to the graduation, sat through the endless ceremony and afterwards gave her a bouquet of flowers and a congratulations balloon. Her dad seemed very proud of her getting her degree, if somewhat uncharacteristically subdued. They packed all her earthly belongings in the trunk right after the ceremony and hit the road, avoiding all the post-graduation parties.

It was just as well. She had just gone through another messy break-up a few days ago and didn't want to bump into the guy, especially in front of her dad. She knew he would make an embarrassing scene again, whining even more so than the last one. It seemed every time she let a guy she was attracted to touch her breasts, or even worse, have sex with her, it drove them crazy. Having sex inevitably changed them for the worse. Though she felt quite comfortable with and very much enjoyed the momentarily heightened sensations of sex, after the intimacy, her feelings for them would pretty much remain for the same. In fact, she was always slightly let down afterwards. There was an excitement at first, but it never lasted. She wished at least once in her life she would be passionately swept away by the cute guy she was dating.

I've got to stop reading those trashy romance novels Mom keeps sending me.

Of course, for the guys it was a completely different story. It was as if her body became their new drug of choice, and each successive boyfriend over the last four years of college became increasingly addicted to her. One taste and they were hooked. They would become annoyingly possessive and jealous, complaining about how the clothes she wore attracted too much attention to her

body. They would fight like ugly barking dogs with every other guy that looked at her. Or they would become like little cloying puppies, following her around constantly, never giving her any space, lapping and nipping at her heels. The same pattern would occur for her each time. After she had sex once or twice with any boyfriend, they began acting weird; she'd lose her attraction for them and then not want to see them again. They would act as if their world was coming to an end just because she no longer wanted to have sex with them anymore. But after the shouting and anticipated sessions of name-calling and recriminations, she would have peace in her life again. After all the break-ups she finally learned that she really didn't want a long-term commitment at this point in her life. She didn't want to follow some earnest guy to a podunk town, raising kids and becoming active in the PTA.

I want to do something more in my life, something important.

She was glad to be free to return to Seaside City, get a job, perhaps to eventually go on and get her Master's degree in Social Work and do something valuable with her life. She also looked forward to living in that beautiful condo her dad had bought before she left for college, relax a little after all her final exams, lay out on the beach in the new swimsuit she had bought herself as a graduation present and read a few more of those romance novels her mom had sent her.

They made pretty good time and stayed for the night at a hotel a few hours south of Stanford. They ate a quiet dinner at the small restaurant in the hotel before retiring for the night. They left early the next morning. Her dad was usually very talkative, but he said barely a word on the whole trip. *Maybe this would be the right time to talk to him*, she thought.

"Hey, Dad?"

"Hmmm?"