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Description:

Review "Lori Foster . . . threads hot sensual tension into a suspenseful tale." -- *Romantic Times*

"Lori Foster delivers the goods." -- *Publishers Weekly*

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. Angel tried to meter her breathing, to look calm, but her heart felt lodged in her throat and wouldn't budge. She hated doing this, had sworn she'd never so much as speak to the man again after his last, most devastating rejection. But she'd been left with little choice.

With her shoe box tucked beneath her arm and one hand on the wall, offering support, she made her way down the hall to Derek's office. She still felt awkward without her crutches, but she knew better than to show him any weaknesses at all. When she reached the open door, she straightened her

shoulders, forced a smile, and tried to make her steps as smooth as possible.

Derek sat behind his desk, his chair half turned so that he could look out the window at the Saturday morning traffic. The rest of the building, except for the security guards, was empty, just as she'd planned.

He was still as gorgeous, as physically compelling as ever, only now he looked a little disheveled, a little ruffled. She liked this look better than the urbane businessman he usually portrayed. The only other time she'd seen him relaxed like this was right after he'd made love to her.

That thought licked a path of heat from her heart to her stomach and back again, and she had to clear her throat.

His chair jerked around and his gaze pierced her, freezing her on the spot. Even her heartbeat seemed to shudder and die. Only his eyes moved as he looked her over, slowly and in excruciating detail, as if he'd never seen her before and needed to commit her to memory, then their eyes met and locked. For painstaking moments they stayed that way, and the heat, the intensity of his gaze, thawed her clear down to her toes. Her chest heaved as she tried to deal with the unexpected punch of reacting to him again. It shouldn't have happened; she didn't care anymore, wasn't awed by him now. Her infatuation had long since faded away, but seeing him with his straight brown hair hanging over his brow, his shirtsleeves rolled up, made him more human than ever. His gaze seemed brighter, golden like a fox, and she tightened her hold on the shoe box, using it to remind herself of her purpose.

She saw some indiscernible emotion cross his face, and then he stood. "Angel."

His voice was low and deep. As he rounded the desk his eyes never left hers, and she felt almost ensnared. She retreated a step, which effectively halted his approach. He lifted one dark eyebrow in a look of confusion.

Idiot. She didn't want to put him off, to show him her nervousness. That would gain her nothing. She tried a smile, but he didn't react to it. Moving more slowly now, he stepped closer, watching her, waiting.

"Can I take your coat?"

She closed her eyes, trying to dispel the fog of emotions that swamped her. When she opened them again, she found him even closer, studying her, scrutinizing her every feature. He lifted a hand and she held her breath, but his fingers only coasted, very gently, over her cheek.

"You're cold," he said softly. Then he stepped back.

"Can I pour you a cup of coffee?"

Angel nodded, relieved at the mundane offer. "Thank you. Coffee sounds wonderful." Walking forward, she set her shoe box on the edge of the desk and slipped out of her coat, aware of his continued glances as he collected two mugs from a tray. She didn't mean to, but she said, "You seem different."

He paused, then deliberately went back to his task. "Oh? In what way?"

With one hand resting on the shoe box, she used the other to indicate his clothes. "I've never seen you dressed so casually before. And offering to pour me coffee. Usually you"

He interrupted, handing her a steaming mug. "Usually I leave domestic tasks to women, I know." He shrugged, gifting her with that beautiful smile of his that could melt ice even on a day like today. "But you insisted no one else be here today, so I was left to my own devices. It was either make the coffee, or do without."

Angel fidgeted. "You know why I didn't want anyone else here. Your family would have asked questions if they'd seen us together."

He nodded slowly. "True." Then he asked in a low curious tone, "Why are you here, Angel?"

Flirting had never come easy to her, but especially not these days. She smiled. "I've missed you, of course. Didn't you miss me just a little?"

He stared a moment longer, then carefully set his mug aside. "Most definitely," he said. He took her coffee as well, placing it beside his, then cupped her face. Strangely enough, his fingers felt rough rather than smooth, and very hot. He searched her every feature, lingering on her mouth while his thumb wreaked havoc on her bottom lip, smoothing, stroking. "Show me how much you missed me, Angel."

Now this was the Derek she understood, the man who always put his own pleasures first, the man who had always physically wanted her. That hadn't changed. Without hesitation, surprised at how acceptable the prospect of kissing him seemed when all day she'd been dreading it, she leaned upward. He was much taller than her, and her leg was too weak for tiptoes, so she caught him around the neck and pulled him down.

