

The Appointment

By

Lynn Forest

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Table of Contents:

Chapter 1	5
Chapter 2	14
Chapter 3	24
Chapter 4	32
Chapter 5	39
Chapter 6	46
Chapter 7	53
Chapter 8	61
Chapter 9	69
Lynn Forest	74
EBook Offer	75
Blushing Books Newsletter	76
Blushing Books	77

Chapter 1

Brenda Evans lingered behind much of the crowd of hundreds who had filled that section of the sprawling cemetery where the Congressman had been laid to rest. She closed her eyes and allowed the warm Southern breeze to comfort her along with the scents of the flowers and budding trees. It was a talent that she had developed over the years out of necessity, to be able to take a moment to pretend that she was in some quiet place, rather than in the company of many.

The past day had been a whirlwind for her, as were most days in her life when she was not able to steal away to spend time with Roland Harshman, her fiancé, and relief from the many storms a job such as hers provided. For years, it had seemed that every other minute was either spent in a conference, across the desk from some demanding politician or bureaucrat or on a plane on her way to or from yet another such scenario.

She had flown back to the state capital from Washington, DC in the middle of the night from where she had been attending a conference on federal highway improvement funding to the states. When she had landed that morning, and been picked up at the airport by one of her assistants, she began to try to keep herself alert with coffee, but her fatigue had been made more profound by her sorrow at having lost a former boss and good friend.

She was lost in thought of the two years she had spent in Washington serving as a staffer to the Congressman, and how she had used her past connection to him to cross party lines on budget legislation in her current post as an outspoken top state government budget policy analyst. At first, she did not even feel the finger tapping her on the shoulder.

Finally disturbed from her thoughts, she turned to see the Governor's Chief of Staff looking at her with an oddly grim expression. "Roger... I'm sorry, I was just thinking about old times with the Congressman."

They walked side-by-side as the young man spoke. "That's understandable, and that's why he wants to talk to you."

She stopped and looked at him with a tilted head. "That's why who wants to talk to me?"

Never one to conceal his penchant for arrogance and condescension, Roger sighed quietly and looked at her as if she were a child needing something explained to her. "The Governor... I'm supposed to take you straight to his car." Roger pointed toward a large black sedan with darkened windows sitting along the curving drive that wound through the cemetery. He turned to see that Brenda was motionless. He's sighed impatiently and motioned for her to follow him. "Come on, he's waiting for you. He waited around specifically so that he could talk with you in private."

They began to walk quickly toward the large vehicle that now sat nearly alone in the distance. Brenda had met the Governor at various functions, and had even attended some meetings with him, but they rarely spoke. It was always her superior, the State Budget Director who did the talking. She was there to sit behind him and answer any questions he would turn and whisper to her. However, it was common knowledge in the halls of power of state government that Brenda did most of what her boss took credit for.

As they approached the car, her throat and mouth were dry and her pulse was racing. She was just thirty-eight years old, and already recognized on a national level as an expert on the financial relationship between federal and state governments. Articles she had written had been

published in national journals on government practices. But she could only wonder what had gone so wrong that the Governor was wishing to speak to her in person.

She had been pushing the state Budget Director to push for more frugality in state spending, but most of those conversations have been either in private with him or in staff meetings. Of course, there were really very few secrets within such power structures.

There had been one recent incident in which she had been covering for her ill boss and had to handle some questions from the state government reporter for the state's largest newspaper. Her answers had been candid and to the point, if not politically soft peddled. There had been some static from her superior, but it was hardly a reprimand. And that was when she had told her fiancé that for the first time in her life she wished that she was in a position to vote against some of the spending.

Her comments to the reporter were picked up by members of the opposition party, accusing her of taking an opportunity to establish herself as a future candidate for public office. In response, some of the politicians on her side hinted their support if she would ever do so.

If the Governor had been upset about those comments, she was about to find out. At the same time, she knew that she was simply espousing opinions in sync with his own. And while she enjoyed her work, she had become frustrated enough with the freewheeling waste she saw all around her that perhaps she needed to be just as blunt with the big fellow in the limousine awaiting her.

Roger opened the back door on the passenger side and gestured for her to get in. Nearly unable to breathe as she did so, she ducked inside and planted herself on the wide seat two feet away from where Governor John Bartley rested, all 275 pounds of him along with his snow-white hair and leathery weathered face.

She was given very little time to think. "Brenda... first of all, I want to express my condolences to you. I know that you and Buddy were good friends, and he always spoke highly of you when he talked about the days when you worked for him."

Brenda took a deep breath and forced herself to speak. "Thank you, Governor. I understand that you spent a lot of time talking with him."

