



CHARADE

...Jake's soft voice dragged out the words in a sing-song tone. "I'm wai—ting."

A rush of excitement skittered across her skin. How could words be so titillating? She slowly lifted the hem of the dress over her back and squeezed her eyes shut. The sensation of being naked in the bright light sent her apprehension meter off the scale.

The soft drawl held a ragged edge. "God, what a beautiful heart-shaped ass."

Lindy sagged with relief. He wasn't repulsed by her flab. A current of air rushed across her exposed parts, followed by the rustling sound of cellophane. What was he doing? Anticipation replaced anxiety, spiraling into her belly. Jake's hands cupped her butt cheeks and caressed them softly, moving in wider and wider circles. The deep flesh of her crotch began to pulse. His thumbs grazed the edges of her pussy, and she pressed against the touch. He paused briefly, then his finger slithered along her butt crack and she gasped at the shock of the cold jelly against her anus. The heat in her crotch escalated. *Oh God, what have I gotten into?* She started to straighten up, but Jake held her firmly.

"Relax, I won't do anything you don't want me to."

His fingers moved to her pussy, spreading the soft jelly along her outer lips. She exhaled slowly. His fingers slipped inside. Her breath started coming in small puffs, and her pulse thundered in her ears. Intense heat licked across the skin on the insides of her thighs, and her clit pulsed.

"Touch me, please," she whimpered.

A sexy chuckle. "Don't you worry about *that*."

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The Journey

CHARADE

BY

DREAMA FAIRE

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CHARADE

AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

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CHAPTER 1

Lindy Greenleaf watched her editor's body language. The subtle shift of his shoulders and the way he laced his fingers together sent a glacier skidding through the pit of her stomach.

He cleared his throat. "Listen, I'm going to be honest. Your last book tanked and corporate's on my ass about it."

"But the title's only been out for three months! Buzz, you *know* how long promo takes to start working."

He nodded, but his expression remained solemn. "It's your fourth book, and your name is well-known enough to boost our publicity efforts." His features softened. "The publisher's not picking up your next manuscript. I'm really sorry."

A flash of anger, then panic rushed into Lindy's chest. How could this be happening?

She fought the burning moisture behind her eyelids. "Have you even *read* it?"

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“Yeah...” He blew out a long breath and shook his head. “I know writing young adult stuff is hard. The little buggers’ crazy fads and weird language change so fast that we can barely get the books on the shelves before they’re outdated.”

“I can fix it.”

“No, you can’t, Lindy. You’re too...” He pursed his lips. “Ah, mature, to be targeting this audience. How would you fix it? Hang around schools? Cruise the mall? Wear black lipstick and join the Goth crowd?” He rose. “You’re a good writer, but you need to find another genre.”

Lindy stared at him in silence for a moment. Everything she’d worked so hard for all those years had just disappeared down the drain like cold morning coffee. Unable to respond in any meaningful way, she fumbled her purse strap onto her arm and stood.

Affecting her haughtiest expression, she chanced a look at the senior editor of Crabbet House. His eyes reflected pity.

Lindy closed the office door behind her, taking care not to slam it, then stalked indignantly down the hall on rubbery legs. Her heart thumped beneath her ribs, and she struggled for each breath as the numbness wore off. *Too old? Who the hell do they think they are?* Crabbet House had made *lots* of money on the Lindy Greenleaf stories. She had the royalty statements to prove it. *Find another genre, indeed!*

The heavy revolving front door of the old building creaked as she pushed through. The midday traffic on East Capital Avenue streamed away from the government buildings on the square, and office workers clogged the sidewalks, hurrying toward lunch or a round of quick errands. Life moved on as usual, oblivious to her pain. Lindy’s pulse slowed, and she turned to look up at Buzz Cooper’s window on the fourth floor. Was he watching her? Or had he returned to his desk to handle more important authors?

Pain tightened her throat and she squeezed back the angry tears. She

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would *not* give up without a fight.

* * *

The following morning, Lindy entered the cavernous lobby of the metropolitan library and sighed with pleasure. She never grew tired of the ambience of books, the come-hither promise of history or science or romance or adventure—whatever the human condition desired. In the quietude, she could almost hear the mutterings and musings of the great and not-so-great authors, their passions and souls bared on page after page, lined up on shelf after shelf. Today, she felt their dreams and disappointments more intensely than ever. Pushing through the heavy glass doors into the library, she glanced at the aged bronze features of Mark Twain, standing guard on his pedestal, eternally welcoming readers to his world. Lindy smiled, comfortably at home in her favorite place.

A spectacled woman beamed from behind the information desk. “Have a nice day off?”

Lindy grimaced. “Actually, Rosa, I’ve had better.”

The woman’s face blanched, then she smiled timidly. “When do we get to read your new book?”

Hah! Never! “It’ll be a while. Publishing takes a long time. I’ll let you know.”

Rosa’s tone sparkled with admiration. “My niece just *loves* your stories. I think it’s wonderful that you write such nice, clean books.”

Wrote. Past tense.

Lindy moved through the main room, thinking about Rosa’s comment. The matronly Italian woman most likely had no clue as to what her niece did or did not like. Lindy grinned. Heaven only knew what the niece was *really* reading.

Lindy greeted the reference librarian hunkered down in front of his computer, the brilliant screen reflected in his thick eyeglasses, his wiry red hair fanning out around his head like a clown wig. Continuing on

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toward the office doors at the rear of the main floor, Lindy considered the man's appearance. What a perfect camouflage for an undercover agent. Her pulse blipped. What if he really worked for the CIA, monitoring the library patrons' reading habits? She shook her head. One never knew.

She entered the circulation department and grinned at the chorus of "hellos" from the four women who catalogued, inventoried, and prepared books to be shelved. She was aware of their smiling faces following her progress through the room, their scrutiny suddenly just a little too intense for her comfort level. What if they were all lesbians? Just waiting for the chance to grab her and—

"John is looking for you."

Lindy blinked and peered nervously at a thin woman sitting behind a stack of paperbacks. "Thanks, Jeanne."

The clerk nodded, then applied a shelving label to the spine of a thick book. Lindy watched the process for a moment. She was pretty sure these women sneaked the newly released romances out at night to feed their ravenous reading appetites. Had they read *her* books? She cast another glance around the room, but they'd all lost interest in her and turned their attention to work.

In her own office, she closed the door and let out a long sigh, gazing around her small domain. Service commendations covered the wall behind her desk, and an oak bookcase held dozens of periodicals and book catalogs. She moved to the desk and traced a fingertip over the fine engraving on the brass nameplate. "Linda Greenleaf, Acquisitions Librarian."

Books had been her life, and her only friends during a turbulent childhood. In the safety of the stories, her imagination had sprouted wings and soared, whisking her away from reality, giving her space and time that no one could steal. A writing career had seemed inevitable and so, it appeared, had yesterday's conversation with her editor. Her

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gut tightened. *I'll think about this another time.*

She scanned the neatly stacked papers and books on her desk, reaching out to straighten a rogue purchase order that had tried to escape from the pile. Then her gaze moved to a shiny snow-globe on the corner of the desk. As she had done every morning of her life, she picked it up, twisting her hand to watch the silvery flakes rise up and swirl a storm around the tiny Dutch girl inside. The blonde figure clutched an armful of tulips and gazed back at Lindy with huge blue eyes.

"Good morning, Sasha," she whispered past the lump in her throat.

The snow began to settle around the figure's wooden clogs and Lindy gently set the globe back where it belonged, poignant memories of a beloved uncle clouding her thoughts. The only person in her life who'd given her something special.

The door opened and the public relations director stepped into the room. "Morning, Lindy. How was your day off?"

John Blair's soft tone of voice sent a shiver scurrying across her shoulders, and her stomach did a little jig.

A dynamic and humorous man, John excelled in his job and was highly respected by everyone in the library community. His charismatic personality drew people like bees to honey, and Lindy had enjoyed more than one fantasy about him during the past eight years.

She smiled, the disastrous day-off briefly forgotten. "Excellent, thank you."

John leaned a shoulder against the doorjamb and casually slid one hand into the pocket of his sharply creased trousers. A vision of his trim body, buck naked and close against her own flashed through Lindy's head. A shudder moved through her chest, suspending her breath and notching up her pulse.

"Lindy, has anyone contacted you about donations for the summer literacy program?"

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She quietly released the captive breath. "Not yet, but you know how these publishing companies are."

He chuckled. "Yes, they can be a real pain in the tail, can't they?"

More than you know. She scribbled a note while she talked. "I'll make some calls this afternoon."

He straightened up and reached for the doorknob. "Keep me posted."

"I'm taking some vacation time next week, so I'll have answers for you by Monday."

"Oooh, going somewhere exciting?"

"Probably not—I need to do some writing research."

John grinned. "Go for it. I'm looking forward to your next book." He winked, then moved out into the circulation department, closing the door quietly behind him.

Lindy exhaled sharply, trying to dispel the adolescent giddiness she always felt when she was alone with him. Why hadn't she ever acted on her daydreams? She glanced down at Sasha, insulated in her tiny world. To take such a bold step would mean opening up to rejection, and Lindy had certainly had enough of *that* in her life.

She shook off the thought and grinned. *Except in one area.*

She reached into her handbag and removed the windowed envelope that had arrived that morning. She stared at the figures on the enclosed check and her pulse skipped. All the answers crystallized: her secret stories generated excitement, notoriety, *and* money. Buzz Cooper had given her a blessing in disguise. Freedom was hers. No more struggling with what morals to include in her teen books. Today's kids were reading whatever caught their fancy—the more adult, the better. The days of sweet romances and friendship stories had passed.

She tucked the royalty check back into her handbag.

"Lindy Greenleaf is moving on."

* * *

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Exactly one week after Crabbet House had dropped her, Lindy sat on a red-eye flight headed for Mazatlan, Mexico. She'd barely slept the night before—she'd been too excited about her latest idea. For the past two years, she'd been successful using only her vivid imagination to conjure up plots and scenes for her erotic romances. Surfing the Internet for ideas, she'd downloaded erotica to read and analyze, and had ordered “how-to” books on the art of writing steamy sex. But the biggest resource had been her own fantasies—scenarios of lust and submission, and willful abandonment of every “nice girl” ideal she'd ever known. If her goal was to have a serious career writing about wild sex, then she'd darn well better experience it first-hand.

She gazed through the small window, only half-seeing the orange-suited baggage handlers and maintenance crew, while her thoughts wandered through the past to her own limited sexual explorations. She could barely remember the one or two exciting “bad boys” whose only interest had been sex without personal involvement. She sighed. Those encounters had seemed prophetic. Her father's scornful words echoed in her head. “*Fat girls can't be choosy.*”

She bit down on her lip and forced his voice out of her head, refocusing her thoughts on Dr. Madison's kind advice. “*Until you accept that what happened was never your fault, you won't be able to experience the joy of loving intimacy. Sex is as much about the mind as it is about the body.*”

The disturbing memories still grated like rough fabric on raw skin. How many years had she held him off? Her throat tightened and she closed her eyes, trying to push away the images of a young girl grappling with the double-edged sword of a father's sexual innuendoes and overt invitations. Obedience to a parent versus self-preservation. Not an easy choice for a child.

Someone bumped the armrest, snapping Lindy's attention back to the present as her gaze landed on the front of faded blue jeans. She

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stifled a small gasp. Brown stitching outlined the fly, dipping into creases and roaming over the mound hidden beneath. *If that's relaxed, I'd like to see what it looks like when it's hard!* She gulped and turned away from the tantalizing distraction.

A soft drawl drifted from above. "Excuse me, I'm in the window seat."

Lindy unbuckled her seatbelt and awkwardly struggled into the aisle, her butt brushing against the man behind the voice. He didn't move aside to let her pass, and the contact sent a flush of warmth up her neck. She concentrated on looking everywhere else as he slid into the seat next to hers.

When she'd settled into her place again, she stole a sideways glance at him. Red-hot shocks careened through her stomach and trickled toward her crotch. She quickly looked away. *I'm sitting next to this for the next twelve hours?*

The soft voice trespassed again. "You going to L.A.?"

How could she talk to him without looking at him? How could she keep her concentration if she *did* look at him?

She took a slow breath, then turned to respond, but couldn't speak. Here was a man with whom she'd happily experiment! Long ash blonde hair swept back from his face, corralled into a ponytail. Heavy eyebrows rambled across a strong forehead, shadowing deep-set eyes. And what eyes—vivid green and sparkling with interest, tiny lines crinkling away from the corners into smooth tan skin. A masculine face, but at the same time, beautiful. Sensuous mouth, nice smile. And he looked vaguely familiar.

She swallowed, her mouth suddenly dry. "Mexico. First time."

His great smile widened. "Me, too. You on vacation?"

Lindy immediately felt self-conscious. What did her hair look like? Had she chewed off all her lipstick? Had her mascara migrated into a raccoon mask? She glanced down at her lap, painfully aware of her

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chubby thighs straining against her white gabardine slacks. She crossed her legs, which only made it worse.

“Sort of. I’m a writer. I needed a change of scenery while I work on a new book.”

The eyebrows lifted. “Really? What do you write? What’s your name?”

Lindy eyed him for a moment. Any chance she could get him to be her guinea pig? She’d have to think about *that* one.

“I write young adult novels—you know, teen stuff.” She offered her hand. “I’m Lindy Greenleaf.”

“Jake Breton.”

The contact with his warm fingers sent prickles of delight across her skin. He held her hand longer than would be polite in most circumstances, which escalated the sensations.

She tilted her head. “What takes you to Mexico?”

“Business. My company needs some advance publicity work done.”

The speaker overhead crackled and snapped, and the attendant’s voice came through, painfully loud. Lindy cringed, but dutifully removed the instruction card from the seat pocket and followed along as the woman demonstrated all the safety procedures. With the instructions for crashing in water, Lindy’s stomach flip-flopped. *Like a seat cushion would do any good after plummeting into the sea at God-knows-how-many-miles-an-hour.*

When the attendant finished her spiel, Lindy glanced at Jake. He’d tipped his head back against the seat and closed his eyes. She allowed her gaze to drift to his lap, wondering if his equipment looked as good as his face. She stared, thinking about making the handsome stranger part of her research. Under her scrutiny, his lap began to grow into a telltale bulge. She sucked in her breath and quickly looked up at his face.

His eyes were half-open and he smiled wickedly.

CHAPTER 2

Jake concentrated on keeping his eyes partly closed and his breathing even, savoring his seat partner's frank scrutiny. His cock stirred and he resisted the temptation to look directly at the doll beside him. Her round butt had felt soft and luscious brushing against him as she'd squeezed into the aisle, and he'd struggled to keep from caressing it as she passed. A vision of those naked plump cheeks raised up in front of him sent blood racing into his groin. He wouldn't be able to pretend much longer.

He lifted one eyelid to get a better look at her. A dreamy expression softened her heart-shaped face. What was she thinking about? Maybe wrapping those full lips around his cock and sucking him off. He smiled at the erotic mental image, and she gasped.

What the hell, let's see if she's a player.

"See anything you like?" he murmured.

Her pale skin turned bright red, and she quickly looked away.

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Jake squeezed his thighs together, urging Dick to calm down, then straightened up in the seat and cleared his throat.

