

A GOLD SATIN MURDER

A Casey Holland Mystery Novella

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Gypsy Moon Press
British Columbia, Canada

A GOLD SATIN MURDER
(Casey Holland Mysteries #7)
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Gypsy Moon Press
www.debrapurdykong.com
ISBN: 978-1-9991987-6-3

Editor: Joyce Gram
www.gramediting.com

Jacket Design: Jim Bisakowski
<http://bookdesign.ca>

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ONE

After a decade of security work for Mainland Public Transport, Casey Holland had learned that troublesome passengers were usually rude, loud, and poorly dressed. But the gorgeous, broad-shouldered man in the charcoal suit, white shirt, and bright red tie strutting down the aisle was a new, intriguing challenge.

The moment the man spotted Casey, he gave her a broad, toothy smile. Cool. Her silky, low-cut tank top and dangling crystal earrings were doing their job. Undercover assignments rarely involved dressing up, but passenger complaints about a hot guy who'd been badgering women to model for his paintings required a different fashion choice. Besides, the bus was way too warm this late-July evening. The less she had to wear the better.

Casey winked at the man, then tilted her head toward the empty seat next to her. He slowed his pace and nodded to the gaping middle-aged woman he passed by. Judging from a quick survey, the man had caught the attention of most passengers. The men didn't look as impressed as the women, though.

"Hola, señorita." Gold-flecked brown eyes glanced at her hands as he sat down. "I am Eduardo from Ecuador."

"Casey. From Vancouver," she replied. "How are ya?" To reveal she was a señora who'd been happily married for just over a year might put him off, so the wedding rings stayed home.

"Excelente." He beamed. "I am here only three months, but I am in love with Vancouver. It has many interesting people."

"That it does." His cedarwood and vanilla cologne sent a jolt of nostalgia through Casey. When Dad was alive, she occasionally gave him a bottle of something similarly scented for Father's Day. She sat up straighter and zeroed in on Eduardo. Not the time for reflection.

"I apologize if my English is not so good," Eduardo said.

"It sounds fine to me." She smiled. "Do you live in this part of the city?"

"Si. Only one block away. I love to walk and ride the buses and talk to people."

He'd have many opportunities to do exactly that in Vancouver's densely populated West End. Thanks to nearby Stanley Park, the popular English Bay beach, and many eateries, the area attracted tons of tourists as well as visitors from other areas of the Lower Mainland.

"Your eyes!" Eduardo slapped his hand over his heart. "La violeta. Extraordinario! I have not seen such a shade before. I am professional artista. May I paint you? It would be great honor! You are so be-eau-tiful."

"Thank you." Great honor and beautiful were the exact words two of the complainants had used in their written statements. "So, how many women have you approached about painting their portraits, especially while riding this bus?"

"Qué?" Eduardo's smile faded. "Why do you ask me this?"

"I'm with Mainland Public Transport security." She showed him her ID card. "We've had harassment complaints about you. One woman threatened to involve the police if it happened again."

His eyes widened. "This cannot be."

"The complaints said you wouldn't take no for an answer until they either changed seats or

left the bus.”

Eduardo sat back in his seat. “I am stupefied!”

Casey didn’t buy the naïve act. “Harassment of any type on MPT buses is against company policy.”

He fidgeted, not quite meeting her gaze. “I am just a single man who loves ladies and to create art.”

Eduardo produced a business card depicting an elegantly designed maple tree with crimson and tangerine leaves. But anyone could create a card and pass himself off as an artist.

“Is difficult to find models in new city. Art schools are filled up.” He frowned. “And many ladies choose to sit next to me and ask what I do to earn money.”

She believed him. Given the lusty stares a couple of women were tossing his way, Eduardo had probably found more than a few willing models and dates.

“Is it wrong to talk about art, or to ask a be-eau-tiful lady on a date? I might break bus rules, but I am not breaking real laws, no?”

Casey sighed. “Are you and I going to have a problem?”

He raised his hands, palms facing her. “I do not want trouble, but I must pursue my art.”

“Eduardo, the rules are there for a reason. They also give me the authority to kick you off any MPT bus if you’re breaking them.” Casey paused. “If you’re going to discuss portrait painting, then be clear about what you want. If you’re turned down, then I strongly advise you to leave the passenger alone. I assume you expect to be paid for your portraits?”

Eduardo nodded. “I do this not only for money but to find true soulmate.” He lowered his head. “I am not so lucky in love. Is heartbreaking road filled with big potholes.”

“Uh-huh.” She studied him. “Do you think you’ll find love on a bus?”

“I search everywhere.”

Eduardo’s expression and demeanor seemed sincere, but she had her doubts about this guy.

“You must have tried dating apps,” she said.

“Si.” He grimaced. “They were not good. Is better to meet ladies in person.” He gave her a whimsical look. “Everywhere.”

Meaning he intended to keep chatting up women on MPT buses. Eduardo might be better looking and more polite than other rule breakers, but his resistant attitude was all too familiar. She’d be seeing him again, no doubt, and their second encounter wouldn’t be as cordial.

“Just be careful about what you say,” she cautioned. “Misunderstandings happen easily.”

The corners of Eduardo’s full, sensuous mouth turned down. “What shall I talk about? The boring weather? Is what others do.”

“Eduardo, buddy, unless someone speaks to you first, it might be best if you didn’t talk at all.”

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