The Governor began to laugh heartily. "That we did. I was always proud to have Buddy as a friend, although politically we could hardly have been farther apart. But we liked and respected each other, and that was above all else. Which brings me to why I wanted to talk to you."

Realizing that she was not to be grilled about some budgetary disaster, Brenda began to relax as the Governor continued. "It's been no secret that while you were a loyal member of Buddy's staff in Washington, you carried out his policies despite your personal disagreements." The Governor laughed once again. "Of course, the fact that you were known to see things our way made it possible for you to hold the position you do now."

Brenda nodded warily. "I understand. It really bothers me to see public money used for frivolous projects or being wasted in any way. Once you get into government work, it seems to become so easy to forget where that money came from and how it was earned."

The Governor looked at her with a sly grin. "I liked your comments in the paper. I always had the sense that you were rather rock ribbed in such matters. The things that you said only reinforced my conclusions about your point of view."

"Well, Governor... I thought that it was time to say what needed to be said. Bob was down with bronchitis, so as acting Budget Director I said what I thought needed to be said."

The Governor took a deep breath and seemed to be looking somewhere else. “And of course, you have probably already heard the squawks and cries from Buddy’s party demanding that I appoint a replacement for him who would carry on his philosophies and beliefs.”

Brenda smiled and nodded. “Yes. I know that those comments were flying around in the news less than an hour after he died so suddenly. I was quite unhappy about that”

The Governor turned slightly toward Brenda. “And as much as I respected and liked Buddy, the appointment is mine to make, and I’m going to appoint somebody who is in tune with our party, not his. And this may sound rather cold, but since I got word that our mutual friend had died, I have been considering people capable of taking his place and evaluating their pros and cons.

“I wanted to talk to you to get your take on the matter, because you had the chance to spend a couple of years seeing a member of Congress in action. You got to see the mechanics of that dysfunctional place up close and personal. I suppose that it gave you some insight on the kind of person who should be appointed to fill the vacant seat. I’m sure that you saw the personality types that were successful, and those that fell flat on their faces.

“And one more thing, that goes back to what you were saying earlier... I know that you got to see just how little regard was given to those who paid the bill to run that snake den that is Washington.”

Brenda pursed her lips and looked up as she considered the matter. “Of course, Governor. I will be very happy to do anything to assist you in making your decision. Over the past five years, I have worked with dozens of our state legislators and state senators on the budget process, and I think that I have a pretty good feel for which ones have the best grasp on budget policy. So, any way in which I can help you narrow down your list of prospects...”

The Governor startled her by reaching out and putting his hand on her shoulder. “I don’t think you understand, Brenda. I would like to appoint you to take that seat in Congress.”

Brenda felt her heart begin to race once again. “Governor... I am very flattered. And I have to admit, lately I have been pondering the possibility of entering the elective fray, but at a lower level. I can’t say that I would not be thrilled to do this, but I have never even run for office at a local level.”

The large man nodded and smiled. “You would serve the last eleven months remaining in his term. Of course, it would not be very long before you would have to make a decision as to whether you wanted to run to stay in that office. You would have to make such a decision while you were still getting acclimated to being a member of Congress in the first place.

“And whether you want to run for your own term or not is your own decision. All that I can promise you is months of chaos and headaches. But I would love to see you fill that position, if even for just a short time.”

“And what about all the others who are going to be outraged by this?”

The governor sighed loudly. “Actually, I will be much less bothered by that than you may believe. I will simply tell them that, whether you decide to run for your own term or not, they will all have the right to enter the primary election and give it their best shot. When it comes down to crunch time, we have the majority in the state house, and you will be confirmed.”

Brenda could not tell if it were she or the Governor most surprised that she did not try to dismiss the idea out of hand. “I would like to talk to... someone... about this. Can I give you an answer tomorrow morning?”

He nodded enthusiastically and smiled. “And I take it that you’re talking about speaking to Roland about this.” Noticing the look of amused surprise on her face he continued on,

“Hopefully, since Roland already spends much of his time in Washington, he won’t mind very much. And don’t be surprised I know all about him. His reputation as a top-notch campaign consultant is widely known. I hear nothing but good things about him. Certainly you would not think that my most valuable policy analyst could be engaged without my knowing about it.”

Brenda could feel her face turning pink. “Thank you. We have been seeing each other for over two years now, and I will confide in you that things are at the point where a decision like this would affect him profoundly. As a matter of fact, I have been a little unsettled about the future, otherwise we would have set a date. So, I can call you tomorrow morning?”