When her mouth touched his, tentative and shy, she felt his smile. She kept her eyes tightly closed, mostly because she knew he was watching her and she felt exposed, as if he'd guess her game at any moment. It had been so long since she'd done this, since she'd kissed a man, and she was woefully out of practice and nervous to boot. If necessity hadn't driven her to it, she'd have gone many more months, maybe even years, without touching a man. Especially this man.

But now she was touching him, and shamefully, to her mind, it was rather enjoyable.

Tilting her head, she parted her lips just a bit and kissed him again, more enthusiastically this time, nibbling his bottom lip between her teeth. His humor fled and he drew a deep breath through his nose. "Angel?"

"Kiss me, Derek. It's been so long."

The errant truth of her words could be heard in the hunger of her tone, something she couldn't quite hide. His answering groan sounded of surprise, almost anger, but kiss her he did. Wow. Angel held on, stunned at the reaction in her body to the dampness, the heat of his mouth as he parted her lips more and thrust his tongue inside. His body, hard and tall and strong, pressed against hers. It had never felt this way, like a storm on the senses. Her heart rapped against her breastbone, her stomach heated, her nipples tightened, and he seemed to be aware of it all, offering soft encouragement every time she made a sound, every time she squirmed against him. She wasn't being kissed, she was being devoured.

"Damn, Angel."

"I know," she said, because everything was different, somehow volatile. "I didn't plan on this."

He paused, his lips touching her throat, then raised his face to look at her. He said nothing, but his

hand lifted and closed over her breast, causing her to suck in her breath on a soft, startled moan. Oh no. She was so sensitive, and she hadn't realized. "Derek"

He kissed her again, hard, cutting off her automatic protest, then backed her to the desk. His groin pressed against her, making her aware of his solid erection, of the length and heat of it. Her plans fled; there was no room in her brain for premeditated thought, not when her body suddenly felt so alive again, reacting on pure instinct. His hand smoothed over her bottom, pulling her even closer, rocking her against him. Her leg protested, but she ignored it, an easy thing to do when his scent, his strength, filled her.

"How long has it been, Angel?"

She clutched his shoulders, her head back, her eyes closed, as he kneaded her breast with one hand, and kept her pelvis close with the other. Surely he knew as well as she did, so she merely said, "A long time."

"And you've missed me?" He nibbled her earlobe, then dipped his tongue inside. "Why didn't you call?"

Even in the sensual fog, she saw the trap. "After the way you acted last time?" She was astounded he would even ask such a thing!

He hesitated, then asked, "How exactly did you expect me to act?"

She stiffened as she pulled back. "Not like you couldn't have cared less! And after the way you'd betrayed my trust! You got me fired, you"

"Shhh." He kissed her again, lingering, and his hand started a leisurely path down her body, measuring her waist, which thankfully was slim again, then roving over her hip. Her thoughts, her anger, turned to mush. She caught her breath with each inch he advanced. His fingers curled on her thigh, bunching her skirt, then moved upward again, this time underneath, touching against her leggings. He cupped her, startling her, shocking her actually. But she didn't move and neither did he. She tried to remind herself that this was what she'd hoped for, but it wasn't true. She'd stupidly hoped for so much more.

His fingers felt hot even through her clothes, but he was still, just holding her, watching her again. "Why now, Angel? Why this secret arrangement?"

She decided a partial truth would serve. "There's been no one but you."

"And you needed a man, so it had to be me?"

"Yes." That was true, too. She didn't know who to trust, who to fear, so for what she needed, no one else would serve. But she hadn't planned on her own honest participation. Her body reacted independently of her mind; she felt shamed by her response to a man she should have loathed, but overriding that was some inescapable need, swamping her, causing her whole body to tremble. Maybe the pregnancy had altered her hormones or something, but she'd never in her life felt like this, and it was wonderful.

She pressed her lips together and squeezed her eyes shut. Her body felt tightly strung, waiting, anticipating. She dredged up thoughts of the past, of all the reasons she had to despise him, why his touch could never matter

He seemed a bit stunned as she moaned softly and her fingers dug into his upper arms. He held her close, his own breathing harsh while his mouth moved gently on her temple. In all her imaginings, she had never envisioned this scenario, allowing him to touch her there, with her half-l...

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