“So, tell me what it’s like to be an author. Do you sit in a garret all day—smoke cigarettes and drink coffee while you type?”

Lindy’s head snapped around to face him, disbelief sharpening her features.

He chuckled. “You know—like Stephen King or Ernest Hemingway.”

Her face relaxed into a charming foolish grin. “I should be so lucky. No, I haven’t quit my day job yet.”

Jake shifted in the seat and crossed his legs. Dick was still acting up.

“Okay, tell me about the day job.”

While she talked, he absorbed the whole picture. If he’d had to guess, he wouldn’t have tagged her as a librarian, but it made sense—who would be better suited to write than someone who loved books? Her passion was evident. What were her stories like? Teen books had to be a bitch to write, what with all the crap today’s kids involved themselves in.

Lindy’s tone changed. “Sometimes I wonder if I’m too old to write for the young adult audience.”

Jake laughed. “Old? What could *that* mean? Thirty?”

Her face flushed with embarrassed delight. “Thanks, but I’m thirty-six.”

He grinned and patted her hand. “Don’t tell anyone.”

The sensation of touching the velvety surface of her skin sent jerky ripples through his pulse, just as it had when they’d first shaken hands. Erotic messages moved in waves through his groin, sending his imagination into fast-forward.

He tried to focus on the conversation. “I’m not much of a reader, but maybe I’ll pick up one of your books when I get home.”

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At that moment, the flight attendants parked the beverage cart in the aisle, and began passing out small foil packets of pretzels.

Jake pulled out his wallet. "Let me buy you a drink. This is gonna be a long night."

Lindy's dazzling smile made him want to think up other things to say that would elicit that same response.

A few minutes later, they touched the rims of their plastic glasses of Chardonnay in a silent toast, then sipped in quiet companionship. Jake threw a sidelong glance at the woman beside him. Her gleaming brown hair curled around her face, and the beautiful soft line of her jaw sent a tremor through his already aching crotch. He treated himself to a long look at her ample breasts, moving sensuously beneath her pink sweater with each breath. His cock hardened again, straining against the seams of his jeans. He wanted to touch those tits, feel the firm nipples in his mouth, run his hands over her curvy hips, taste the creamy honey of her pussy. And when he'd done all that, he'd like to hold her close all night.

He took another big swallow of wine. *Like she'd ever let any of that happen—but it could be worth some effort.*

* * *

Lindy felt foolish babbling on and on about her job at the library. Why would the handsome public relations guy care? And why did she care if he cared?

She swallowed the last of the wine and warmth moved through her chest as she stole another glance at Jake. What would he think if he knew about her "other" writing? More importantly, what would he think about being part of her research? Unlikely he'd even consider it. Sex with a fat girl couldn't be high on his list.

She automatically pulled the hem of her sweater down over the seatbelt buckle. "Tell me about your public relations job."

A brief flash of confusion darkened Jake's eyes, then he grinned.

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“Sorry, I was a million miles away. What did you say?”

“You said you were headed to Mexico to do some PR work. What kind?”

“Oh, yeah. I’m a freelancer. One of my clients wants to expand their market into the Mazatlan resorts. I’m going down there to do the advance planning.”

The effects of the wine and the drone of the jet engines pressed in on Lindy while she listened, and her thoughts drifted again to her own research plans.

A few minutes later, she offered a weak smile. “Sorry, I don’t mean to be rude, but I can’t keep my eyes open.” She reclined her seat back as far as it would go, and scrunched down, trying to get comfortable. “Wake me when we get there.”

* * *

Lindy breathed deeply, feeling the warm, moist air flow into her lungs. The sharp needles of hot water danced across her shoulders, and she closed her eyes. Only one more year and she could leave, find a safe place. Anywhere but here.

She turned off the shower and stepped out into the small bathroom. A tall figure shimmered in the steam, and she gasped. Then a huge fluffy towel wrapped around her body, and she gazed up into deep green eyes.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m here to help you with your research. Isn’t that what you want?”

* * *

Lindy moaned, nestling her head against the rough fabric of the seat. *It’s so hot in here!* She took a deep breath, and jerked awake as a flush of sweat materialized over her chest and crawled up her neck. *Holy cow, what a weird dream!*

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Instantly, she felt Jake's gaze. Another wave of heat moved across her chest, this one sending a ripple through her belly. She shifted in the seat and sat upright, aware of her soaked panties.

She stretched her neck and shoulders. "Are we there yet?"

"I was just going to wake you. We'll be landing in LA in twenty minutes." He checked his watch. "It's the middle of the night, and I'm starving. How about you?"

Lindy gazed at him for a minute, thinking about her mind-boggling plan. "I could eat something."

Jake's expression brightened and a sly twinkle illuminated his eyes. "Anything specific in mind?"

* * *

Stepping through the door into the jet way, Lindy recoiled at the wall of heat pressing into her. She trudged up the slight incline of the passageway, wrinkling her nose at the stale stuffy air, and intensely aware of Jake following close behind her. He seemed tuned in to her thoughts, but for all her great plans, she had no clue how to go about including him in them. She couldn't just ask him to hop into bed with her, could she? She shook her head. No, she couldn't.

"Something wrong?"

Jake's close murmur startled her.

"No, just wondering how I'll get any work done tomorrow—err, today—after a night with no sleep."

"Yeah, jet-lag's a bitch, but if you don't try to follow East Coast time, you'll adjust pretty fast. How long are you staying?"

"Until Sunday night."

The throng of passengers reached the end of the jet way and spilled into the icy air-conditioned terminal. The abrupt change in temperature sent an uncomfortable ripple of goose-flesh over Lindy's arms.

Jake took her elbow and another flash of heat raced toward her crotch. Her thoughts immediately returned to her extraordinary plans.

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Jake seemed more than a little interested in her, and his innuendoes were encouraging. An image of the intriguing bulge in his lap flashed through her head. Her nipples tightened, and she stole a peek at his unique profile as they marched down the concourse toward the public areas. Yes, jumping Jake Breton's bones would be a great way to jump-start her sputtering writing career, not to mention her own personal enjoyment of the project. She gulped. *If I can just get up the nerve.*

Except for the night sky darkening the huge windows, Lindy would not have guessed that it was long past midnight. People of every description filled the brightly lit main terminal. Men dressed in western wear swaggered on fancy boots, and gazed confidently from beneath Stetson brims. Slim, fashionably dressed, perfectly coifed ladies browsed shop windows. Hindu women in brilliant saris shepherded dark-eyed children, and kept close watch on the youngest tots. In a corner of one of the waiting areas, a group of rumpled teenagers slept in a heap, their duffel bags and knapsacks doubling as pillows.

Jake squeezed her elbow. "Lost in space?"

She grinned. "Crowds offer such wonderful opportunities to study people and personalities. It helps me develop characters for my stories."

Jake's face registered awe, and Lindy again pondered the reaction of most people when they learned she was an author. Though writing was hard work with very little glamour involved, everyone reacted the same—authors were celebrities.

She pointed across the concourse. "There's a restaurant."

Two minutes later, she sat back, crossed her legs, and watched Jake stroll up to the bar. His worn jeans weren't tight, but they wrapped neatly around his firm butt, hugged his long legs, then ended just at the tongue of soft brown loafers. Her perusal moved upward to his lean, muscular arms, bronzed from what could only be long hours spent in the sun, or maybe on a tanning bed. A loose fitting, fine knit golf shirt

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draped easily over his broad shoulders and skimmed his chest, but revealed nothing of what physique lay beneath.

I wonder what he looks like without the shirt. A stir moved through her belly. Jake turned sideways and leaned on the bar as he looked through his wallet, and Lindy's gaze drifted to the front of his trousers. She took a deep breath, savoring the deliciously uncomfortable pulsing between her legs. In less than five hours, they'd be in Mexico. She had to come up with a way to include him in her plans, without letting him know why.

* * *

Jake pulled a twenty dollar bill from his wallet, furtively watching Lindy give him the once-over. Her scrutiny sent lust romping through his body, and Dick woke up. Jake turned back toward the bar, sliding his hand over his erection to adjust it to a more comfortable position.

What was different about her? For one thing, she wasn't falling all over him, like so many of the girls he met. Granted, the women who hung out in bars were there mainly to meet guys and maybe score a husband. Like Tammy.

A familiar cold slab moved into his chest, and anger rose like a cobra. Different or not, this chick wouldn't get anywhere near him. He collected the two beer mugs and headed toward the table. Lindy's soft brown eyes sparkled, and her full mouth curved into that beautiful smile.

Well, maybe just a little.

CHAPTER 3

Lindy took a small sip of beer, then tilted her head. “You talk about jet-lag like you have a lot of experience.”

Jake nodded. “I travel quite a bit, mostly to the West Coast. Been to London twice.” He grinned. “Now *that’s* jet-lag! They say it takes one day to catch up for every hour you lose or gain. But on quick trips, sometimes I’m back home before I have a chance to get out of sync.”

“Home is D.C.?”

He shook his head. “Fairfax, Virginia.”

“Do you commute every day?”

“No, only when necessary. Since I freelance, I don’t have to punch a time clock for some suit.”

Something about the way he said the word “suit” sent a blip across Lindy’s mental radar screen, but she said nothing. With any luck, she’d know Jake Breton *very* well by the end of the trip.

Jake finished the last bite of his cheeseburger, then pushed back

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from the table. “I need to hit the men’s room.”

He sauntered out of the pub and disappeared around the corner. Lindy’s courage grew. *What the heck. Just be bold, make it happen. It isn’t like I’ll ever see him again when it’s over.*

* * *

The passenger profiles changed dramatically at the entrance to the international terminal, and Lindy’s brain quickly catalogued the experience for possible future use in a story. She grinned at a group of senior citizens shuffling along behind their tour group coordinator. The luggage ratio had to be about four pieces for each gray headed traveler, not to mention the camera cases, shoulder bags, and huge purses.

In sharp contrast, large families of Spanish-speaking people milled about, keeping the air humming with the din of excitement—even at the ungodly hour. Children chased each other, giggling and squealing. Women laughed and chattered nonstop, handing out food to anyone who came near. The men stood together in small clusters, ignoring the chaos.

Lindy focused on two particularly handsome dark-skinned men with coal black hair and smoldering eyes—such wonderful physical characteristics for an exotic hero. How would this man look in flowing robes and a turban? Brandishing a sword...yes, a dangerous man. The object of her attention turned and looked directly at her, his dark gaze boldly dropping to her breasts. A flutter of excitement moved through the pit of her stomach. Better yet, what things would he do to her if she were his captive? Her pulse leaped at the thought.

Jake’s voice murmured close by. “Dangerous to stare at strange men, especially foreigners.”

Lindy dropped her gaze, feeling the blood rush to her cheeks. Dangerous or not, she would write a story involving just such a man.

Jake walked to the waiting area and dropped into a seat. He slouched down, closed his eyes and, in moments, his chest rose and fell

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slowly. How could he sleep through all this noise? Lindy took advantage of the moment and her aroused state, imagining herself straddling him, lowering her body slowly onto his rigid shaft, feeling him deep inside her. The soft flesh between her legs pulsed, and she exhaled sharply and looked away. *What I'd give to have Roger Rabbit right now!* She squeezed her thighs together, stunned by the erotic sensations coursing through her body. Had she ever felt this way before? Maybe the mental block had tumbled.

When the attendant called for boarding, Jake rose to his feet and stretched, his shirt lifting just enough to provide a glimpse of a flat, firm stomach. Another pulse ran through Lindy's core. They both stepped into the line, and she reached into her handbag for her boarding pass.

Fumbling through the contents, she muttered, "Darn it, I *just* put it in here...ah, found it."

As she withdrew the card, the handbag slipped off her shoulder, spilling its contents onto the dull gray carpet. Lipstick rolled toward the check-in desk. Her change purse popped open, scattering nickels and pennies in every direction. Three pens and four pencils tumbled out, and her tiny pocket recorder hit the floor with a sickening thump. The novel she'd brought along lay face down at Jake's feet.

Oh God! She lunged for the paperback, but Jake already had his fingers around it.

An instant later, his eyes burned with lustful delight. "Wow! Porn!"

She tried to grab the book, but he held it up out of reach, grinning lecherously.

"My, my. I didn't know librarians read such things."

Lindy nearly choked on her hoarse whisper. "It's *not* porn—it's a romance! Give it back!"

He chuckled and tucked the book into his own bag, then nodded toward the entrance to the jet way. "When we get on the

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plane...maybe.”

Mortification burned through Lindy’s chest. How could this have gotten so messed up? Now she’d never be able to follow up on her plan.

Jake touched her shoulder. “Where are you sitting?”

“Nine-B, the window seat.”

“Well, shoot. I’m clear back in row twenty-six. I was hoping we could read your book together.”

His hand moved from her shoulder down the length of her arm, and he pressed close against her, his hardness rubbing her butt. An involuntary gasp hurtled past her lips.

His whisper warmed her ear. “Shhh...Just keep that thought for later.”

Lindy’s heartbeat thundered in her ears. Like she’d thought about anything *else*!

Inside the hot, crowded plane, the line of passengers inched along the aisle, progress slowed every minute or so by travelers stopping to stow luggage in the overhead, find pillows, shrug out of jackets, or settle small children. Lindy craned her neck to see how much longer it would be before she could sit down. The long day was beginning to take its toll.

Behind her, Jake still held her upper arm, his erection pressed against her bottom. She glanced over her shoulder and met his insolent gaze.

“You’re embarrassing me,” she whispered.

He pursed his lips and kissed the air. At the same time, his hand moved from her arm to her waist, sending a jolt of excitement through her belly. Her chagrin forgotten, she took another step forward. Jake had inserted himself right into her plans, and she intended to enjoy every minute of the experience.

Finally, she dropped into her seat and released a grateful sigh. Jake

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looked at her for a minute, then licked his lips and leaned down toward her. His shirt drifted open at the neck, and she caught a tantalizing glimpse of soft hair curling across his bronze chest. She held his gaze and focused on the sultry undercurrent in his voice.

"If I don't talk to you again before we land, wait for me at the gate."

He straightened up and moved down the aisle, and she leaned her head back against the seat, consumed by the ragged exhaustion of her desire. If she didn't get some sleep, she'd fall apart. And so would her scheme.

* * *

Hot breath caressed Lindy's ear, and she snuggled into the strong golden arms surrounding her almost-weightless body. She tried to look at her lover, but he had no face. She frowned, trying to focus, but the vision grew watery, and the embrace disappeared.

A whisper threaded its way into her subconscious.

"Hey, sleepy-head, we're going to land in ten minutes."

She opened her eyes and stared at Jake's amazing face, just two inches away. She inhaled slowly, holding his gaze, wanting to memorize those eyes for the future. A murmur ran through her belly and her pulse ticked.

Jake sat back. "The captain just announced arrival and customs information. Sounds like a zoo to me."

"They say there's safety in numbers. Let's do it together."

A twinkle leaped into his eyes and the luscious lips curved into a wicked grin. "My thoughts exactly."

Lindy's cheeks warmed at his suggestive tone and her courage grew.

She tilted her head. "What happened to my other seat companion?"

"I told her you were my fiancée and I wanted to sit next to you."