“And I hope to hear my preferred answer. Have a good day.” He then tapped on the window, and several seconds later the door next to Brenda was opened for her to step out.

Even in a city as large as the state capital, a woman such as Brenda Evans would stand out in her mysterious attractiveness as she scanned the restaurant to see if Roland had already arrived and been seated. She was not a sultry beauty in the popular sense: rather, she was a pretty, thirty-eight-year-old woman who up close had an almost beguiling presence, a 5’5” curvy frame, dancing blue eyes and shoulder length black hair.

Roland told her that he had noticed her at a cocktail party, but he had a date with him that night, a casual acquaintance who had also wanted a companion to the same party. But Brenda never went out with a man simply for the sake of needing a date, so she had been alone that evening at the cocktail bash being thrown by a prominent lobbyist trying to romance the same party that she and Roland belonged to. That evening, they simply had not yet met.

However, Roland knew the host quite well, and the host knew that Roland really did not have a relationship with the woman in his company that evening. And when Roland and the host had a moment alone, Roland inquired as to her identity. And of course, before the evening was done Roland had once again slipped away for a moment as a man on a mission. “Excuse me, but aren’t you Brenda Evans, the state budget policy...?”

Brenda had been quite entertained at hearing how Roland had gone about introducing himself to her, and she had often enjoyed relating that story herself to others or encouraging Roland to retell it. In any case, from their first time together, they had been with each other every possible moment.

She could describe it to other people as simply having found somebody she simply needed to be with. He was six-foot-tall and stocky with black unruly hair, and she often described him to people as looking like a “rough-and-tumble rugby player”. In fact, during his college days that was exactly what he had been.

But most of all, she liked his warmth and humor and sincerity, to say nothing of the fact that they felt a strong and mutual physical attraction. Now she was eager to see him for more than one reason.

She spotted a movement from a back table in the restaurant and saw a hand waving. Then the man stood up and began walking to come to greet her. They met and shared a discrete kiss, then Roland escorted her to their table and pulled the chair out for her. And when she sat down, he leaned down and whispered to her, “You always look so hot in a black dress.”

She was just about to make a flirting comment in response when a waiter came to take their orders. Once they were alone, her body language indicated that he should scoot his chair a little to the side of the round table so that they could speak more privately.

She reached across with both hands, and he took them in his own. He knew it was a sign that something important was on her mind. “You know, Governor Bartley is working on replacing Buddy.”

Roland nodded and laughed. “The vultures are out in number on this one. I’ve lost count of how many there are wanting a shot at it.”

Brenda closed her eyes and took a deep breath and whispered, “What about me?”

Roland froze in surprise, his eyes arched in shock. “You’re going to go after it? I know that you have been feeling the itch, but it won’t be easy. But you are smart and you are tough. And you spent a couple of years there, so you know the ropes.”

She leaned closer and nervously cleared her throat. “I don’t have to go after it. Governor Bartley wants to appoint me, and he says he doesn’t care what anybody else thinks.”

Roland shook his head slowly. “That is just... wow! I wasn’t expecting to hear this. I mean, you’ve always had strong opinions about spending public money, but until the last few months when you started making these cryptic comments, I’d never seen you as the officeholder type.”

“Roland, I need to know how you feel about this.”

“If you want to do it, go for it. You have a lot to offer”

She took a deep breath. “And you’re okay... I mean, we’re okay with it?”

He shook his head rapidly, a huge smile on his face. “An opportunity like this is just too rare to pass up. I think back to all the things that you have said about how government could improve the budget process. Now you can work on that from a whole different angle.”

Her face was suddenly beaming. “Roland, I can’t tell you how many times I have fantasized about being on the floor of Congress, attacking wasteful spending, things that are just to help one Congressman or another get reelected. I don’t want to sound... you know... I’ve just always thought that... I can make a difference. Now I have the chance.”

Roland arched his eyes. “I think you know what you’re setting yourself up for. You are going to be resented as an outspoken new member who was appointed. You’re going to be ridiculed by talking heads and reporters who disagree with you on things like spending...”

She responded with a wicked grin. “Sounds like I’m going to be having a lot of fun.”

Roland gave her a thumbs-up gesture. “Then if you are willing to put yourself through all that, you know that I’m going to be right there next to you and supporting you.”

She put her hands up to stop him. “We need to think about...” She leaned closer and spoke in a whisper, “I mean, I think we need to take into consideration... what we like to do. I mean, what I like for you to do to me.” Her face turned dark pink immediately.

Roland took her hands in his once again. “It’s been, what now... maybe two years, I think since the first time. We’ve always been quiet... discrete when we do that. We’ve always kept that to ourselves. I don’t see why it will be any different if you go to Congress.”

