

Longing For Love Sample

Prologue

Fourteen months ago

When your life hangs from a thread, every new moment is a treasure. An evening under the stars on a rooftop with the woman of his dreams should've been the high point of Ethan's life—even if that rooftop belonged to the hospital, and their companion was an oxygen tank.

Sitting in his wheelchair, a hospital mask on his face and a blanket wrapped around his shoulders, Ethan Cadman relished the softness of Dr. Emery Love's warm hands as she pulled a wool cap lower over his bald head and tucked his ears inside it.

"*Voilà!* The best view of the city!" She adjusted the blanket around him, to protect him against the chilly December wind. "If you have to catch pneumonia once a month anyway, let's make it worth it!"

She's so beautiful. At another time in his life, Ethan would've been plotting how to get her out of her scrubs and into his bed. Heck, he'd been fantasizing about having her all to himself for months. But right now, his body felt sucked dry of every bit of energy.

Fort Sunshine's humble skyline shone in the night. Every so often, a dark spot indicated abandoned, decaying buildings—a testament to the town's economic depression. Once, Ethan had taken pleasure in making them shine again; but tonight, he felt like one of them: dark, cold, and empty. On the street below, car headlights swirled like aimless glow fish.

"And stop talking nonsense about giving up, Ethan. Of course, you can do this." Dr. Love opened a cup of Jell-O and handed it to him with a plastic spoon, then removed his mask and adjusted the oxygen cannula so he could eat. "You remind me of a super-ball; the harder we doctors smash you to the floor, the higher you bounce."

Even in the midst of his depression, her attempt at humor warmed his soul.

He shouldn't complain. Technically, she wasn't even his doctor—her business partner was. But it had been a small blessing that she was the physician on call almost every time he'd been admitted. She'd definitely gone beyond her duty tonight, sneaking him out of his room in the oncology unit when he'd said he was dying to be outdoors.

"I'm not bouncing at all." Ethan dipped the spoon into his blue Jell-O. "Every cycle of treatment is harder than the last one. Right now, I feel like a truck ran over me."

"Hey, that's improvement!" Grinning, Dr. Love opened a cup of red Jell-O for herself and sat on the ground next to his wheelchair. "On your last admission, you said you felt like a train loaded with elephants had run you over."

No matter how dangerous the reason for his admission, they would minimize it and joke about it. Normally, that was enough to cheer him up—heck, he was usually the comedian making her and the staff laugh. But today nothing could brighten his spirit.

"My last admission?" He groaned. "It obviously wasn't the last one—and something tells me this one isn't it either." He sipped a spoonful of Jell-O that tasted like stale vitamins. "Shouldn't we have already figured my chemo dose by now? I'm sick of it all. The nausea; the excruciating fatigue; the low blood counts causing fevers." And now he hated himself for showing weakness. He'd taken so much pride in being the patient who never complained. *What's the point? To her, I'm not even a man.*

His eyes traveled to the cars on the street below. No, he would never dare jump off the building. But there was some morbid pleasure in knowing that if he accidentally tripped, he'd be gone so fast he'd probably feel nothing. Maybe that would be less painful than this never-ending battle.

He expected Dr. Love to joke again, minimizing his illness. Instead, she surprised him by kneeling in front of his wheelchair and wrapping him in her arms.

His first reaction was shock, and then emotion flooded him. Embracing her, he gave himself permission to savor the warmth of her body, her pleasant jasmine smell, and her hands sliding up and down his back. He knew she was bending the doctor-patient rules—and he felt deeply grateful for it. An unexpected peace descended over his soul.

Her voice cracked and lacked its usual cheerfulness. “Ethan, do you have any idea how hard I’ve worked to keep you alive?”

He smiled against his will, knowing by heart what came next. She swallowed and finished her lines in a whisper. “If you die now, I’m going to kill you.”

Those words never failed to make him chuckle. “Thank you, Dr. Love. I needed that.”

She slowly released her embrace. Then she sat back on the ground next to his wheelchair lacing her fingers with his.

He closed his eyes for a moment, enjoying the silkiness of her hand. *If she only knew how much I crave her touch.* The ghost of his libido flashed by.

“Dr. Love, would you marry me?” It wasn’t the first time he’d blurted those words.

She tittered. “You’re so cute, Ethan, but I have to decline the honor—again.” She wiggled her left fingers, showing her humongous diamond ring. “You know I’m already getting married.” In spite of her words, she didn’t remove her right hand from his.

He winked with a weak smile. “We’ll see about that.”