"No way!"

"Yup. She was delighted to help out. Now you have to act the part

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for the rest of the flight.”

No problem there. Jake’s hand slipped over hers and, immediately, she felt flustered again. Things were moving swiftly in the right direction, but she wasn’t sure she was the one in control. *I hope I don’t blow this.*

She turned to look out the window. The rosy glow of dawn embraced the world below, filling her with a sense of calm. *I can do this.*

The plane banked sharply, opening up a view like nothing she’d ever seen. Creamy white sand ribboned like lace along the edge of the Gulf of California, following the soft contours of the land. Tidy white breakers marched toward the beach, hauling the deep turquoise sea behind them. Dozens of buildings sprawled along the water’s edge. Disappointment stabbed through her thoughts.

Jake squeezed her hand. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but I never dreamed it would be so heavily built up.”

“It’s a resort. They’ve used every square inch of land.”

“I was hoping for a more secluded, romantic setting.”

Jake’s warm breath caressed her earlobe. “We’ll find a place.”

* * *

The LA terminal had been busy, but General Rafael Buelna International Airport was chaotic by comparison. A dull thump began at the base of Lindy’s skull. How would she ever get through the day? Jake took her elbow and they pushed their way through the throng of travelers. The terminal was uncomfortably warm, and Lindy began to perspire. Her short-sleeved light knit sweater was perfect for the Capitol in September, but now felt heavy and oppressively hot.

Jake steered her past the elevator toward a long flight of granite steps. “Looks like baggage claim is on the lower level.”

“Why aren’t we taking the elevator?” Lindy heard the irritation in her tone.

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“It’s out of order.”

They reached the bottom of the stairs, and pushed forward with hundreds of other passengers vying to retrieve their luggage first.

Jake raised his voice above the din. “How many bags do you have?”

“Just one—a red Samsonite, an old-fashioned hard-sided suitcase.”

“You stay here, I’ll get our stuff.”

He strode away without waiting for a response, and she frowned. He barely knew her, yet he’d jumped in and taken charge. *Wait a minute, you were so hot to involve him in your plans, what’s the problem now?* She shook her head at the mental tirade. *Too tired—a long nap and I’ll be ready to romp.* Jake leaned over to grab a duffel bag off the baggage carousel, and she focused on his tight buns. *Romp, indeed!*

She dug through her shoulder bag and pulled out the travel information she’d printed off the Internet. Customs could be easy or it could be a nightmare. She skimmed the information, and an uneasy stir moved through the pit of her stomach. She glanced up in time to see Jake snag her ancient suitcase. Her stomach pitched like a roller coaster. When she’d packed, the possibility of customs searching her bags hadn’t concerned her, but now she had a serious problem.

CHAPTER 4

Lindy's concern took a detour as she tried not to stare at the sculpted contours of Jake's upper arms as he hefted the bags and started toward her. Remembering the glimpse of his firm stomach, she wondered if he might be one of those body builder types. Lots of power there—enough to make any woman cry “uncle.”

Jake raised one eyebrow. “Something wrong?”

She laughed and looked away. “No, but I can see it will take me a while to get my time clock organized.”

His expression relaxed. “Yeah, well, let's get this over with.” He turned on his heel and carried their luggage toward the customs barrier.

Lindy hurried after him. “Here, let me carry my bag. With any luck, we'll get through quickly.”

She took the suitcase from him, and scanned the customs area for the shortest line. Glass fronted booths barricaded the entire end of the baggage claim area. Each cubicle housed a stern-faced, dark-skinned

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man in a khaki uniform shirt. The customs officers methodically examined entry papers and questioned visitors. Lindy set her suitcase down, and dug through her shoulder bag while Jake waited. He was making her more nervous by the minute. Why didn't he just get into a line?

She pulled out a small envelope and waved it in the air. "Need my ID."

"Oh, yeah." He reached into a pocket of his duffel bag and pulled out a small blue booklet.

Lindy picked up her suitcase. "I don't think you need a passport for entry into Mexico. I just have my birth certificate and a driver's license." She waved the envelope. "And a tourist card."

Jake pocketed his passport and grinned. "Are you going to get in line, or have you changed your mind?"

A bullet of anxiety shot through her pulse. She took a deep breath and walked toward the nearest booth.

The elderly couple ahead of her gathered up myriad bags, then moved on through the barricade. The solemn faced customs officer behind the glass nodded for Lindy to step forward. Five minutes later, he stamped her tourist card, and she pushed through the turnstile. Should she just walk confidently toward the exit and hope no one would notice? Would Jake catch up with her? She hesitated, then took a step forward. *Try for the door.*

"¡Señorita, por favor!"

Her shoulders sagged and she turned toward the voice. A plump woman beckoned from behind a long, low counter.

The woman's face remained expressionless as she motioned for Lindy to put the suitcase on the countertop. "Open please."

Lindy glanced back toward the customs booth. Jake was just pocketing his passport. *Darnit!* She hurriedly unsnapped the old-fashioned latches and opened the case. The customs inspector carefully

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moved the clothing aside, lifted the underwear for a peek beneath, and shook the shoes to dislodge anything that might be hidden in the toe. Jake stepped up beside Lindy, and panic slithered through her chest. She smiled brightly, her cheeks stiff with the effort.

“Why don’t you go to one of the other inspection stations? That way, we’ll get out of here much faster.”

He glanced down the length of the counter. “Nah, you’ll be finished in a minute.”

Oh, boy. She took a deep breath and turned back to the exploration of her suitcase just in time to meet the Mexican woman’s hostile stare. The expression sent a shaft of realization through Lindy’s head. She gulped and looked down at the object in the woman’s hand. Lindy’s heartbeat leaped into overdrive and her skin crawled under Jake’s gaze. She could barely breathe, and her mouth had suddenly filled with cotton.

Do I have to say anything? It isn’t illegal!

The customs inspector said nothing as she tucked the bright pink, multi-tipped vibrator back into the suitcase.

In mortified silence, Lindy stared at her belongings, unable to look anywhere else as the inspector gingerly moved a stack of T-shirts aside. The gloved hands hesitated, then prodded the clear plastic packages in the bottom of the case. Lindy squeezed her eyes shut and waited.

The suitcase latches snapped loudly, and she opened her eyes again to meet a disapproving stare.

The woman’s tone spoke volumes. “You go now.” She turned to Jake and gestured at his duffel bag. “Open please.”

Lindy grabbed her suitcase and turned away, fighting the urge to run toward the exit as fast as she could. Jake’s soft drawl drifted behind her.

“That will be a hard act to follow.”

* * *

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Lindy strode toward the wide glass doors leading to the outside world. How had she gotten herself into this mess? Humiliation almost overwhelmed her. She'd never be able to look Jake in the eyes again, let alone go forward with her original plan. She slowed her pace, then began to laugh. *What a story plot! The heroine buys sex toys to use for research with a stranger, but doesn't expect him to see them until she's ready.* She stopped walking and looked back toward the inspection area. *What would a story character do in this situation?* Jake was moving quickly toward her, a quizzical look on his face. *Hey, you're a writer—just make it up as you go along.* She took a deep breath and composed her features into a neutral expression as Jake came to a halt in front of her.

He smiled and touched her shoulder. "Ready to find a secluded, romantic place to stay?"

An electric current sizzled from beneath his fingers to the tips of hers, and she met his friendly, non-judgmental gaze. *He's not going to make an issue out of it. How many guys would be able to resist?*

Relief settled into her chest. "*More than ready.*"

His hand slid down her arm and grasped her fingers. Courage renewed, she walked along beside him, plotting her next move.

At the exit doors, grim faced, gun-toting military guards stared hard at every person who passed by. Lindy shivered a little. The security cautions she'd read had made her slightly nervous about the trip. Some parts of Mexico could be dangerous, but according to the website, tourism-oriented Mazatlan was one of the more secure areas for visitors. Still, seeing the weapons reminded her that robbery, kidnapping, and rape still occurred in some parts of the country.

What if she were abducted and sold into white slavery? What kinds of things were white slaves forced to do? Another stronger shiver ran across her shoulders, and she looked down at Jake's hand enclosing hers. At least she wasn't wandering around by herself.

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They pushed through the glass doors, and Lindy inhaled deeply. The early morning air smelled fresh and cool, a wonderful respite from the stale recycled air she'd been breathing for the past twelve hours. Jake guided her along the sidewalk toward a taxi rank. A rotund man with a bushy black mustache and thick eyebrows stepped forward, smiling broadly. To Lindy's surprise, Jake negotiated the taxi fare in fluent Spanish. What other interesting facets might he possess?

* * *

Jake pulled the cab door shut and glanced over at Lindy. She looked exhausted and, for sure, the scene at the customs station wouldn't have helped her frame of mind.

He took her hand. "The driver recommends an inn ten miles north of here. It's called El Escondrijo, which means hideaway. We'll still be close enough to come into town."

She nodded wearily. "Sounds good to me...When is your business meeting?"

"Tomorrow and Saturday. I'll be gone during the day, but we can have supper together—if you want to, that is."

Suddenly, she looked young and shy, and a thread of panic laced through his chest. *What the hell am I doing? Acting like a friggin' teenager, that's what!* He abruptly released her hand. Surprise leaped across her features, but her soft tone touched him.

"Yes, I'd like that."

She turned away to look out the car window, and Jake studied her features for about the hundredth time since they'd met. His gaze dropped to the voluptuous curve of her full breasts, and his fingers twitched with the urge to reach under the soft sweater and touch them. Immediately, his thoughts moved to a purely physical level, and his cock hardened, straining against his zipper. Anticipation sent another surge of excitement through his loins. It looked as though he might be sharing Lindy's bed for a few days. He pictured the assortment of sex

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toys in her suitcase and another surge of lust grabbed him.

He cleared his throat. "That Mexican woman didn't seem to appreciate finding Roger Rabbit."

Lindy's head snapped around, her face pale with dismay.

Jake chuckled and shrugged his shoulders. "Hey, don't look at me like that! I was astonished, too."

A wide array of emotions marched across her features: surprise, indignation, embarrassment. She opened her mouth, then clamped it shut and looked away. Now she was angry, and it suited her well.

"So...you gonna tell me about it?"

She didn't respond immediately, then slowly turned toward him, her face now an unreadable mask. "I sell those items online. I make quite a bit of money from it."

Jake couldn't help himself. He barked out a loud laugh. "And you carry samples around with you, just in case?"

Lindy's jaw hardened and her lips thinned into a straight line. "And just *why* is this any of your business?"

He grinned and shook his head. "Sorry. Whatever spins your cherry."

* * *

Fury raged into Lindy's head and she turned her back on Jake to stare out the window. *Who the hell does he think he is, questioning me like that?* She pulled her lower lip between her teeth. *And whatever possessed me to tell him I sell sex toys?* She drew in a deep breath. Somehow, all her great plans were crumbling. She had the perfect opportunity to make her own fantasies come true, but she couldn't seem to step across the line, except in her head. She focused on the scenery, trying to calm her rattled nerves. She had come to Mexico to relax and regenerate her creative juices, let her muse take over. If she wasn't careful, she would single-handedly sabotage the trip.

Jake's drawl curled around her irritation.

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“I’m sorry, Lindy. That was rude of me.”

His hands grasped her shoulders, his thumbs working small circles around the knots at the base of her neck. She closed her eyes, melting under his warm touch, all animosity and self-consciousness fading into oblivion. He slowly massaged all the way down her spine, kneading the tension from her muscles, his touch sending sensual signals to her central command post. A stir began in her belly, and she rhythmically squeezed and relaxed her thighs, encouraging the growing fullness between her legs.

Jake’s hands fell away, and Lindy opened her eyes. The cab had stopped in front of a large building. She stepped out of the car and drew in a deep breath, feeling the sharp sting of salt air in her nostrils. The warm wind caressed her skin like a chiffon scarf.

She gazed wide-eyed at the magnificent structure. The Hideaway looked more like an elegant villa than a hotel. Brilliant white stucco walls rose through two levels, topped by a gently sloping roof covered in rounded tiles the color of sandstone. Tall, elegant windows faced out to sea, and each windowsill displayed a planter filled with magnificent red flowers and exotically patterned tropical leaves. A cluster of palms hugged one corner of the house, and the entire image reflected in a large dark pool. Glossy green lily pads frosted with pale pink water lilies covered the surface.

Serenity slipped into Lindy’s mind. If she couldn’t create a masterpiece *here*, she’d better find another vocation.

CHAPTER 5

“Jake, this is fabulous, but I’m not sure I can afford something so—”

“I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised.”

He scooped up the luggage and started up the marble stairs to the entrance. Lindy sighed and followed, wondering if she’d be making any of her own decisions for the next few days. Jake’s long legs took the steps two at a time, and Lindy forgot her brief pique. The possibility of seeing him unclothed sent a warm surge through her already-humming crotch, momentarily chasing off her exhaustion.

The cool dim foyer of the house offered a welcome respite from the sun, which had risen quickly, pulling the temperature up with it. A short round woman hurried toward them, her English embellished with a heavy Spanish accent.

“¡Señor, Señora! Welcome to El Escondrijo. I am *Señora* Rodriguez, the owner. A room, *por favor?*”

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Jake nodded and answered in Spanish. The woman's face brightened with pleasure, and she began speaking rapidly while gesturing toward other parts of the house.

Lindy sighed. "Excuse me, would you both speak English, please?"

Jake chuckled. "Sorry. She's telling us about the breakfast and dinner schedule, and the rules for the swimming pool."

Señora Rodriguez moved to a small desk in the entryway. "Please sign, I show you room."

Jake turned to Lindy. "Twenty-five American dollars a day for a room with a double bed and a view of the water."

Lindy pulled out her wallet and fished for money. "Sounds reasonable."

Jake laid a credit card on the desk, and the owner looked confused.

Jake grinned. "We need two rooms—we're not married."

* * *

Ten minutes later, *Señora* Rodriguez ushered Lindy into a spacious, softly lit room. "You need anything, come to kitchen."

The door closed quietly, and Lindy examined her surroundings, talking out loud as she walked around.

"This is bigger than my living room."

Tropical print drapes in tones of peach, pale yellow, and golden green contrasted beautifully against the smooth, pale lime-green stucco walls. An old-fashioned white wicker chair and matching settee were cushioned in peach brocade with dark green cording. The same luxurious fabric covered the four-poster bed, and five or six throw pillows in complementary shades were attractively arranged against the headboard.

Lindy moved to the window and caught her breath. Like a photograph in a travel brochure, brilliant green grass swept down the front bank, ending abruptly at the snow-white beach. Deep blue-green water caressed the sand, and the expanse of sea reached endlessly to the

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horizon where the pale blue sky touched it. Palms interspersed with tropical flowers of orange, fuchsia, and deep crimson punctuated the earth tones.

Someone rapped softly on the door.

“Lindy? You awake?”

Jake’s drawl sent the now-familiar ripple of excitement racing through her as she reached for the doorknob. She peered at her new companion and the ripple rose into a wave. He’d changed into shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt. Her imagination hadn’t done the man justice. His perfectly muscled arms and legs were golden brown and dusted with fine blond hairs.

He grinned. “Is your room okay?”