Brenda sat in silence for a moment, biting her lower lip. “Still, it’s possible.”

Roland shrugged and laughed. “How many members of Congress have confessed to drug use in the past? They survive all kinds of relationship and marital problems that become public.”

Brenda leaned even closer to him. “But having the word come out that your Congresswoman loves to be spanked? How would that play out?”

Roland nodded slowly, a mischievous grin on his face teasing her. “A lot of the women voters would just be quietly cheering for you, and a lot of the male voters would just wish that they had a chance for themselves to spank that cute butt of yours. Besides, who hasn’t always wanted to see one or another member of Congress being spanked?”

Brenda scowled at him, then folded up her napkin and playfully tossed it at his face. “You and I both know that it would be a problem if it somehow became known. And I’m not oblivious to the fact that it would be a problem for you and your career as well.”

He cleared his throat and rested his elbows on the table and interlocked his fingers. “Okay, I’ll be serious now. Yes, I will be realistic in the knowledge that in the rare case that something like that would become known, some people would make a great big deal out of it. But it’s only something that we do in private. It’s not like it’s being done out in public at some kind of S&M exhibition.” He looked up and rubbed his chin. “Of course, suddenly just the thought of that...”

She began to giggle but had a nervous look on her face once again. “And how would we respond to it? You have a lot of experience in public relations. You’ve had to help candidates deal with some baggage.”

“Of course, there would always be the option of just simply stating that such a question would be totally out of bounds and improper. The case can easily be made that no one has a right to inquire about what two people in love do in privacy. After all, we’re engaged to be married. You can take the stand that you refuse to acknowledge the question and give it any dignity, on the basis that it would be simply setting yourself up to answer other questions that were no one’s business.”

He thought in silence for another moment. “But don’t discount the value of simply smiling, winking at reporters and saying... ‘Don’t you wish... next question’.”

She rested her chin on her hand for a moment, and then a grin began to creep across her face before she lowered her head and dissolved into giggling. “I am somewhat frightened to think you may have been serious.”

He reached across and brushed the hair out of her eyes. “I’m not making light of your concern... our concern. I acknowledge the possibility. But there’s also something liberating in telling people to not be critical of something unless they have tried it for themselves.”

Brenda closed her eyes and nodded slowly, then opened them and smiled. She picked up her glass of wine and lifted it toward Roland. He picked his up and they clinked them together, and Brenda whispered, “Here’s to one very warm and pink Congressional seat.”

After Roland placed his glass back down, he gazed at her affectionately, an almost wistful expression on his face. “I think back to when we first started seeing each other, how hard it was sometimes for us to find time together. I was always flying back from or to Washington, and you have never had a short work week. But I knew that you and I were going to be together for keeps when I realized how hard we kept working to be with each other.”

Brenda nodded and spoke quietly in return. “I always knew that you would prove to be worth all the work and trouble.”

He laughed and leaned toward her. “I can’t begin to guess how many times we huddled together at my place having pizza and watching a movie just so we could have some precious time alone. I guess our habits really haven’t changed that much.”

Brenda began to giggle and nodded her head. “As a matter of fact, I think we had been seeing each other for a year before we ever danced together.”

“And that was when you found out that I had some pretty good moves.”

She winked at him. “Actually, I think that the first time I saw your best moves was in your bedroom. And Roland, I think you have only gotten better with practice.”

There had been a lot of pressure on the Governor from the national Central Committee of the party to fill the Congressional vacancy as soon as possible in case of some narrow voting margins, and five days after the day when Brenda had met privately with him, she was on the floor of the United States House of Representatives being sworn in by the Speaker. For the first time she was seen in news clips on national news broadcasts, her parents and Roland standing proudly in the background as she took the oath of office.

It had taken a whirlwind, emergency weekend session of the state legislature to make it official, but before the vote was taken Brenda was hastily assembling a staff and getting her office in order.

A woman with whom she had been friends for fifteen years and had served as a long-suffering Deputy Chief of Staff for another member was quickly brought on board as her Chief. Linda Montgomery knew that her new post may be short-lived, but she looked forward to it regardless.

Brenda had accepted the customary resignation letters of two other staffers who had served her old friend Buddy, and assured the two pages assigned to that Congressional District that she was more than happy to keep them on. More than anything else, she was ready to put her tingling nerves at rest and get to work.

Getting to work would have to wait until she completed a couple of interviews with political reporters from the round-the-clock news networks. A newly appointed thirty-eight-year-old female member of Congress drew their attention, especially considering the acidic comments being tossed around by others who wanted the position.