“There’s your sense of humor!” she celebrated, tightening the grip of her hand.

They stayed in silence for a while, watching the city lights.

You think I'm joking, but I'm not. He clutched her hand as if it were the lifeline to all the dreams he feared he'd never have. *You'll be the mother of my future children—if I make it out of this alive.*

Chapter 1

Ethan Cadman pressed the trigger of the fire extinguisher while aiming at the flaming dish towel and oven mitt on the stove. The stream of foam spurted with a satisfying swish, leaving a cloud as he swept it back and forth.

Once the flames disappeared, he set down the extinguisher and grabbed his phone from the golden granite counter. He angled the screen to prevent his friend Jay, on FaceTime, from noticing the mess, while speaking in a calm voice. “As I was saying, man, everything here is under control.”

Ethan used his free hand to turn on the kitchen fan and open the window to dissipate the smoke—God forbid the fire detectors went off. “I’m taking good care of your girls. The dog is fed and walked, the litter box is clean, and the plants are watered.”

“I should’ve canceled this trip when the doctor placed Allison on bed rest! I can’t stop worrying,” Jay said, knotting his dark eyebrows. “Can I talk to Gracie?”

“Let me check if she’s awake.” Placing the phone against his chest to cover the camera, Ethan turned to Jay’s nine-year-old niece and her sleepover mate. Holding hands in their pajamas, the girls trembled, gawking at the smoldering dish towel remains. They’d surely learned their lesson about trying to cook without adult supervision. He mouthed, “I got your back. Now go to sleep.”

Still shaky, Gracie whispered, “Thanks, Uncle Ethan.” Then the girls ran back to the bedroom.

Ethan returned his attention to the phone. “Sorry, Gracie is already asleep. But for the thousandth time, Jay, relax! Allison will be fine. She’s carrying a baby—not a time bomb.”

Ethan could hardly keep a straight face. There was something funny—and cute—about seeing his muscular former roommate transformed into this bundle of nerves about his wife’s pregnancy.

“Please make sure Allison takes her prenatal vitamins,” Jay asked.

The doorbell rang and Ethan strolled to the door. “I will.”

“And that she drinks the protein shakes I left for her.”

Ethan winced inwardly. Convincing Jay’s wife to drink those through her morning sickness was difficult. He opened the door for the pizza delivery guy. “Uh... Okay.”

“And make sure she has plenty of fruits, vegetables, and lean protein,” Jay continued. “Don’t let her fill up on junk food.”

Ethan angled the phone to prevent Jay from seeing the pizza box he’d just accepted from the man at the door. “Don’t worry, man. I’m on top of her nutrition.”

As Ethan carried the pizza to the open-concept kitchen, Jay said, “Thanks for staying there. I wish you’d at least let me pay you—like a house sitter or something.”

Ethan appreciated his friend’s desire to help him. But his financial mess couldn’t be fixed by house sitter wages. “Don’t mention it, man.”

“How did the job interview go at Courts Inn Hotels?”

Ethan left the pizza box on the granite counter. “Mr. Harvey and I hit it off. I’m hoping it makes up for my unimpressive résumé.”

“What unimpressive résumé?” Jay protested. “You’ve been remodeling homes since you were practically a kid; you’re overqualified for that job in maintenance—not to mention your current gig as handyman.”

“But I don’t have references, precisely because I always worked for myself.” Searching the off-white lower cabinets, Ethan gathered supplies to clean up the fire extinguisher residue. “This job at Courts Inn is my best hope of getting new health insurance.”

Ethan glanced down and realized his black T-shirt was covered with fire extinguisher foam. “I have to go now, man. Talk to you later.”

He disconnected the call and pulled his shirt over his head to study it. *Shoot. I hope this washes off. I can't even afford a new freaking shirt.*

“Sir, you forgot to sign.” The voice made Ethan realize the delivery guy was still standing at the door.

“Oops, sorry.” He headed back to the door, tucked his phone under his arm, and did his best at scribbling a signature on the receipt in spite of his clumsy, numb fingers. As he returned the pen, the young man studied him.

“Is that a chemotherapy port?” the teenager asked, pointing at the quarter-sized round bulge on Ethan’s upper chest.

Ethan nodded while slipping his shirt back on. “How do you know about that?”

The delivery boy hesitated. “My dad had one placed not long ago. He’s getting chemo for stage three colon cancer.”

Ethan winced. “Sorry to hear that.”

The young man bowed his head, and they exchanged a look of mutual understanding of two survivors of the same shipwreck.