She stepped back and invited him in with a sweeping gesture. “More than okay—I may never leave it!”

He took one step inside and peered around. “Nice. It’s a lot different than mine.” He looked down at her and winked. “Well, come knock on my door whenever you wake up.”

You can count on it!

He sauntered down the hall, and the sensations in Lindy’s crotch escalated.

She headed straight for her suitcase sitting on the floor by the closet. *Maybe I should unpack first. Nah, it can wait.* She opened the case, pushed aside her clothes, and reached for Roger Rabbit.

Seconds later, she pulled back the beautiful bedspread and smoothed a hand over the pale yellow sheets, so crisp they felt as though they might have been ironed. She peeled off her clothes, then sank into the soft mattress and let out a long sigh. A light scent of lavender curled up from the pillow. Every muscle cried out for sleep, but the throb between her legs was more insistent. She picked up the elaborate vibrator and inspected the clever design. Shaped like a huge penis, the soft pink jelly shaft measured about eight inches long, and

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was covered with bumps and ridges. About three inches from the lifelike head of the shaft, a transparent section held small pearl-colored beads. Strategically positioned an inch below that, a fat rabbit-shaped appendage angled in toward the shaft, a feature which had made Roger Rabbit one of the hottest things on the market after its television debut on *Sex and the City*.

Boy, I wish I had some stock in this product!

She spread her legs and touched herself. Her plump lips were wet and slippery just from looking at Jake for two minutes. She closed her eyes, picturing his strong face and lean body, imagining him naked. Her clit twitched beneath her fingertips. The man was *definitely* good for her libido. She stretched her inner lips aside and positioned the bulbous vibrator tip at the opening. Slowly, she inched the fat shaft in a little, then pulled it out. In a little farther, then out again. Her juices began to flow and, within moments, the pocket of beads pushed past the inside rim of her vagina. Six inches of firm gel filled her, pressing against her deepest recesses.

Her heartbeat quickened, and she began to breathe in short bursts. She wanted to plunge in the shaft and turn it on, but she held back. The more she teased herself, the wilder her orgasm would be. She relaxed and pushed the full-length of the vibrator in. The rabbit nose pressed hard against her swollen clit. She brought her knees together and squeezed her inner muscles tightly. Now she could barely breathe.

She moved the shaft switch into the first position, then arched her back as the rod began to gyrate inside her, grinding the beads against her. The penis head grazed her G-spot with each slow rotation. A deep throb began in her belly, and she quickly moved the second switch to medium speed. Instantly, the rabbit nose vibrated in a frenzy against her clitoris, sending exquisitely painful shocks through the rigid nub. She slid both switches into the highest mode, and the shaft writhed crazily, while the bunny chewed on her pulsing bundle of nerves.

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She began to hyperventilate and moan, struggling to keep from crying out. “Oh, my God, oh my God, ohhhh...”

The eruption crashed over her like molten lava, sending aftershocks through every nerve. Her muscles clenched the vibrator and she rocked against it, again and again, arching her back and succumbing to the sweet torture. The orgasm began to fade and she exhaled, long and slow. Her heartbeat thumped in her ears. She moved the switches back to the first position, then lay very still, letting the vibrator work its magic. In minutes, the groundswell of orgasm started again, and she flipped the switches to high. The rabbit pummeled her throbbing clit, and she spread her legs as wide as possible. Pushing the shaft as deep as it would go, she sank back into her newly found fantasies and imagined Jake’s gorgeous body pounding her with his passion.

* * *

Jake braced one foot against the sun-bleached log and leaned into the stretch. Muscles tight from long hours of inactivity resisted at first, then gradually lengthened. As he limbered up, he stared at the white sand, and Lindy’s pretty face drifted into his line of vision. Why couldn’t he stop thinking about her?

He glanced at his watch, then started down the beach at a steady lope. Focusing on a dark spot at the end of the beach, he concentrated on his breathing and the rhythm of the run. No one—not even the intriguing librarian—would keep him from realizing his dreams.

Ten minutes later, he jogged past a small blond woman walking an Irish Setter. Immediately, his rhythm zigged when it should have zagged, and Tammy’s face leaped into his thoughts.

“Shit!”

He stopped and turned toward the ocean, trying to control his breathing. Would he ever be free of her? Hadn’t she destroyed enough of his life already?

CHARADE

* * *

Lindy woke from a deep sleep and stared at the ceiling, momentarily forgetting where she was. The light in the room had changed dramatically, and she glanced at the clock beside the bed. She'd slept most of the day. She stretched, enjoying the pleasant sensation of muscles lengthening and relaxing. Her leg brushed against something cool and firm, and she grinned. Ol' Roger had given her the ride of her life. Now she was ready to take on Mr. Handsome down the hall. She picked up the vibrator and, for one second, was tempted to have one more romp.

"Nope, gotta save something for later."

She slipped out of bed and padded across the tile floor, then dropped to her knees in front of the open suitcase. The array of sex toys had cost her a small fortune, but she'd decided that she wouldn't be able to write realistically about such things if she'd never tried any of them herself. She tucked the pink vibrator under a pile of clothes, and grabbed a pair of clean panties.

In the bathroom, her reflection in the full length mirror put a damper on her optimism. Her large breasts swayed with every movement, casting shadows over a softly rounded belly that defied all attempts to suck it in. A small roll of fat circled her waist, and her broad hips sported classic love handles.

Resignation swept over her. No way could she undress in front of Jake.

An hour later, freshly showered and filled with trepidation, Lindy moved down the hall toward Jake's room. He opened the door, and she gaped, flinching at the explosion that rocketed through her crotch. Drops of water glistened across his bare chest, tanned to the color of toast. His dark blond hair hung loosely about his face, dripping water over his broad shoulders. A sudden flash of familiarity hit her again. Who on earth did he remind her of?

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He grinned. “Hey, decide to join the land of the living?”

The smoldering heat between her legs intensified. “I can’t believe how tired I was.” She cast a curious look into the room. “Did you get any rest?”

He stepped back from the door and gestured for her to enter. “A little, but now I’m ready to party.”

She stopped just inside the door, unsure whether to stay, or wait for him downstairs. A quick glance at his broad chest made the decision for her. She moved past him.

“Where are we going for dinner? Any idea what’s around?”

He closed the door, then swiped a towel across his shoulders. “I talked to Carmen while you were sleeping. There are several good restaurants in town, and two very popular discos. I figured we’d just drift—how does that sound?”

“Who’s Carmen?”

“The owner’s daughter.”

Jake reached into the closet to grab a shirt, and Lindy stared at his flat torso. His jeans hung low on his hips, threatening to slip down and reveal the goods. Her sex pulsed. Maybe she could do this after all. It would certainly be the most enjoyable research she’d ever done.

CHAPTER 6

The taxi sped down the highway, and Lindy imagined the evening ahead—a carefree resort atmosphere, a little wine, and some serious “studying” in a dark room—a *very* dark room. She glanced sideways at Jake and caught him looking at her, a thoughtful smile pulling up one corner of his sexy mouth.

She raised an eyebrow. “What?”

“Nothing, you just look so different than when we met on the plane. That color looks good on you.”

Lindy glanced down at the dark turquoise peasant dress she’d purchased for the trip. The gauze fabric slithered and slipped over her full body with every movement, the material just thin enough to give a hint of what lay beneath. Her nipples hardened and raised little peaks in the fabric.

Jake whistled under his breath. “Yes, that is a *very* fine dress!”

Lindy’s cheeks warmed. She felt as though Jake were undressing

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her, right there in the backseat. Her imagination soared. What would *that* be like? Jake slowly slipping the dress down over her shoulders, then exposing her breasts. The taxi driver would watch them in the rearview mirror. The dress would slide down over her belly—*Oh, God*. She automatically pulled the dress loosely over her midsection, her fantasy dissolving into self-consciousness.

The taxi pulled up in front of a low adobe building, and they climbed out. Lindy tried to sort out the countless sounds of the busy tourist area. The strains of diverse music drifted from many directions, punctuated by the incessant honk of traffic. People of every imaginable race crowded the sidewalks, and neon signs flashed and blinked up and down the street in the early evening light.

Jake touched her arm, his green eyes sparkling with innuendo. “I’m *really* hungry.”

The soft flesh between her legs grew warm. *I can play that game, too*. She tilted her head and gave him a sultry look.

“What kind of appetite do you have?”

Recognition of the repartee flashed across his features and his smile widened with delight. “A very *big* one.”

The image of a large throbbing cock materialized in Lindy’s head, and she looked away, suddenly stunned by her own boldness.

Jake chortled. “Gotcha!”

Minutes later, they sat at a small round table on the patio behind the restaurant. Beautiful tropical gardens surrounded the dining area, and soft Latin music drifted on the air. Lindy closed her eyes and inhaled a deep breath, letting the atmosphere permeate her mind and body. She would get around her inhibition—one way or another.

Jake’s voice brought her back. “Any plans for tomorrow?”

“I thought I’d work on the outline for my story in the morning, then do some sightseeing in the afternoon.”

He shook his head. “You’d be better off to reverse your schedule.

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Everything closes up for siesta from two to four.”

Now here was something more than a handsome face and hunky body. This was a man who always seemed to have things under control. Including *her*.

A waiter delivered two frothy glasses of beer, then took their order. After he'd gone, Jake lifted his drink in a toast.

“Here's to your muse.”

Lindy chuckled and touched her glass to his. “My muse is already hard at work.” She took a long swallow of the dark brew, the sharp aromatic flavor a pleasant surprise—so different from American beer.

“How did you start writing? Did you always know you'd be a writer?”

She shook her head. “Never imagined such a thing. I was reviewing three teen books for possible library acquisition. They were *terrible*. I kept saying to myself that even *I* could do better.” She grinned. “Next thing I know, I'm writing some of the scenes like I thought they should be written...that's all it took. I just *became* a writer.”

Jake's admiration illuminated his face and Lindy again had the feeling she knew him from somewhere.

“Wow, what a great story! What are you writing now?”

The question caught her off-guard and she blinked. “Oh...I have a couple of ideas, but I haven't fleshed them out yet.”

Jake leaned forward. “Like what? I'm really interested—how do you come up with plots and stuff?”

She stalled for time, trying to think of something plausible that teenagers might read. Nothing came to mind. Instead, her thoughts reeled with erotic images for the story she would write about Jake.

She bailed out. “I never talk about my plots.”

He looked surprised, then nodded and sat back in his chair. A tiny murmur of anxiety ran through her head. *Oops, maybe that was too abrupt.*

CHARADE

At that moment, a trio of mariachi singers strolled up to the table, strumming their guitars and flashing wide smiles. Lindy studied the men's faces, absorbing the distinctive features and smoldering dark eyes. All three men were dressed identically in close-fitting pants and waist-hugging jackets the color of sun-drenched terra cotta. Heavy gold brocade threaded an intricate pattern down the sides of the tight, tapered trousers, stopping at dark brown low-heeled boots. The singers wore large white sombreros encrusted with the same gleaming brocade.

Lindy glanced at Jake and he winked, then nodded to the nearest musician. The tempo of the music changed, became seductive and romantic. Lindy closed her eyes as the enchanting melody moved into her soul. Her shoulders swayed in time to the guitar, her head filled with visions of slow steamy sex under tropical night skies, wrapped in the exotic rhythm of the music.

The sound moved away, and she opened her eyes to Jake's unmistakable expression.

He tilted his head, considering her for a moment. "Pretty sexy stuff."

She nodded slowly. *This just might be easier than I thought.*

* * *

Jake watched Lindy's reaction to the stirring music. His assessment was correct—a seductress lurked beneath the pristine librarian facade. She'd closed her eyes, and a flush had risen to her cheeks. Her large breasts were almost visible beneath the thin fabric of the sexy dress. His cock stiffened immediately, and he threw a glance at the lead singer, whose sly smile of understanding twitched his heavy mustache. He nodded his head in camaraderie. Jake grinned and shifted in his chair, trying to make more room for his erection.

The musicians moved off, and Lindy sighed and gazed across the table at him. Something in her eyes sent another bolt of need through his shaft. With any luck, he'd be fucking her brains out before the night

CHARADE

ended.

She pulled a small notebook and pen from her purse, and began writing.

He leaned forward. "Whatcha doin'?"

She glanced up and grinned. "Making notes on those singers. I just had a great idea for a story."

"Gonna share?"

She contemplated him for a moment, then nodded. "Suppose a group of teenagers comes to Mexico for Spring Break, and one of them disappears. The plot could revolve around the others trying to solve the mystery because the local authorities refuse to help."

Jake nodded, then frowned. "How do the mariachi singers fit in?"

She laughed. "Atmosphere. Just for color, and to make the story seem real."

He sat back. "I noticed you didn't bring a computer with you. Do you write everything out by hand?"

"No, just my notes and outlines. Once I have a firm idea in my head, I start typing it." She shook her head, grinning self-consciously. "So much for not talking about my work."

The waiter set two large platters in front of them, filled the glasses with amber-tinted wine, then bobbed his head.

Jake smiled. "*Gracias.*"

Lindy stared at the pile of steaming seafood. "Good grief, is this all for *us*?" She transferred shrimp and calamari to her plate, then helped herself to the array of fresh fruit and a large spoonful of golden saffron rice.

Her movements were precise as she arranged the food on the plate just the way she wanted it. Exactly the way she'd packed her suitcase. Jake smiled as another rush of blood surged through his cock.

Going through the motions of filling his own plate, he furtively watched Lindy as she began to eat. She gazed at the display of food in

CHARADE

front of her, then gingerly picked up a large shrimp, glistening with juice. She inspected it for a moment, then lifted it to her mouth and looked across the table at him. The shrimp brushed against her full lips, and his fork stopped in mid-air. She continued to hold his gaze while she moved the plump pink morsel along her lower lip. Slowly, she slipped it halfway into her mouth. Jake's erection strained against his leg, and his pulse jerked. The shrimp slid back out, her lips wrapped around it, sucking away the sauce. Her small pink tongue appeared and she closed her eyes.

"Oh, my God, this is heaven!"

Baby, you ain't seen nothin' yet!

* * *

As Lindy toyed with the shrimp, her recognition of Jake's desire confirmed that this would be a trip to remember. Her juices gushed, soaking her panties. She stared boldly at him and slipped the shrimp back into her mouth. She bit down, savoring the explosion of garlic, butter, and some aromatic herb.

Jake's eyes darkened with lust and he leaned forward. "You are asking for trouble, my dear."

She opened her eyes wide and smiled innocently. "Whatever do you mean?"

A jolt of need ran through her. At that moment, she wanted to crawl under the table and take his cock in her mouth. The eroticism of such a forbidden act inflamed her already throbbing pussy. *This will be the sexiest book I've ever written.*

An hour later, they drifted from the soft lights of the restaurant patio to the brightly lit tourist promenade. Jake's hand rested on Lindy's shoulder, his warmth permeating the fabric of her clothing.

"Beautiful dress, Lindy." His fingers moved to the elastic neckline. "But you need to wear it like the local women do."

He slowly pulled the elastic down over her shoulders, and her

CHARADE

breath caught in her throat. The front edge of the neckline grazed the tops of her bulging breasts, and her nipples hardened.