Her next order of business was to have lunch with Linda. As Linda grinned with enthusiasm, Brenda told her of her own determination to be more than a placeholder. She knew that job opportunities for someone like her would be abundant either in Washington or back in her home state, so she had nothing to lose by speaking her mind.

She had been sworn in during a morning session, and by the time the afternoon of that day was over, she had taken part in two committee hearings. And in her second hearing, she had raised eyebrows and the blood pressure of at least three other committee members by challenging the spending levels in two bills brought before the committee. She decided that she must be doing something right.

Five days had passed since she was sworn in as a new Member of Congress, and on none of those days had she gotten home before 11:00 p.m. In her case, "home" was an apartment that she was sharing with a couple of old female acquaintances who worked for a large defense contractor and had recently lost a roommate to marriage.

At least Roland maintained a small rented condo in the Virginia suburb of Arlington as well as one in the state capital. The one in Arlington was ideal for them whenever they were both in Washington, for the other side of the duplex was usually vacant, the occupants spending most of their time traveling. That meant that they could carry on with relative assurance that no one could overhear them. They had briefly considered moving in together in the place, knowing that she would not be the only member of Congress living with an unmarried partner, but decided to be more discreet, at least for a while.

The problem was, right after Brenda was sworn in, Roland had to leave for Chicago for several days on a business trip. But it was Friday night, and he would be returning to Washington late on Saturday morning. She would have one morning breakfast meeting to attend, followed by

posing with a class of high school students on the steps of the Capitol. Then she would have the rest of the weekend free.

She took a small glass of wine to her bedroom to help her settle down her mind so she could be well rested and ready to spend time with Roland. She got undressed and climbed in the bed, then closed her eyes and began to slowly sip on the wine.

When she could not be with Roland, she made it her practice to have available some of the same brand of white wine they had shared on their first date. They had gone out to a nice restaurant near the state capitol building that was a favorite with many of the government types, and ended up spending three hours there enjoying each other's company and that same wine.

They had begun to date at least once a week, and it was after they had been dating for three months and they knew that they had hopelessly fallen for each other that she flew to Washington to meet him at his condo on a Saturday afternoon. That was when they had been intimate for the first time.

It was a Saturday afternoon on an overcast late September day, and while the day had started out warm with even a bit of humidity, just as Roland was taking her luggage out of the taxicab, the sky let loose with a heavy downpour, brought in by a strong breeze and dropping temperatures. By the time they got inside, the little black dress of the type that Roland had told her had been meant for her, hung like a limp rag from her body.

Roland went to the closet and pulled out a blanket and wrapped it around her, and then to her delight, scooped her up and carried her to the sofa. He then walked to the gas fireplace that was just several feet from her, and turned up the flames. He sat next to her with his arm around her while the blue and yellow dancing flames warmed the room and helped to take the chill off.

At first, she had been so good-naturedly flustered by being soaked that she did not even see the candles burning throughout the room and a bottle of wine on ice on the coffee table in front of her. Suddenly she began to look around, then turned her gaze back to Roland and fluttered her eyes. An alluring smile came to her face, and Roland could hear her murmur, "Mmmhmm. Yeah."

Her arms emerged from beneath the blanket and soon they were intertwined with his. They continued to embrace, kiss, laugh and murmur, each of them knowing that the relationship was going to be taking another step that afternoon.

After a little while, the blanket had been tossed aside and was now covering the sofa but not Brenda. The dress, the bottom half of which was now up to her waist, was damp, but she seemed more than comfortable with everything.

As they continued to kiss and pet, Roland began to kiss down her throat and whispered to her, "Warm enough now?"

She nodded slowly and giggled. "More than warm enough and more than ready enough." She remembered how slowly and sensuously they had undressed each other, and how much care Roland had taken to build her arousal and excitement, even making their joint unwrapping of the condom an erotic experience. It had been a long time for her, and something she had really not done that often. But Roland seemed to take her to another time and place.

Their lovemaking was slow when it needed to be slow, and frantic and demanding when it needed to be frantic and demanding. If she had ever had such a climax in her life, she could not have said when it would have been.

In the afterglow, as their minds and bodies recovered, they lay side-by-side on their stomachs on the blanket covered sofa sipping their wine. Brenda was still taken by the ambience, that being of course Roland, the fireplace, the candles and the wine. As the warmth of the fire

radiated over them, they were content to stay just as they were, naked and falling more deeply in love.

Roland had poured them small glasses, and when they were finished, he took them and placed them on the coffee table. They moved onto their sides to face each other, and continued to murmur expressions of love and satisfaction as they stroked each other's bodies.