“What do you have, if I may ask?” the boy said.

“I *had* lymphoma. I finished chemo a year ago.”

“Are you cured?” The young man’s voice rang eager and hopeful.

Ethan smiled. “My doctor says that until five years have gone by, I’m only allowed to say I’m ‘in remission.’ He won’t even let me remove the port for another year ‘just in case.’” He winked. “But I *know* I’m cured.”

“You look great!” the boy commented pointing at Ethan’s full head of brown hair, then waving vaguely at his fit body.

“And your dad will too again. Trust me.” Ethan sent him reassurance with his eyes.

“Thank you. I hope you’re right.” The young man sighed. “He hasn’t been able to work and is very frustrated about the medical bills piling up. That’s why I took this job, to help out.”

Feeling deep sympathy for him, Ethan gave a single nod.

The boy seemed reluctant to leave, as if he’d just found an old friend and resented the goodbye.

“Tell your dad he should join us sometime at the local support group.” Ethan searched for a card in his wallet. “Right now meetings are on hold while we find a new place to meet, but we hope to resume soon.” He extracted the last bit of cash he had, a twenty-dollar bill, and extended it to the young man with the card. “And here’s your tip. Have a good night.”

The boy’s eyes bulged at the sight of the bill and he blurted effusive thanks. But before the moment turned awkward, Ethan waved goodbye and closed the door.

Yup. Twenty dollars more or less would not fix or worsen his own financial mess. And that family needed the money more than him.

He carried the pizza into the home office. There, his friend Allison rested in a recliner with her computer on her lap.

Allison’s face lit up at the sight of the pizza. She clapped quietly in celebration before taking the box and attacking its contents.

He pointed at the wall clock. “Finish your night snack and go to sleep, missy. It’s bad enough I’m feeding you pizza behind Jay’s back; I don’t want to also lie to him about your bedtime.”

“The pizza was an emergency!” she argued after swallowing a bite. “Even a cracker makes me throw up, but *this* I can keep down—go figure. Crazy morning sickness.” She rewarded him with one of her elusive warm smiles. “Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. I’m the only male friend you have who’s been pregnant.”

She chuckled at their usual joke about his time on chemotherapy.

Between bites of her second slice of pizza, Allison commented, “I talked to Hope earlier. She and her husband really liked you during your job interview at Courts Inn.”

“I liked them too.” He moved her laptop to the side table to protect it from the dripping cheese. “Turns out T.J. volunteers in programs to help cancer survivors and offered to help me fundraise for the support group.”

“Nice, but don’t get sidetracked. I wanted you to meet them because they can help you straighten out your finances. Before working for Courts Inn Hotels, Hope specialized in rescuing businesses from bankruptcy, and T.J. worked for one of the country’s top tax accounting companies.”

As Allison talked, Ethan hardly paid attention. His whole focus rested on the screensaver on her computer, showing Allison at a restaurant with four girlfriends. One of them was Dr. Emery Love. The most fascinating woman he’d ever met.

“Earth to Ethan!” Allison snapped her fingers, making him react.

He gave an apologetic smile and pointed at the screen. “Sorry. I got distracted for a moment admiring the future mother of my children.”

“Oh, drop it.” Pushing away the remainders of her pizza slice, Allison gave Ethan a once-over. “I’ve heard you bluff for a year about going after Emery, yet you’ve never done anything about it.”

She moved to rise from the chair, and he held her arm to support her. At two months pregnant, Allison wasn’t showing yet and didn’t need help, but he’d promised Jay to treat her like delicate glass and he planned to keep at least that promise. “I’ll get there. I just have to... psych myself up.”

“First, the excuse was that you needed your hair to grow back after chemo,” Allison continued as he walked her out of the office. “Then it was that you wanted to regain the weight you’d lost...”

And don’t forget that I can’t face her when I’m risking bankruptcy.

“Then you started dating one tramp after another...” Allison narrowed her sky-blue eyes and moved a blond strand off her forehead. “Are you making excuses and avoiding Emery because you’re scared?”

Ethan looked up to the ceiling. “You can take the girl out of the psychotherapy practice, but you can’t take the psychotherapy practice out of the girl. *Me*, scared?” He flicked his hand with a scoff.

Allison stopped walking to pat his shoulder. “Ethan, I know Emery can come across as a little... intimidating.”

You think? Emery Love was not only out of his league due to being a rich doctor. To him, she was a superhero. He wouldn’t be alive if it hadn’t been for her.