He stared at the peaks under the dress and nodded. “Yes, this is the way you should look.”

His hand drifted down, his thumb grazing a nipple. A red-hot poker slammed through her crotch and she leaned against his caress, looking up into his face. A dimple she hadn’t noticed before punctuated his smile. He licked his lips suggestively, then put his mouth close to her ear.

“Ready to go back to the hotel?”

She nodded, stunned by the depth of her need.

As if by ESP, a taxi rolled up beside them. She turned to climb into the back seat, and Jake’s hands grasped her hips, pulling her hard against him. Her head roared with exciting images and plans for the rigid shaft pressing against her butt.

Beside her, Jake slouched into the seat and stretched out his legs. Lindy couldn’t keep from looking at the bulge in his pants. He thrust his hips up, making it more prominent, and she licked her lips.

His drawl thickened with heat. “You gonna treat me like that shrimp?”

She lowered her voice to a sultry murmur. “Oh, no—much better!”

He grabbed her hand and pressed it against his mound. Another skyrocket blasted through her belly.

The taxi pulled up in front of the inn, and Jake slipped his arm around her waist. As he guided her through the quiet entry hall and up the staircase, her heart thundered beneath her ribs. In moments, she’d be living the fantasy of a lifetime.

The warm yellow glow of hurricane lamps at either end of the hall cast soft shadows on the walls, and the scent of jasmine drifted through an open window at one end. Jake’s hand slipped from her waist to her butt, caressing each cheek, and keeping her fires stoked.

CHARADE

She stopped at the door to his room, and he chuckled.
“Uh-uh. *Your* room. You have all the toys.”

CHAPTER 7

Lindy's cheeks flamed and she bit back a sharp retort. Why did she feel like this? She had what she wanted—Jake was eating out of her hand, and she had, after all, purchased the sex toys for just such an occasion.

She turned and headed down the hall. *Isn't this a fine situation—big, bad Lilah Jade, sex goddess and popular erotica author is embarrassed!*

While she fumbled with her key, Jake's hand moved softly across her behind. "Guess I should keep my big mouth shut, huh?"

She looked up and his sincere expression melted into an insolent grin. "But, hey, if you're gonna sell that stuff, don't you need to know how it works?"

Lindy's heat suddenly cooled—the moment had passed. She'd never be able to do it now, not under Jake's bold scrutiny and teasing. Descriptions of passionate sex couldn't be mechanical. Readers

CHARADE

gobbled up stories of wanton desire, domination, and submission, but more than that, they wanted a human element on which to center their own secret fantasies—something *she* knew better than anyone.

“Jake, I’m really whipped. I need to say goodnight.”

His handsome features softened with disappointment and he took a step back. “Okay. Will I see you tomorrow afternoon?”

Lindy had forgotten that he would be gone all day. “What time do you have to leave in the morning? Maybe we could have breakfast together.”

His expression brightened. “That’s a great idea. I don’t have to be anywhere until nine.” He postured an elaborate salute. “See you first thing.”

He sauntered off toward his room and dismay flooded into her head. How could she have screwed this up so royally? Why not just call out, tell him she’d changed her mind? He stopped at the door to his room and looked back at her. Her inner thighs prickled with heat, the warmth moving rapidly toward her crotch. She gazed at him intently, willing him to come back to her.

His white teeth sparkled through the sexy smile. “Night.” He disappeared into his room, and the door bumped closed with finality. Lindy stepped into her own room and leaned against the wall. So much for being in control of her destiny.

She sighed deeply and looked down at her suitcase. *Might as well unpack—I’m sure not sleepy.* Scooping up a stack of undies, she spied Roger Rabbit’s seductive tip peeking from beneath a pair of white shorts. Her simmering desire rose to a slow boil, and she set the underwear aside and reached for the vibrator. Jake was right in one sense—she couldn’t use these things if she didn’t practice. She gazed for a moment at the elaborate device, then set it aside. *I know how this one works.* Her flesh rippled with the memory.

She dug to the bottom of the suitcase, gathered up the rest of the sex

CHARADE

toys, and laid them out on the bedspread. Which to try first? She picked up a slender white object that looked like a fat plastic tampon connected by a thin wire to a remote control. The label said “vibrating egg.” She flicked the switch, and the egg buzzed to life, sending vibrations through her fingers and all the way up to her elbow. She turned it off, picked up the instructions, and grinned. *I’ll definitely enjoy using this one with Jake.*

She scowled, her enthusiasm fading. Use it with Jake *when?* She’d had the perfect chance and she’d blown it. She sank onto the edge of the bed and let her thoughts wander. What deep-seated fear was keeping her from letting go? Her body ached to feel Jake’s arms, his passion, the thrust of his need, but her head was in control. She smoothed her hands over the soft fabric of her dress, molding it against her thighs. Would Jake be repulsed by the abundant soft flesh that padded her body? Or was her fear deeper than vanity?

Forlorn and confused, she sighed and turned her attention back to the items on the bed.

A clear cellophane bag held two identical small blue devices. Lindy examined the nipple clips. She’d never heard of such a thing, but the idea had fascinated her, so she’d added them to her on-line shopping cart. She flicked the switch on one of them and grinned with delight. The hum was soft, but the vibrations were strong. She pulled the dress off over her head, then stepped out of her panties. Checking the illustration on the package, she carefully clipped one of the devices to her left nipple. A tiny black thumbscrew tightened the jaws of the clip around her firm nub, sending darts of pleasure into the flesh. She attached the second clip and turned the switches on.

She gasped and cried out. “Oh, my God!”

Deep vibrations fanned out across her breasts and she arched her back. Her skin thrummed and warmed, the sensations crawling over her skin and migrating toward her pussy. Cupping a hand around each

CHARADE

breast, she absorbed the hum, then smoothed both hands down her torso, spreading her fingers over her hot skin, and breathing hard. Sliding one hand to the soft hair over her mound, she eased a fingertip across her clit. It felt hard and ready. She pressed it gently, moving it back and forth, feeling it grow beneath her touch. Another wave of erotic sensation pulsed through her flesh and she tipped her head forward, her gaze drifting to the array of toys on the bed. Wave after wave of sensation rode through her and she snatched up the rabbit vibrator. Bracing one foot against the edge of the mattress, she slid Roger home, hard and quick, almost shrieking at the deep penetration. She pushed the control switches to the highest speed.

Her body threatened to self-destruct with the impact of the erotic attack. Bucking against the vibrations, she moaned as orgasm slammed through her body.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!”

* * *

Jake moved quietly down the hall toward Lindy’s room, thinking about his plan. He raised a hand to knock, then stopped and stepped closer, leaning his forehead lightly against the door. From behind the thick oak, he heard moans and soft cries, and Ol’ Dick snapped to attention.

Sounds like Miss Lindy is practicing. He smiled, listened for a minute longer, then glanced at the bottle of wine he’d brought along. He knocked softly on the door. A loud thump resonated from the other side, and he almost laughed out loud. Pressing his ear against the wood, he listened to the scuffling and bumping. She was obviously trying to get everything put away before she opened the door. *That’s okay. We’ll just trot it all out again.*

Her throaty voice held the remnants of raw passion. “Who is it?”

Jake massaged his erection. “Who the hell do you think it is?” he rumbled.

CHARADE

The door opened about twelve inches and Lindy's flushed face appeared, sending more jolts through his groin.

He grinned. "There's a party in my pants and you're invited."

Her eyes widened in surprise, then she threw her head back and laughed. Stepping aside, she pulled the door open and gestured for him to enter.

He stepped into the room, intentionally brushing against her arm as he passed. A quick look around revealed nothing of what she'd been doing, but the strong scent of her sex hung on the warm air.

He headed toward a small table in the corner. "Round up some glasses—I forgot to bring mine."

He worked the cork out of the wine bottle, listening to Lindy in the bathroom, removing the cellophane wrap from the plastic glasses. He imagined how she would feel under his thrust. *I should take her right now, against the sink or on the tile floor.* His cock was so hard it ached, and the pressure in his balls made it difficult for him to think about using any kind of finesse.

Lindy stepped up beside him and set the glasses on the table. "I'm glad you came back."

He turned to answer and lost himself in her limpid eyes. For an instant, he thought he saw a glimmer of fear. Who might this lovely creature be, deep in her heart?

* * *

Lindy recognized the undisguised desire in Jake's eyes, and her heart thudded. Her body still hummed with orgasmic after-waves, and she could only think about how his cock would feel inside her. All the doubts faded. *Who needs sex toys?*

Her fingers grazed his hand as she accepted a tumbler of wine, the contact sparking across her skin like static electricity. She took a sip, her gaze traveling up the muscular forearms, imagining those arms wrapped around her in a tight embrace. Anticipation seethed in the pit

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of her stomach and she took another long swallow, savoring the warmth as it spread down her throat. Boldly, she met his gaze, searching the recesses of her mind for something clever to say.

His touch startled her, and she looked down at his hand, moving slowly up her bare arm. Her whole body came to attention, recently primed and well prepared. His touch sent delicious shivers across her shoulders.

He held out his hand. "I brought back your book."

Lindy stared at the enticing cover of the steamy paperback romance she'd dropped in the airport. A fine sheen of perspiration spread quickly across her chest. *This is ludicrous. I feel like a bumbling teenager on a first date.*

Jake chuckled. "This is really hot stuff." He opened the book and handed it to her. "Here, read me a little story." He pulled out a chair and sat down.

Lindy stared at him, hoping to see his familiar teasing expression. *Good grief, he's serious!*

Her gaze dropped to the open pages. *Why not? At least I can leave my clothes on.*

Clearing her throat, she began to read.

"Nick's tongue followed the whorls of Amanda's ear, sending indescribably erotic messages to her already pulsing..." Lindy gulped, struggling with the words of passion read aloud. "...clit." A quick glance at Jake's face calmed her thumping pulse, and her voice became stronger.

"Beneath the loose shirt, Nick's fingers deftly unhooked the front of her bra, then moved to her hard nipples. His callused fingers grasped the rigid nubs, rolling them, twisting gently, pinching. She felt only the delicious sensation at the brink of pain. She moaned, wanting more, but terrified of her own passion. She wanted to touch him, feel his erection. She tried to reach behind her.

CHARADE

“Instantly, he growled, ‘Keep your hands on the rail. If you won’t cooperate, I’ll have to tie you up.’”

Lindy’s crotch ached, pulsing with the erotic words and images, her own fears and desires surfacing to meld with the erotic scene.

She continued. “A sleeping giant awakened in the dark depths, building and rolling upward, filling Amanda’s pussy with the promise of ecstasy. Nick squeezed her nipples harder, sending delicious arrows of agony through her breasts, missiles that found their target in her clit. Her hips began to move, and she squeezed her thighs, beckoning the orgasm she knew would transcend anything her fingers or vibrator had ever produced.

“From somewhere, she heard a moan. Was it her own passion breaking free? Was it Nick? She rolled her head back onto his shoulder.

“‘Touch me. Please,’ she whimpered.

“‘Not yet,’ he murmured.

“He released her nipples, then tightened his arms around her, holding her firmly against his chest. He nibbled her neck, his soft lips caressing her skin with a feathery touch. Her legs began to wobble as the energy of passion ebbed, pulling her back from the very brink of heaven.”

Jake’s voice sounded thick as honey. “Sell me one of your toys.”

A blizzard roared through Lindy’s stomach. *Is he kidding?* One look at his face said he wasn’t.

Her nipples hardened as she padded across the room toward the bed, her thoughts racing. Wasn’t this exactly what she’d planned? Hoped for? Why the devil did she feel so terrified? Dropping to her knees, she retrieved the plastic bag of sex toys from under the bed. Taking a deep breath, she rose to her feet. *I’m going to need a lot more wine to do this.*

She turned back to face Jake, and her heartbeat slammed to a stop.

CHAPTER 8

Speechless, Lindy gaped at Jake, slouched back in the chair, his jeans unzipped. The biggest cock she'd ever imagined poked straight up in the air like a pink and brown totem pole. Her pulse jerked again and need throbbed through her crotch.

Jake's eyes sparkled with potent intent over the rim of his wineglass. "Bring that stuff over here."

She took a deep breath and moved toward him, wetness oozing down her leg. She couldn't stop looking at his shaft, thinking how it would feel if she straddled his lap and impaled herself on it. She licked her lips, took another deep breath, and set the bag of sex toys on the table. At the same time, she spotted her handbag in the chair. The tape recorder—somehow, she had to turn it on.

Jake's face was flushed with excitement, and the corners of his mouth turned up in a sly smile. "I'm ready."

"Just a sec."

CHARADE

She leaned over and reached into the bottom of the handbag to flick the switch on the high-powered micro recorder, then moved it closer to the front of the bag as she withdrew her hand. She also grabbed the tube of cherry flavored lubricating jelly she'd forgotten to pack.

From behind her, Jake's voice assumed a commanding tone. "Stay bent over, just like you are, and pull your dress up over your butt."

Her breath froze in her chest. She was naked under the dress.

Jake's soft voice dragged out the words in a sing-song tone. "I'm wai—ting."

A rush of excitement skittered across her skin. How could words be so titillating? She slowly lifted the hem of the dress over her back and squeezed her eyes shut. The sensation of being naked in the bright light sent her apprehension meter off the scale.

The soft drawl held a ragged edge. "God, what a beautiful heart-shaped ass."

Lindy sagged with relief. He wasn't repulsed by her flab. A current of air rushed across her exposed parts, followed by the rustling sound of cellophane. What was he doing? Anticipation replaced anxiety, spiraling into her belly. Jake's hands cupped her butt cheeks and caressed them softly, moving in wider and wider circles. The deep flesh of her crotch began to pulse. His thumbs grazed the edges of her pussy, and she pressed against the touch. He paused briefly, then his finger slithered along her butt crack and she gasped at the shock of the cold jelly against her anus. The heat in her crotch escalated. *Oh God, what have I gotten into?* She started to straighten up, but Jake held her firmly.

"Relax, I won't do anything you don't want me to."

His fingers moved to her pussy, spreading the soft jelly along her outer lips. She exhaled slowly. His fingers slipped inside. Her breath started coming in small puffs, and her pulse thundered in her ears. Intense heat licked across the skin on the insides of her thighs, and her

CHARADE

clit pulsed.

“Touch me, please,” she whimpered.

A sexy chuckle. “Don’t you worry about *that*.”

More rustling plastic, then something cold and firm pressed against her clit. Jake gently rocked the object back and forth until it slipped past her swollen lips, then he pushed it deep inside her. She closed her eyes. *The vibrating egg!*

“Okay, straighten up now.”

She turned slowly, wondering how she could meet him face to face, but his soft expression and sparkling eyes promised only delight. Her fear disappeared. He took the hem of her dress and pulled it off over her head, leaving her naked and vulnerable again.

His eyes widened as he looked at her from top to bottom. “God, you are *so* sexy!”

A jumble of thoughts raced through her brain. Was the man blind? How could he think cellulite dimples were sexy? She focused on his expression—obviously, he didn’t see her flaws. For the first time in her life, she almost felt good about her body. Jake’s open admiration made her feel like the sexiest woman alive, and her courage regrouped. She lifted her chin and gave him a sultry smile. *Let the games begin.*

Suddenly, the egg began to hum inside her, and she gasped. Her gaze dropped to his hand, and his thumb moved the switch forward. Her hips bucked as the egg began to pound. Her nipples hardened, and she grasped them, rolling the rigid nubs between her fingers, heightening the sensations in her crotch. The vibrations stopped, jolting her with the sudden void.

