

## Excerpt from *The Lullaby of Luci*

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### *Llegada*

The first thing you notice about Argentina is that you're *it*.

Well, that's the first thing you notice when you're Black.

I had an Argentine friend once who pointed out that if I ever went that I should expect to feel like a bright red life raft floating in the middle of a white-washed ocean. The analogy made no sense--everyone knows that the ocean is black blue, not white--but I understand now what he meant. On the plane, there'd been one other guy with dark skin and kinky curls atop his head, but he got off when we stopped in Sao Paolo, Brazil, and I didn't see him when I boarded my connecting flight to Buenos Aires. Across the aisle from me had been a family comprised of two parents, two daughters and a chunky son--blonde hair, blue eyes, speaking fluent, fast Spanish...or Castellano, as they call it here. Behind me was a young couple, both with long, dark hair, pale skin and strangely earthy perfume. Even the flight attendants were White. Then there was me: hair braided, melanin poppin', American accent all the way on fleek.

I don't even like the word "fleek," but that's without a doubt what my accent was as I tried explaining to the woman sitting next to me on the plane that I was from Chicago, a city she'd never been to.

The second thing you notice is that the plug-in outlets are twelve feet up in the air, which is incredibly inconvenient when your phone has sixteen percent battery, you can't contact your ride into the city, and your parents have no idea whether or not you're alive or dead. *Why, sway, why* did anyone ever think that would be a good idea?

The third thing you notice is that the ladies' restroom is the only place that has reachable outlets--which is fine because you haven't brushed your teeth or washed your face in probably fifteen hours, and a trip to the restroom would probably save a lot of people from having to smell your stinking breath and see your sleep-deprived face.

The fourth thing you notice is that the cleaning ladies have a hard dagone time moping around your bulky suitcase you've stationed next to you and your charging phone.

That brings us to the fifth and final thing you'll notice: that your ride is late. But, you won't mind because it'll give your phone more time to charge, and more time for the cleaning lady to bump into your bulky suitcase again. And again. And maybe once more after that.

Yes, that's me, folks. Right now.

Giuliana Jane Mathis. The G is silent, so you actually say my name like "You-lee-aww-na," which is too complicated for most, so I typically go by Luli.

Luli Mathis. Twenty-one years old, starting a new job in a foreign country in a week. On my own--with the exception of a host mother who's volunteered to feed me and keep me sheltered out of the kindness of her heart. All I know thus far is that my host mother's name is Marta, that she is some sort of social worker, lives close to downtown Buenos Aires, and her grown children live in Uruguay and offered host us for a week during the summer. She doesn't own a car, so she's had to book a cab that was supposed to arrive at four thirty, but now it's five forty-five. I glance over at my phone, which has now charged to forty five percent--a safe enough percentage, so I yank my charger from the socket, shove it in my backpack and skirt out of the bathroom with my suitcase in tote.