“But if you got to know her, you’d realize she’s not as put-together as she seems. Has it ever occurred to you that unless you make a move you’ll never know if there was a chance there?”

Normally, Ethan would've been confident in his ability to woo a lady. He'd often heard that the contrast of his deep blue eyes with his dark hair made him look like he belonged in front of cameras instead of at a construction site. But beyond the feeling that chemo had aged him a decade and drained his finances, he'd learned a piece of bad news that ruined his chances with Dr. Love.

But those were more delicate topics he had no intention of discussing with Allison.

Chapter 2

“Why did I become a doctor? Why?”

Dr. Emery Love banged her forehead against the restaurant table again and again. With every knock, lavish silverware clattered against exquisite china. “My father warned me! You give away your youth for this career; you sacrifice your social life and your peace of mind; you give your patients all your time, your soul and... your *blood!* And they repay you by threatening to *sue* you!”

Emery felt the familiar symptoms starting again: racing heart, trembling hands, waves of hot blood crashing over her face. Her chest tightened to the point it was difficult to draw air, but as a lung specialist, she knew there was nothing wrong with her breathing. This wasn't a typical panic attack; this was a mixture of panic and rage. Emery's father used to lovingly call it “your diva mother's drama-queen genes.” Her Korean grandma called it “The kimchi temper.”

Her girlfriends called it “The MDiva attack.”

The waiter's wary expression as he cleared the table reminded Emery this wasn't the place to lose it. Aware of the stares of the three other people sitting with her, she rubbed her sore forehead and drank large gulps of her ice water. For goodness' sake, the

lives of her ICU patients relied on her keeping a cool head like her physician father. But the tendency to catastrophize was genetic—and stronger than her.

“Can we move on, Emery? You spent an hour repeating that during the legal counsel meeting.” Ken Carter, Esq adjusted his two-thousand-dollar steel-blue tie, the only splash of color on his gray designer suit. “And allow me to remind you that my firm’s hourly fees are quite hefty and we don’t plan to give you a discount just because you used to sleep with me.”

Emery glared at her ex-fiancé across the table. Before she could reply, her friend Fe, sitting next to her, covered her mouth with the embroidered fabric napkin and murmured, “I’m going to murder him.”

As if fearing she would, Fe’s husband and Emery’s business partner, Dr. Shawn McDevitt, intervened, “Carter, married man’s advice, aren’t you trying to win Emery back?” He tilted his auburn head and narrowed his blue-green eyes. “Do you think comments like that help you get out of the dog house?”

Ken’s expression was sincerely baffled. “I’m guessing you want me to say no.”

Why am I dating this guy again? Emery asked herself, perplexed. *Oh yes, the biological clock.*

Fe shot Ken a homicidal once-over before turning to Emery. Piercing her with her golden eyes, she used one hand to hold Emery’s and the free one to rub her back. “Go ahead, honey.” She used her soothing speech therapist’s voice. “It’s okay to vent; use your words.”

If Emery had ever regretted taking her cousin Shawn’s job offer in that dead Florida beach town, acquiring Fe as family had made it all worth it. Connecting with Fe’s three best friends—Joy, Hope, and Allison—had been the bonus.

“How dare Mrs. Becker blame my inhaler prescription for her heart attack?” Emery exclaimed. “Her emphysema is so bad she has like... three working lung cells.

I've been killing myself trying to help her breathe better!" She dropped her head back on the table. "On top of never thanking me for all I did for her, and on top of stealing the toilet paper from our office bathroom for the past year—she has the nerve to sue me?"

And to think that she'd given the last decade of her life to the career of medicine. While other women launched into their adult lives after college, Emery had sacrificed her twenties to her medical training. And now she had no husband, no babies, and nothing more than a handful of certificates on her wall and a collection of ungrateful patients like Gertrude Becker.

Ken rolled his eyes and shook his head. Not even one hair of his blond pompadour moved. "You better chill out, Emery; this process is likely to drag on for months. And there's no need to take it personally."

"But I understand why she's taking this personally, Carter. Emery literally saved this woman's life last year." Shawn reached in the pocket of his teal scrubs for hand sanitizer. "This lady had horrible health insurance that no one in town wants to accept. Emery agreed to see her for free, diagnosed her early stage lung cancer, and fought the insurance company to get her treated." Shawn rubbed his hands clean. "And after that, she's gone above and beyond her duty taking care of this woman—she even paid out of her own pocket for her Chantix prescription to help her quit smoking."