Jake took her shoulders and turned her around. “Sit down and spread your legs.”

Numb with lust, she did as he ordered, frantic to climax and relieve her agony.

Jake pulled one of the nipple clips out of the bag, examined it for a

CHARADE

moment, then dropped to his knees. Lindy stared at the top of his head. *What is he going to do with that?* An instant later, her hips jerked as the nipple clip gently closed around the base of her clitoris.

From between her knees, he looked up and grinned wickedly. “Ready?”

As she opened her mouth to reply, the egg inside her started to vibrate again, and Jake flicked the switch on the nipple clip. She gasped, gripping the arms of the chair until her knuckles ached.

Jake watched her for a second, then nodded. “Relax and let it happen—we’re just getting started.”

He rose and stepped quickly out of his jeans. The egg thumped against her G-spot and she began to pant as her clit hardened with the stimulation. A wave started deep in her core, building, moving her toward climax. She focused on the sensations, beckoning quick release.

Suddenly, Jake straddled the chair, and Lindy gaped at his cock, one inch from her mouth.

“Suck it.”

“I ca—”

He slipped the rigid shaft through her open lips. Tasting the cum on the tip of his cock, the sensations racking her body slammed into her mind. The raging torrent deep inside her drove toward home, and she closed her mouth around his shaft, pulling it in deep. She lifted a hand and touched his balls, stunned by the contradiction of soft skin over hard organs.

He groaned, then his voice became guttural. “Oh, God, baby, I wanna come in your mouth!”

Lindy was out of control. Orgasm screamed through her body, and she grabbed Jake’s thighs to ride the wave, sucking him harder and harder, while peak after peak of savage pleasure coursed through her body. His cock pulsed and rippled as he climaxed, filling her mouth with the salty sweet taste of his seed.

CHAPTER 9

In the warm afterglow of release, Lindy's body thrummed with echoes of ecstasy. Her arms and legs felt as though lead weights held them down. She gazed at Jake through half-closed eyelids as he zipped up his jeans. Humming softly, he pulled back the covers on the bed, then straightened up and turned to look at her. A soft, friendly smile warmed the light in his eyes, and a fleeting emotion ran through Lindy's head, but disappeared before she could identify it.

Jake slipped his hands under her arms and lifted her effortlessly to her feet, his sexy smile just inches from her face. She focused on his lips, stunned by her sudden desire to kiss him.

His voice was husky. "C'mon, let's get some sleep. I have a long day ahead of me."

He guided her toward the four-poster. When she sank back onto the soft bed, he pulled the covers up to her chin, and smoothed her hair away from her face. "See you in the morning."

CHARADE

She reached for him. “Aren’t you going to stay?”

He chuckled. “I said I need some sleep—won’t happen with *you* in the bed!”

Lindy’s eyelids drifted down as the door closed softly behind him. Though she felt drained, her sexual nerve endings still crackled with heat. She revisited the passion of the evening, then mused through all manner of scenarios for their next meeting. She craved having Jake’s cock inside her, pounding her the way the egg had, sending her over the edge. Her eyes snapped open. *I’ll have one more go with Roger Rabbit.*

She crawled out of bed and padded over to the table. Seeing her handbag on the chair, she remembered the recorder. She pulled it out and hit the “play” button. Listening for a moment, she grinned with satisfaction. She’d definitely have a best seller on the shelves by spring. She tucked the device back into her bag, then turned her attention to the array of sex toys. The only one she hadn’t tried was the strap-on butterfly. She examined the device closely, read the instructions, then put it back on the table. *I’ll try that one tomorrow while I’m sightseeing.*

She slipped back into bed with the pink vibrator. Her soft flesh was slick and accommodating, and the fat shaft slipped in easily. She positioned the rabbit’s nose against her clit, and turned the switch. The head of the shaft began to rotate slowly, rubbing against the highly sensitized inner walls of her pussy, urging on the deep tightening in her belly. She closed her eyes and pictured Jake’s cock, recalling the velvety skin against her lips, the sweet taste of the crevice as her tongue explored.

She moved the switch forward a notch and the gyrations moved faster. Her breathing speeded up and she wished she’d grabbed the nipple clips. She thought about Jake’s fingers around her asshole, and the sensation of his intimate touch. Instantly, her sphincter muscles clamped at the erotic thought. She pushed the shaft switch to full speed

CHARADE

and activated the rabbit. The storm inside her broke loose again. Arching her back, she cried out.

* * *

Jake leaned against the wall outside the door to his room, his eyes closed, his head tipped back, consumed with thoughts about the past two hours. Lindy's innocence and pure delight were more erotic than all the sex toys in the world. *She is the sexiest fucking woman I've ever met. She makes Tammy look like a rank amateur.* His eyes snapped open and he waited for the usual anger to boil up. It didn't come, and he slowly exhaled his relief. Maybe—just maybe—he was emerging from the darkness.

He straightened up and looked down the hall toward Lindy's room, tempted to go back to her. His flaccid cock stirred again and he reached inside his pants to squeeze his growing erection. No, he *had* to get some sleep, or he'd be a mess for his meeting tomorrow.

He caught a movement from the corner of his eye, and turned just in time to see a dark-haired woman disappear down the stairs. Carmen was one sexy-looking piece of work, but Catholic girls being what they were, he wasn't about to waste any energy in *that* direction.

His head swam with images of Lindy's beautiful ass and glistening, pulsing cunt. God, she'd looked so damned good, gripping the chair and bucking against the vibrators.

He stepped into the shower, lathered up, then began to masturbate. He pictured her mouth around him again, sucking hard, her teeth grazing the tip, the explosive release of coming in her mouth. His balls hardened and he jacked off faster, groaning long and loud as he ejaculated against the shower tile. Tomorrow he would do everything and anything to lovely Lindy—and she was gonna love it.

* * *

Lindy moaned and wrapped her arms around Jake's soft, squishy

CHARADE

chest, burying her face in his neck. The harder she hugged, the farther away his body seemed to drift. She changed positions, then woke with a start.

Morning sunlight slanted through the windows, bathing the room with a golden neon glow. She looked at her arms still clutching the pillow against her chest, trying to reconstruct the dreams, but they'd faded.

She rolled onto her back and gazed at the stucco ceiling, thinking about her amazing adventures of the night before.

Jake's voice hummed through the door.

"Lindy? You up? I'm going down for breakfast."

She leaped out of bed and ran to the door. Leaning her cheek against the cool wood, she pictured him on the other side. "I'll be down in fifteen minutes."

She snatched some clothes out of the suitcase and wriggled her feet into flip-flops. In the bathroom, she washed her face, then grabbed one of the soft, pale yellow towels. Blotting away the moisture from her chin, she stared at her reflection. Her cheeks held a pink flush, and the tiny lines around her eyes had all but disappeared. She slowly towed her neck, considering the subtle changes in her face. She felt as relaxed and content as she looked.

"A dose of Jake a day keeps the shrink away." She laughed out loud. "Hey, that was good—I'll use that somewhere in my story."

Feeling gloriously alive, she hurried down the hall to meet her breakfast date. At the bottom of the staircase, she hesitated, unable to remember where the dining room was located. Soft mandolin music and conversation drifted from another hallway, and she followed the sounds to a large empty dining room. Her heart fell. Where was Jake?

"¿Señorita?"

Lindy whirled around at the deep sultry voice. A young woman gestured to follow, and Lindy fell into step behind her, suddenly

CHARADE

embarrassed by her own sloppy appearance. Envy tunneled through Lindy's head at the girl's slender body and exquisite features. Tortoise shell combs held long, shiny black hair, and beautiful brown skin glowed with health.

They moved through the quiet dining room toward a set of French doors. Lindy spotted Jake sitting on the terrace and her stomach did a double flip. Her pussy reciprocated.

The Mexican girl turned and smiled, her white teeth dazzling against ruby lips. "Please, sit down. I will bring coffee, *sí*?"

Jake leaped to his feet and grinned at Lindy. "Ah, good morning. I wondered if you'd make it before I have to leave." He turned to the girl. "*Gracias*, Carmen."

That was *Carmen*? During the brief interchange between the two, Lindy didn't miss the girl's shy but seductive glances at Jake. A tiny bristle of irritation moved through Lindy's head. *Not on my watch!*

Carmen disappeared and Jake gestured toward the view. "Isn't this something? I've always dreamed of living by the ocean...I'm a water baby at heart."

Lindy gazed at the sea, feeling its pull, the mesmerizing effect on her thoughts. She'd grown up on the Chesapeake and, though she did love the excitement and glamour of living in Washington, DC, she missed life on the shore more than she cared to admit. A small shadow passed over her heart. A life she'd abandoned in a desperate flight to keep her sanity.

Concern colored Jake's voice. "Lindy? You okay?"

She gazed at his wonderful face. *More than okay*. "Yes, just a little overwhelmed by the beauty of this place."

Carmen appeared with a cup of coffee and a plate filled with small pastries. "Your food will be ready in *un momento*."

Lindy watched the girl leave the room. "She's gorgeous. Why would she have to wait tables?"

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Jake's laugh barked through the calm morning atmosphere. "She has a college degree in business. She manages this place for her mother, in addition to helping with the chores."

Lindy narrowed her eyes and studied his face. "How do you know so much about her? We just arrived yesterday."

He grinned. "You slept most of the day, remember? I had to find *something* to do." He glanced at his watch. "Damn, I have to get going." He grabbed a pastry and stood up. "See you this afternoon?"

Lindy quelled her disappointment. "I'll be here."

What would it be like to have a man like that around on a regular basis? She chuckled. She'd be a limp rag most of the time, for one thing. And forget about getting any work done!

"Your breakfast, *Señorita*."

Lindy jerked with surprise, then giggled nervously as Carmen set a plate of ham and eggs on the table.

"Thank you, Carmen."

The girl's exotic eyes held a veiled expression. "When would be a good time to prepare your room?"

"I'm going to town this morning. I'll be back after lunch."

"*Bueno. Gracias.*" Carmen silently gathered Jake's dishes and left the room.

Lindy gazed at the ocean while she ate. She would outline the story this afternoon, and sketch out some scenes. A ripple of excitement surged through her belly. *And practice with Jake again tonight.*

CHAPTER 10

Back in her room, Lindy peeled off her clothes and stepped into the shower. During breakfast, she'd been intensely aware of the scent of her sex, and wondered if Carmen or Jake had also smelled it. Lathering up, she stroked her upper arms and shoulders, then gently grasped her breasts and massaged, thinking about Jake's innovative use of the nipple clip. He didn't exactly seem to be an amateur. Of course, any man who looked like that would have women crawling all over him. A tiny jolt of jealousy popped into her head and she frowned. Why was she reacting this way? He was a total stranger, a lab guinea pig—what did she care about his love life? The point of this whole exercise was sex with a stranger.

Ten minutes later, she stared at her suitcase and shook her head. The jumbled mess was still unpacked, but she would do that when she returned from the museum. She pulled on a pair of slimming black linen capris and a pale pink cotton tee, then headed for the table to get

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her handbag. The sex toys were still scattered over the tabletop.

“Oops, I almost forgot!”

She peeled off the capris, stepped out of her panties, and picked up the purple butterfly strap-on vibrator. The instructions guaranteed that the device could be worn in public and no one would suspect. A bolt of electricity jagged through her belly, and a drool of moisture trickled down the inside of her thighs. She examined the device a little closer. The five-inch gel butterfly featured antennae that would stimulate the clitoris while the tail buzzed against the anus. In the middle of the body, a three-inch shaft curved enticingly upward.

She stepped into the straps, then sat down on the chair and spread her legs. The shaft slipped inside her, the two ends of the body nestling firmly against her soft flesh. While not as thick or long as the rabbit shaft, this one felt just as good. The butterfly wings pressed her lips aside, holding them out of the way so the “bug” could do its work. She adjusted the straps and tightened them. Satisfied she’d done it right, she rose and ran the cord up through her butt crack, her hands trembling with anticipation of turning on the power. The gel softened and warmed with her body heat and, in moments, she could barely feel the contraption. What an interesting experience *this* would be.

Taking a couple of steps, she smiled. “Perfect.”

She slipped back into her panties and capris. The tiny remote control fit easily into her pocket, the cord hidden by her shirt. She headed for the door and a thought leaped into her head. *Might be a good idea to try it first before going out.* She slid her hand over the remote and found the switch. Taking a quick breath, she slid the control into the first of the ten positions. A gentle hum began in her crotch, with just a hint of tantalizing vibration on her clit. She inhaled slowly and pushed the switch to the next position. The intensity increased, and the vibrating tail buzzed against her butt. *Yes! This will be fantastic.*

She switched off the power and headed downstairs, energized by

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her newly found sexuality.

* * *

The taxi driver peered over the back of the front seat.

“You need tour guide? I speak English.”

Lindy smiled and shook her head. “No thanks, I plan to just wander around and explore.”

A shadow passed over the man’s dark face. “*Señorita*, be careful, *por favor*. Sometimes my country is not so good for women alone.”

A cold sensation moved through Lindy’s stomach as she remembered the security warnings for Mexico. But she lived in one of the biggest cities in the United States—a place with its own crime problems—and, so far, she’d stayed out of trouble.

She nodded. “Thank you, I’ll be careful.”

The vehicle moved away from the front of the inn, and Lindy absorbed the interesting scenery. Suddenly, she swore under her breath. She’d left all the sex paraphernalia on the table, and Carmen would soon be making up the room. Lindy toyed with the idea of going back, then snorted. So what? The woman was a maid, college education or not. Besides, she wouldn’t even know what she was looking at.

Lindy paid the taxi driver, then turned to admire the historic building that housed the Museo Arqueologico de Mazatlan. The sun reflected on the brilliant white building situated amidst lush gardens. Elegant scrolled wrought iron grates protected the tall arched windows, and the huge double-doors at the entrance were constructed of rich, golden-red wood. She turned in a complete circle, scanning the large public park that housed not only the museum, but also the zoo, a library, and facilities for sports and recreation.

Though the hour was early, the sun’s intensity sent Lindy hurrying for cover. She pushed open the heavy door and stepped into the cool dim interior of the museum. Her steps echoed on the marble floor, and she inhaled the unique odor of a building filled with history. How

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interesting that a stone or wooden structure could gain an individuality of scent and feeling just by the items it contained. Similar to her own library...the smell of paper and ink, new and old, the wooden shelves constructed so long ago. A brief rush of homesickness threaded through her chest.

A thin man in uniform stood by the entrance to the exhibits, and Lindy nodded to him as she dropped some pesos into the donation jar.

“Gracias, Señorita.”

She shifted her handbag to the other shoulder, and the bottom of it brushed against the small lump in her pocket. *Oh, yeah! Time to rock!* She glanced back at the guard, then moved into the first room. A quick look around confirmed that she was alone. She slipped a hand into her pocket and flipped the butterfly switch to the lowest speed. The deep hum started as she began to stroll along the wall hung with paintings.