"Yup, that's my girl." Ken tapped Emery's cheek. "Always trying too hard, desperate for people to like her."

Before Emery could react, the shriek of a soprano singing an opera aria pierced the air—the sound of Ken's ringtone. He excused himself from the table to answer.

"This has been the worst week of my life!" Emery twisted the ruffled hem of her coral designer dress. "First the mold, then my dreaded birthday, and now this!"

"Mold?" Fe asked, accepting her chocolate mousse from the waiter.

“It’s just a few spots on the ceiling of a room in our office building,” Shawn explained, stealing a spoonful of his wife’s dessert.

“Uh-uh, Shawny! Not just *any* room!” Emery corrected. “The room where I host the smoking cessation classes for our asthma and emphysema patients! As if we planned on killing them all by making them inhale mold spores!” She dropped her head on her arms on the table, making Fe’s dessert bounce. “And it’s impossible to get a reliable contractor in this town to come check it out. For all we know, there’s some leak in the roof that’s causing the problem and the whole building’s structure is rotten and about to collapse!”

There it was again, the catastrophic thinking.

Palm up, Fe spread her manicured fingers. “And for all we know those spots are the sprouts of a giant beanstalk that we’ll climb to go get golden eggs—*gee*, you doctors are trained to jump to the worst-case scenario, aren’t you?”

“It’s not about being a doctor.” Shawn raised his dessert spoon as if making a confession. “Neurotic over-worrying runs in our family.”

That made Emery smile. Shawn had always treated her like a real cousin, even if she’d been the odd stepdaughter of his aunt, with no common DNA between them.

Fe rose from her seat, adjusted the red bodycon dress flaunting her generous curves, and leaned to hug Emery in her seat. “I’m so sorry you’re going through this stress, honey. Is there anything I can do to help?” she asked.

“No, Cuzzy.” Emery’s nickname for Fe was short for *cousin-in-law*. “Unless you can talk some sense into this ungrateful patient—or find me a contractor who doesn’t leave me hanging.”

“Wait. Allison gave me the number of someone who used to be a contractor and is now a handyman,” Fe said. “Maybe he can—” With a jerk, Fe let go of Emery and turned

sharply to her husband's chair. "Shawn McDevitt! Did you just pinch my butt in public—again?" Her voice was firm, but the corners of her mouth twitched up.

Shawn had the air of a kid caught in mischief. "I can't help it. You bend over and McDevil takes charge."

Fe gestured as if to slap him, but instead tickled his waist. Laughing, he caught her hands and pulled her toward him, making her fall into his lap. A kiss extinguished their laughter and Emery knew she no longer existed to them.

Gosh, she envied those two.

Watching Shawn and Fe's romance evolve into engagement and marriage had planted the first seed of doubt in her mind about Ken—even before Ken's alleged slip with the stripper from his bachelor party. She'd never seen Shawn happier than now, settled into his blended family with Fe and their three challenging kids.

That was what Emery had always wanted, a family she could call her own. She once thought she'd get it by marrying Ken, but now questioned it. Shawn and Fe had cursed her with the burning suspicion that maybe relationships were supposed to be pleasant and not exhausting.

And of course, there was also that conversation she'd once overheard between a patient and a homesick hospital housekeeper.

"Dear, life's too short to be where you're not absolutely sure you want to be."

The patient wasn't talking about love, yet the words had drilled into Emery's soul, making her question her wedding plans ever since.

Ethan Cadman—that was the patient's name. She hadn't heard from him in a year, but how could she forget him when he was her biggest medical success story? As she usually did when she remembered Ethan, she sent up a small prayer, hoping he was still doing well.

Ken returned, still holding his phone. “I have to go, but good news! Wright knows the couple threatening to sue Emery. He says they’re just minor-league con artists.” He buttoned his gray jacket. “You did the right thing choosing my firm, instead of letting your malpractice insurance pick a counsel that would only cater to their interests—Reservation of Rights, my ass.” With a scoff, he picked up his briefcase. “Rest assured I will teach this couple a lesson!”

Shawn stood up, to walk Ken out. “Carter, considering you were once engaged to Emery, you should step aside and let your partner Wright handle things. Obviously, you’d be too emotionally involved in the case.”

“Emotionally involved? Oh, Shawn, you’re so funny.” Guffawing, Ken slapped Shawn’s back. “If I had emotions, I wouldn’t be so successful.” He tossed a thumb at Emery over his shoulder without looking at her. “We could be already married. I could be on the other side, suing *her*, and the fact that she was my wife wouldn’t matter. I’d have no hesitation to crush her into bits in court, then go home and screw her without remorse.” He strode away alongside Shawn.