At the first canvas, she stopped abruptly. A beautiful bare breasted, brown skinned young woman gazed back with liquid dark eyes, her long blue-black hair cascading over her shoulders, her smile insolent and inviting. Lindy stepped closer, stunned by the model's uncanny resemblance to Carmen. *It couldn't be!*

The reminder of the gorgeous girl's interest in Jake reined in the subtle sensations in Lindy's crotch, and she switched the vibrator to the second level. Moving away from the disturbing painting, she concentrated on the erotic movement of the vibrator against her butt hole, a sensation that felt like it was trying to crawl inside.

She took a deep breath. *Relax. Forget Carmen. Enjoy this. Prime yourself for Jake.* She chuckled. Suddenly, her research had more to do with enjoying her new partner than with plotting a novel. She moved around the room, paying only cursory attention to the artwork. On the far side, she stepped into the next room and gazed for a moment at the glass cases. She wouldn't be alone here. An elderly couple peered at an Aztec mask, a young man leaned nonchalantly against one wall, and a

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couple of teenaged Mexican girls whispered and giggled in the corner, occasionally throwing furtive glances at the boy. A wave of anticipation ran through Lindy's belly at the prospect of experiencing a climax in public.

Bumping up the power another notch, she felt the beginnings of orgasm deep in her core. The excitement of doing this in the midst of people was almost more than she could stand. The heat grew in her crotch as she moved along the aisle, stopping briefly in pretense of studying a clay funeral urn. She started to breathe hard, and wondered if she could keep from making any noise when she came. She slid the control to the highest level. The animal in her pants sucked and licked and buzzed and probed. Gasping, she leaned on the glass case for support.

Orgasm rammed through her body, and security alarms clanged through the still air. She inhaled deeply, moving her hips to the erotic waves clawing through her body. From the corner of her eye, she saw the girls and the young man staring at her, and their voyeurism sent another wave of delicious agony rolling home.

Suddenly, a hand roughly grasped her arm. "Come with me, *Señorita. Por favor.*"

* * *

Jake shifted in the uncomfortable cast-iron chair and drummed his fingers on the tiled tabletop. He scanned the street, then looked at his watch for the third time in two minutes. Why were these people always so careless about time?

A female tourist strolled by, her brown curly hair reminding him immediately of Lindy. His balls tightened. Tonight he'd taste her honeyed lips, feel her pulsing slippery core wrapped around his cock, hold her luscious body and savor her wanton passion. A rush of blood surged through his shaft.

"So sorry I'm late."

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Jake leaped to his feet, painfully aware of the log in his pants. "Juanita, good to see you again."

The exotic beauty stepped forward and grasped his shoulders to plant a kiss on each cheek. She stepped back, her gaze dropping to his crotch. A sly smile turned up the corners of her red lips.

"Mmm, you must be *really* happy to see me."

She sat down in the opposite chair, and opened a small portfolio. Jake willed his cock to settle down, then turned his attention to the sheaf of papers Juanita set in front of him. He felt her gaze rippling across every inch of his body while he read each paragraph of the contract. He concentrated harder, pushing away the distraction.

A few minutes later, he leaned back in the chair. "Looks fine to me."

Juanita stubbed out her cigarette and reached for the document. "Let's discuss the last section. Then you sign, and we'll go to the beach."

CHAPTER 11

Lindy stepped into the blazing sun and jammed on her sunglasses.

Well, that was certainly embarrassing. She rubbed her arm where the guard had grabbed her, feeling the deep bruising that would surely show up later on the surface of her skin. She looked around the park area, then headed for a shady spot. As she walked, the butterfly chafed her sensitized crotch. *I need to find a bathroom and take this thing off.*

Sitting down on a marble bench near the fountain, she let out a long sigh. So much for art and culture. The warm air pressed against her, magnifying her lack of sleep and the sexual beating her senses had taken. Leaving the refreshing shade, she headed across the square toward the zoo. *Surely, they'll have a restroom.*

Ten minutes later, she tucked the purple vibrator into the bottom of her handbag and headed for the shopping district. The noon sun blazed, and her stomach reminded her it was time for lunch. On the main street, a small café sat between two shops. One store displayed racks of

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brightly colored clothing on the sidewalk. The other shop offered tables crowded with pottery and native crafts.

Her weariness had evaporated with the brisk walk, and she stopped to browse through the clothing. The magnificent colors intrigued her, especially the shawls. Or were they called ponchos? *No, that's the thing with the hole in the center.* She frowned. *What the devil are these called?* She fingered the soft woven cloth, staring at nothing, trying to dredge up the elusive word.

A gravely accent intruded. "You like serape, *Señorita?*"

Lindy laughed. "Of course! That's it!"

The voice belonged to a short man with a very large Poncho Villa mustache. His brown eyes glowed at the prospect of a sale.

Why not? I want something to remind me of this trip—as though I'll ever forget it!

She turned back to the rack of garments, and pulled out a serape in brilliant pink, blue, and green stripes. Suddenly, her hand froze in mid-air and her heart thumped beneath her ribs.

Next door at the café, Jake embraced a gorgeous woman. Stunned, Lindy watched them walk slowly across the sidewalk together, then climb into a shiny black Mercedes parked at the curb.

"¿Señorita?"

Lindy turned back to the shopkeeper. He took the serape and nodded, then gestured toward the entrance to his store. She glanced back toward the café, but the car had gone. Her thoughts reeled. *He did say he was here on business, but what kind of business takes place in an intimate café?*

The shopkeeper thrust a brown paper package into her hands. "Ten pesos, *por favor.*"

Lindy pulled out a crumpled note and thrust it toward him, fighting the burn behind her eyelids. What was the matter with her? She didn't give a hoot about Jake's business.

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* * *

Lindy threw her shoulder bag on the floor and flopped down on the smooth bedspread. The room was cool and quiet, and she was exhausted.

Her brain had been on fast-forward during the entire taxi ride as she'd tried to sort through the jumble of emotions threatening to disable her. First, anger at what she perceived as deception on Jake's part, then astonishment that it bothered her. Finally, disappointment—an unnerving emotion. Had she honestly thought she might have something special with Jake? Was she that naïve?

She rolled over onto her side and stared out the window. Realistically, he was part of a research project—nothing more. Next week, her life would return to normal and she'd get on with salvaging her writing career. For all her bravado, something in her heart called her a liar.

The gauzy curtains drifted lightly, framing the azure sky outside. A small shaft of sunlight played across the tabletop, and Lindy focused on the sex toys, still exactly as she'd left them. She grinned, thinking about Carmen finding them, and what she must have thought. If she *was* the girl in the painting, then she probably wasn't too shocked.

The exhausting morning swept down and Lindy closed her eyes. *I'll start working on the story when I wake up.*

* * *

“Oh, yes! Baby, move it just like that!”

Jake thrust his hips forward and arched his back. A film of sweat covered his chest, and the air felt thick and impossible to breathe.

“More to the left...there! That's good! Keep it up!”

Jake moved his hips in a rhythmic circle and pushed his hands through his loose hair. His thoughts moved to Lindy, and how incredible her luscious plump cunt would feel when he plunged into it.

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His cock hardened and strained against his red bikini briefs.

“Oooh, Jacque! Keep that thought...we’re about finished, then I’ll buy you a drink.”

Jake threw a glance at the thin blond-haired man behind the camera.
In your dreams!

* * *

Lindy looked at the clock and leaped out of the bed. “Dammit, I did it again!”

She padded to the window and gazed at the beach, still littered with blankets and bodies trying to catch the last of the late afternoon rays. She sighed and shook her head. So far, she’d slept away almost two days of her time, and hadn’t written one word. She turned from the window and smiled. But what a treasure trove of ideas and experiences with which to work.

She pulled a notebook from her still-packed suitcase, promising herself she’d put everything away before the day ended. She sat down and dumped her shoulder bag out on the bed, trying to locate her favorite ballpoint pen. It was hopelessly entangled in the straps of the butterfly vibrator. The memory of the unusual museum experience tickled her funny bone and she giggled as she extricated the pen. What must have been going through those kids’ minds? She laughed out loud. They probably thought she was having a seizure or something.

She moved to the table and pushed the sex paraphernalia aside to make room for the notebook, then frowned and leaned forward for a closer inspection of the items. *Where are the nipple clips?* She stepped back and scanned the carpet. Maybe they’d fallen to the floor when Carmen cleaned. Lindy dropped to her knees and felt around under the pedestal table legs. They weren’t there. She sat back on her heels and looked all around the area, but the clips were nowhere to be seen. The image of the museum painting crowded into her thoughts, and anger churned through her chest. Perhaps Miss Catholic Good Girl had a

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serious alter ego.

What to do? Tell the owner that her daughter had stolen kinky stuff? Confront Carmen herself? Forget the whole thing?

Lindy settled into the chair and glanced out the window. What if Jake wanted to use the clips again tonight? The image of him hugging that beautiful woman sent a shower of pain pouring into Lindy's head.

She stared at the empty page in front of her, thinking about the things they'd done the night before, and the things she'd planned to do as soon as he came back. A small ripple tugged at her clit and she squeezed her thighs in response, then blinked back the burning tears that had sneaked up on her. It didn't matter—she had a mission, and what Jake did with his own time didn't concern her.

CHAPTER 12

Jake buckled his belt and reached for his shirt. One hour and he'd be with Lindy. A pleasant ripple curled through his belly and he smiled. Who'd have thought he could feel this way again?

A sultry accent drifted on the air. "Jacque, you were fantastic today—as always."

Juanita stepped up close, an all too familiar look on her face.

Uh-oh, time to dance. He slipped into his shirt and concentrated on the buttons. "It's this exotic place and the scent of excitement in the air."

Juanita lowered her lashes and tilted her head. "Are you ready?"

Jake retrieved a rubber band from his pocket and corralled his hair. "Am I ever. I'm so beat, I can't wait to get back to my hotel."

Disappointment shadowed her features, but her tone remained level. "Aren't we—"

He patted her arm. "Not this time, Juanita—I'm here with

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someone.”

Anger flashed through her dark eyes, and a deep flush rose over her cheeks. She pursed her full red mouth, then lifted her chin.

“I see. Meet me tomorrow at the café, same time. We’ll go to the castle for the rest of the shoot.”

She turned and strode away on stiletto heels, her round ass moving seductively beneath her white linen skirt. Jake felt a stir, remembering what a hot tamale she’d been the last time they’d met. He grinned. Not to worry—he had his very own little tostada waiting for him back at the hotel.

Forty minutes later, he moved quietly down the hall toward his room. *Shower, beer, and Lindy*. His cock leaped to attention, and he chuckled. Old EverReady never let him down. He opened the door, stepped into the refreshingly cool room, and dropped his briefcase on the floor by the closet.

He turned around and a jolt ran through his chest.

“Holy Shit, what are *you* doing here?”

He blinked and tried to focus in the dim light, not believing his eyes. His cock, on the other hand, had the situation well under control and rose to the occasion.

Carmen lay on the bed, stark naked, a suggestive smile turning up the corners of her full mouth. Jake took a step forward, his erection rubbing uncomfortably against his jeans.

“Carmen, what are you doing? *Jee-zus!*”

She tilted her head back, and ran a hand through her long shiny hair, spreading it over her shoulders. “I’m waiting for you, Jacque.”

He glowered. “How do you know that name?”

She lifted her chin and stared directly into his eyes. “Juanita is a good friend of my mother. I have heard her talk about how expert you are in the bedroom.”

Jake closed his eyes and turned away, slipping his hand to his

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crotch to adjust the throbbing thick lump. Anger roiled through his gut—he didn't like being the topic of women's talk. The emotion migrated to his loins and Dick wilted.

Carmen's voice drifted on the warm air. "Come fuck me. You *know* you want to. I could see it in your eyes yesterday—and this morning at breakfast."

His cock struggled back to attention, and he turned around. He had to admit, she was magnificent. Long, shapely legs tapered from a large black bush down to delicate ankles. A thin gold chain draped around one ankle, and small feet displayed toenails painted bright pink. His gaze moved back up her body, taking in the smooth skin, flat belly, and narrow waist, then stopped at her large brown globes.

She sat up, and small blue nipple clips dangled enticingly from the dark pink nubs.

He pulled in a sharp breath, and stepped closer. "Where did you get those?"

"I borrowed them from your girlfriend."

She flipped the switches on both vibrators, then leaned back on her elbows. Closing her eyes, she tilted her head back and spread her legs.

* * *

Lindy set aside the pen and stretched, easing the tightness of concentration from her shoulder muscles. She stared out the window at the almost deserted beach. The sea had turned a deep blue with the changing light, and the sky had become purple. Lacy fronds of palm leaves framed the view, and serenity stole over her like the lovely soft serape she'd purchased. She glanced back at her notebook. Four pages of notes, two good character profiles, and a great ending. She chuckled. No matter how hard she tried otherwise, she always wrote the end of a story first. Eccentric, but it worked.

Somewhere in the house, a door slammed, and Lindy glanced at her watch. Anticipation stormed into her stomach, and she jumped up from

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the chair, tossed the notebook into the suitcase, and surveyed the room. The junk from her handbag still covered the bedspread, and clothes were strewn everywhere. *Soon as I shower, I'll tidy this up before Jake gets here.*

* * *

Jake licked his lips and stared at Carmen's open crotch, dark pink against her brown skin. Her hips moved suggestively as the nipple vibrators hummed.

She began to moan and murmur in Spanish. "*Te quiero*, Jacque. I want you. Fuck me."

Jake took a deep breath, fighting the overwhelming desire to leap on her and cram his cock down her throat, into her cunt, up her ass. She was so beautiful—and so shameless. He took a step forward, and she spread her legs wider. Her pussy glistened with juice, the lips pulsing visibly. He unzipped his pants and grabbed his cock. He stroked it hard and squeezed the tip.

Deep in his loins, the pressure built and he pulled harder and harder. His breath came in grunts and he closed his eyes while he listened to Carmen beg him to fuck her. The surge started and he began to pant as the sensation moved through his cock. Creamy cum spurted in three large bursts, covering Carmen's glistening skin. He exhaled sharply and dropped his head.

"You bastard! You are no more than a dog!"

She removed the nipple clips and flung them at him. They bounced off his chest and skittered under the bed. Buttoning her dress, she strode past him without another word.

The door slammed, and Jake dropped onto the edge of the bed and let out a long breath. "Well, *that's* about the weirdest experience I've ever had!"

He flopped back on the bedspread. When was the last time he'd turned down a chance to get laid? Twice in one day had to be some

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kind of record. He stared at the swirly design in the stucco ceiling. The real question was *why*? Images of the erotic night with Lindy played through his mind. Was he *really* ready? Had enough time passed to heal the wounds? The answer was just down the hall.

He forced himself to think of his last days with Tammy. Horrible days, heart-breaking hours when he'd had to endure her confession as though it hadn't bothered him. He closed his eyes, remembering his blond wife's solemn expression as she'd stabbed him in the gut. And the asshole loser lowlife cowering behind her, a smug look on his ugly face.

Jake leaped off the bed.

"Time to move on and have a life again."