Emery was too shocked to answer.

Clenching the handle of her dessert spoon, and raising it as if it were a knife, a trembling Fe rose from her chair. “Yup. I’m going to kill him. *Ese desgraciado hijo de...*”

“Wait, Cuzzy; don’t!” Emery jumped off her seat and circled Fe’s waist, preventing her from launching at Ken.

Growling, Fe dropped the spoon and searched the large bag hanging from her chair for her makeup kit—whenever Fe was anxious, she had to do someone’s hair or makeup. She retouched Emery’s blush while talking. “Emery, honey, I’ve been biting my tongue for months, but I can’t take it anymore!” Waving the makeup brush, she looked up to the crystal chandelier. “Why? Oh, why would you take that guy back?”

“Well...” Emery mumbled, “I haven’t *exactly* taken him back yet.”

Fe stopped the lip-gloss short of Emery’s lips. “Yes! What was that about?” She lowered her voice. “Did he say that you *used* to sleep together? As in not anymore?”

“Not since we canceled our wedding a year ago,” Emery explained. “The last three months, since we resumed dating, have been his chance to show that his interest in me isn’t only physical—and to regain my trust.”

“Regain your trust?” Fe grunted while applying the lip-gloss on Emery. “Honey, I don’t care how many times the guy swears that someone framed him and it wasn’t true, he was smooching the stripper from his bachelor party. I’ve seen how he treats you!” Fe pointed with the lip-gloss in the direction Ken had gone. “I’ve seen him flirt with other women right in front of you, and talk to you in that condescending tone, like he’s doing you a favor being with you.”

“He has some childhood issues. But he’s in therapy now; he’s really trying.” Emery fiddled with her dangling crystal earrings as Shawn rejoined them at the table. “It’s complicated.”

“I don’t think it’s that complicated actually,” Shawn commented, taking his seat. “The bottom line is: you’re obsessed with having a baby before turning thirty-five; you just turned thirty-four this week, and Carter is your safest bet in this retirement town where young, single men are scarce.”

Emery hated it when Shawn used his sharp observational skills against her. “Okay, okay, I admit it.” With a groan, she pressed her eyelids and confessed, “I’m so desperate to have a baby, I’ve considered marrying Ken just to divorce him afterward.”

“It hurts me seeing you suffer about the darn biological clock.” Fe held Emery’s fingers. “You can always adopt.”

Shawn played with his wife's lustrous honey-blond curls. "Honey, I've known Emery since she was five and her hair didn't obey the law of gravity. And she's always dreamed of a child who shares her DNA—someone who looks like her."

"Shawny's right," Emery agreed. "Try growing up hearing your classmates gossip that you're a genetic experiment from the US government."

Emery's uncommon racial mix had led to constant unwanted attention since childhood. Her mother had been half Korean and half Jamaican—a mixture that made her instantly famous on the fashion runways, back in her youth. Her father had been a half WASP, half Swedish physician. Emery had been the only product of that short-lived marriage, and she'd grown up feeling like the leftover piece of a puzzle that didn't seem to fit with any of the branches of her family.

Maybe if I had a child who resembles me, I wouldn't feel that alien anymore.

Fe's phone rang reggaeton music. After a few exchanges in machine-gun fast Spanish, she addressed Shawn. "Hey, that's my cousin Juana. She and her cleaning crew are in your office building and she says the lights won't turn on, and there's water dripping from the ceiling in one room."

Emery broke out in a cold sweat. "That must be the same leak that's causing the mold!"

"Shite," Shawn cursed, checking his phone. "And I just got a text from the hospital about an emergency procedure. Emery, can you handle the role of landlord this time?"

Okay, don't panic. One of the bribes Shawn had extended Emery to join his practice had been shared ownership of their office building, where they rented suites to other doctors. But she'd never had to manage a crisis like this on her own.

"I guess I have to. But it sucks that we don't have a maintenance person right now. Who do I call? An emergency plumber? The electric company?"

“If the water is coming from a roof leak, a plumber won’t help,” Shawn offered, picking up his white coat from the back of his chair and slipping it over his scrubs. “And the first thing the electric company will ask is that you check the breakers.”

“The what?” *Okay, now is the time to panic.*

Fe seemed to take mercy on her. “Wait. Let me call Allison’s friend the handyman and see if he can meet you there.”

(End of Sample. To keep reading go to <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07WXXMJZQ/>)