CHAPTER 13

A soft rap sounded on the door as Lindy leaned close to the mirror to put the finishing touches on her eye-makeup. Her stomach pitched, and her cheeks grew pink.

“It doesn’t matter what he’s done in the past—I’ll make him want only me,” she whispered to her reflection.

Taking a deep breath to calm her jiggling insides, she opened the door. Jake grinned boyishly and held out a single yellow rose, and Lindy took another deep breath. *Oh, my God, let this dream go on forever.*

“Jake, you are so sweet.”

She accepted the rose and stepped back to let him enter. “Sorry about the mess.”

He moved close and kissed her cheek. “Not to worry.”

He smelled so damned good, spicy and fresh. His damp hair smelled of shampoo, and his crisp blue shirt held the scent of a recent

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hot iron. She slid her arms up around his neck and gazed into his eyes, wanting nothing more than to feel his lips on hers.

He smiled impishly and touched a finger to her lips. "I'm starving...let's go stock up on energy."

He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, and Lindy's deepest muscles tightened with the promise.

He took her hand as they left the room. "I thought we could go to Mañana's. Someone told me the view is spectacular, and the disco goes 'til four in the morning."

"I could never stay awake that long."

He squeezed her hand. "I think you could, under the right circumstances—Oh! I forgot." He dipped a hand into his pocket, then held out the nipple clips. "I found these in the hall...you must have dropped them when you left this morning."

Lindy gulped and stared at the small reminders of her experience with Jake. Should she tell him of her suspicions? She glanced up at his sincere expression. *No, leave it alone.* No point in spoiling what promised to be a perfect night.

She grinned and shook her head. "You keep 'em...I didn't bring my bag."

A few minutes later, they settled into the backseat of a taxi, and Jake pulled a shiny brochure from his back pocket.

"I picked up some information about the area." He began to read aloud. "Mazatlan has a population of almost 500,000 people. Wow, I thought they only had tourists here!" He chuckled, then continued. "It's the largest port between LA and the Panama Canal. There are seventeen miles of sandy beaches, but most visitors come to go sport fishing. Hmmm."

Lindy watched his mouth as he read. Her earlier close encounter with his lips had reinforced her desire to know him as a person. The sex research would be fun, but here was a man with something to say, one

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who seemed to have more than one thing on his mind. *This* she could get used to.

“Wow, listen to this!” Jake’s tone took on the excitement of a little boy. “There’s a lighthouse here that’s the second highest lighthouse in the world, after Gibraltar.” He laid the brochure in his lap and turned to face her. “I didn’t know any of this stuff. When I get finished tomorrow, you want to go up there?”

Lindy nodded. *And the day after that, and the day after that.*

Jake grinned and stuffed the brochure back into his pocket, then picked up her hand and kissed her fingers.

“Might as well take advantage, since my employer is paying the bills.”

Lindy suddenly remembered the woman she’d seen with him that morning, and a jolt of disappointment flashed through her head, followed by uncertainty. Maybe she had jumped to conclusions. Was the woman *really* his employer? Best not pursue it.

The taxi rounded a bend in the highway, and a stunning panoramic view assaulted her senses. “Oh, my God, what is *that*?”

Jake squeezed her hand. “That’s the Castle Hotel. Mañana’s is inside. Awesome, huh?”

“How’d you find out about this place?”

He hesitated before answering. “My meeting is here tomorrow...I thought I’d check it out ahead of time so I sound like I’m right on top of things.”

Lindy didn’t miss the wariness in his answer. Would he be meeting his beautiful *employer* again?

She shook off her paranoia and stared at the huge elaborate building perched precariously on a cliff overlooking the sea. A huge full moon had just risen above the horizon, highlighting the white towers and spires against the deep purple sky, and casting a mesmerizing reflection over the water. Details of the building’s design sharpened as the taxi

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drew closer. Moorish influence showed in every angle—porticos with open arched windows, scrollwork along the roof edges, and a rambling flow to architecture that promised hundreds of rooms, passageways, and hidden staircases. Lindy's pulse quickened. *Such a romantic setting for a love story.*

"Jake, have you ever been to Spain? If I could go anywhere, I'd visit Granada. Seeing this castle makes me more determined than ever."

Jake's silence set off alarms in her head and she turned. His expression moved her deeply. "What's the matter?"

His strong features had softened with emotion, something close to sorrow. He turned away, his voice husky. "Nothing."

The cab rolled to a stop and he jumped out. Lindy stared after him for a moment, then opened the door and followed him across the flagstones toward the door. She stopped abruptly and jammed her fists on her hips.

"Jake! Are we together, or do you want me to go back to the hotel?"

He turned and strode back toward her, his eyes dark. He pulled her close and whispered in her hair. "Jeez, Lindy, I'm sorry."

She melted against his chest, feeling the strength of his arms around her, emotion crowding into her throat. This felt so good, so right.

She tipped her head back and looked at him. "I'm a good listener."

He drew a finger softly over her cheek and nodded his head. "You're something else, you know that?"

His lips brushed her forehead, and Lindy vowed that her adventure wouldn't end when the trip was finished.

* * *

Inside the magnificent building, Lindy gazed in awe at the opulent furnishings and artwork in the massive hallway. Everywhere she looked, the wealth of centuries past enhanced the elegant architectural features.

Jake stopped beside an ornate antique library table placed against

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one wall. Heavy crystal candleholders sat on each end and, on the wall above, a huge, gold-framed mirror reflected the lights from dozens of bronze wall sconces.

He reached into his pocket, then held out the nipple clips. "Here, put these on before we go into the dining room."

"You have to be kidding!" she whispered, startled by the ragged excitement in her voice. "Here? In public?"

The elusive dimple punctuated his cheek, and he slid his hand toward his crotch, his own hunger prominently apparent beneath the soft brown gabardine trousers. Her clit pulsed. *Why not? What's different about this than my museum excursion this morning?*

Minutes later, Lindy entered the elaborate dining room and settled into her chair. The weight of the clips pulled heavily on her nipples and, with every movement, they swayed and brushed against the fabric of her blouse, the ends grazing the skin on her midriff. In the restroom, she'd turned them on for a test run, then tightened the screws a little. She gazed across the table at Jake and her panties dampened, her stomach pitching with anticipation.

He smiled mischievously. "Too bad I don't have a remote control for those." His gaze dropped to her chest. "Let's play a game. Whenever I do this"—he licked his lips—"you turn them on."

Her belly muscles tightened. She was already so crazy with need she couldn't stand it—how would she ever make it through dinner?

Before she could answer, a waiter appeared and Jake ordered two margaritas. When the man had gone, Jake leaned forward on his elbows and gazed earnestly across the table.

"How did your day go? Get any writing done?"

She giggled. "I almost got arrested."

His eyes widened. "No shit! What happened?"

Lindy related the incident of touching a wired display case, but left out her personal journey at the moment of the crime.

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Jake chuckled and relaxed back into his chair. "That's a hoot." His smile disappeared. "But you have to be very careful—I've read some real horror stories about women tourists who simply disappeared."

Sobered by yet another reminder, Lindy nodded, but said nothing. The waiter returned at that moment and set a large frosty glass in front of her. She picked it up and gazed at Jake over the salt-rimmed edge. The delicious icy liquid caressed her throat, the salty bite and tangy lime bordering on erotic.

Jake's tongue licked the salt from his lower lip, and Lindy's crotch convulsed with delight. She set down the glass and, with a furtive glance at the other diners, slipped her hand beneath her blouse. Her nipples reacted instantly to the promise, straining against the clips that held them firmly. She moved the switches to the first level, and an explosion of fireworks raced across her chest as nerves responded to the deep hum.

She tried to breathe normally, but the sensations were too strong. She began to pant, and Jake made a clucking sound.

"You have to behave...I don't want to get thrown out of here for promiscuous conduct."

She focused on his face and ran her tongue over her lips, giving him a taste of his own medicine.

He grinned. "Okay, enough for now."

The vibrations stopped and relief tempered by disappointment flooded into her head. Feeling suddenly bold, she raised her margarita in a toast.

"Here's to later."

The waiter reappeared and they ordered dinner, then settled into comfortable conversation.

Jake picked up his fork. "You never told me if you got any writing done today."

"I did, but just some outlining and character development."

CHARADE

He laid the fork on the side of his plate. “You know, I was thinking about your story idea—you know, the kids on spring break?” He waited for her nod, then continued. “In other parts of Mexico, there are white slavers who prey on young women. Maybe that could be what happens to one of the girls, and the others set off to find her.”

Lindy tilted her head, feeling new admiration for his intelligence. “That’s a good idea. It would certainly take some serious plotting, though, and a lot of research into the subject.”

“Yeah, but today’s kids want kick-ass excitement and intrigue—I think they’d gobble it up.”

“I just might follow up on that.” She drained the last tangy drop of margarita. “How did *your* day go? Make any progress with the resort people?” A quick image of Jake’s gorgeous companion sent a chill rippling across Lindy’s shoulders.

Jake quickly shifted his gaze to the plate. “Yeah, the usual glad-handing, back-slapping, and yes-yessing. I should be able to get the account.”

Something in his body language raised a red flag in Lindy’s brain and her warm glow faded. He didn’t want to talk about it. Why? What was he hiding?

“Jake, why did you act so weird when I mentioned Spain earlier?”

A dark cloud crossed his face, and his thick eyebrows came together in a frown. “I have some baggage, that’s all.”

* * *

Irritation prickled Jake’s neck hairs, and his erection wilted with Lindy’s question. Why couldn’t she just focus on what they were doing now? He carefully kept his expression neutral. *I’m definitely not going there.* He licked his lips.

Her lovely features opened up with surprise—almost dismay—then she obediently reached under her blouse. A second later, her cheeks flushed and she parted those luscious lips. His cock leaped back to

CHARADE

attention, and he silently enumerated all the things he would do to her when they returned to the room. Mainly, he was going to fuck her so hard she'd never forget it.

With Lindy under the control of the vibrators, his thoughts moved past the evening's anticipated carnal entertainment to center on the real person sitting across from him. Why did he feel this uncontrollable urge to tell her everything? Admit that he'd lied to her? Perhaps it was meant to be.

He pressed his hand against the bulge in his pants. Lindy let out a tiny whimper, and he straightened up in the chair. "Okay, you can stop," he whispered in a ragged voice. "Let's eat and get back to the hotel. I have *big* plans for you."

* * *

Lindy took a small bite of roast chicken and watched Jake slice off a chunk of steak. He kept his head down, his focus on the plate, carefully avoiding any further conversation. She thought about what little she knew about her dinner partner—and all the things she liked about him. He had a great sense of humor, was gentle and courteous, seemed self-confident and independent. And what he did for her libido should be against the law. Her tormented nipples hardened, and she smiled. She still had one more day to win him over, to make him think she was the only woman for him.

How ludicrous is that? What do I have that a man like Jake could possibly want?

CHAPTER 14

Lindy patted the white linen napkin against her lips, then sat back in the chair. "That was delicious!"

Jake grinned mischievously. "You up for dessert?"

She stared straight into his eyes, formed a sexy smile, and lowered her voice to a throaty murmur. "As in room-service?"

"Damn, woman, you are in for it!"

A few minutes later, they left the building and stood close together in the warm night air.

Jake took her hand. "Would you like to walk down by the water before we leave?"

She searched his face, seeing a new expression in his eyes, one that promised more than just fun-and-games. She nodded and they started down a long flight of ancient stone steps that led to the beach.

The ocean breeze felt cooler than the night air, and Lindy shivered briefly. Jake's hand warmed hers, and she stepped closer, brushing his

CHARADE

arm as they walked, delighting in the soft contact. The nipple clips danced with each step, arousing her with promises of the night.

A hundred yards from the castle, Jake stopped and turned to her, his eyes dark, his features taut with emotion.

"Lindy, I'm sorry I was so abrupt earlier. There are some things about me that you might not like." He hesitated, then took a deep breath. "I lied about who I am. I figured it didn't matter 'cause I wouldn't ever see you again, but..."

Lindy held her breath, not allowing herself any expectations.

Jake didn't finish the sentence, but turned to gaze across the dark water. Softly, he related his tale.

"My mother was Spanish, a war bride. My father left her when I was six years old." Jake fell silent for a moment, his expression matching the dark sky. "With no education, she had a very hard life. She desperately wanted me to go to college. She worked long hours in a laundry, and struggled to save every penny she could toward my education."

He took Lindy's hand and started walking again. "Then she got very sick. She didn't have insurance, but she wouldn't consider using my college fund for medical care. All she could think about was my future. So I accepted the money and pretended to enroll in classes at the local college, but I was actually working on a highway construction crew to earn enough to stay ahead of the monstrous medical bills and keep us from being put out on the street."

Lindy nodded to herself. That would explain his muscular physique and deep tan. They walked on through the night, her heart constricting painfully at Jake's somber tone of voice.

"Mother was beautiful. Being here and surrounded by dark-haired women...everywhere I look, I see her."

Lindy instantly realized that his mother must have died.

She squeezed his fingers. "I'm so sorry, Jake."

CHARADE

His voice broke. “There was nothing they could do...she had leukemia. She desperately wanted to see Spain one more time before she died, but I couldn’t even manage to do that for her.”

“When...”

“Two years ago.”

Lindy thought about how lonely he must be after spending so much time in a futile charade. She stopped walking and turned to face him.

“Why did you think I’d object to knowing this about you?”

“Because I’m still a construction worker. I’m no hotshot PR guy. When I found out you were a famous author, I wanted to impress you. I knew you sure as hell wouldn’t be interested in a cement slinger.”

She gazed at his strong features, highlighted by the brilliant moonlight, and her own courage rose from some hidden cache.

“Jake, I’m not a famous author. My publisher dumped me—I’m a has-been trying to struggle back into the game.”

He stepped close and took hold of her shoulders, searching her face for a moment. She tilted her head back and lost herself in his sad eyes. His face drew close, his lips brushed hers, then covered her mouth. She circled her arms around him as he kissed her, deep and long. His tongue played along the tender flesh inside her lips, sending electric jolts deep into her belly. But more than that, a song started in her heart, and she kissed him back.

He pulled her tightly against his chest and stroked her hair. “God, Lindy, I’ve wanted to do that since we first met on the plane.”

She inhaled his clean male scent and nodded, her cheek rubbing against his shirt. The nipple clamps bit into her skin, and she extricated herself. The husky edge to her own voice surprised her.

“Let’s go back to the room. *Now*.”

* * *

Jake helped Lindy into the taxi, his gaze resting briefly on her beautiful round ass undulating beneath the skirt as she climbed in. A

CHARADE

murmur ran through his loins, but went nowhere. He felt drained and exhausted from his confession, but vastly relieved. He could stop pretending—at least on one count. He glanced sideways at his companion. Had she just been trying to make him feel better by saying she was a failure? And what exactly did she mean? It didn't matter—she made him feel good again, and gave him hope.

She snuggled up against him, weaving her fingers through his. Her warm breath tickled his ear. “Why don't you lick your lips?”

His cock stirred, then rose to form a tent in his lap. Lindy giggled softly and touched it, and a jolt shot straight from his balls to the tip of his erection.

“Wait 'til we get back,” he murmured. “I wanna use all your stuff at the same time.”

* * *

Lindy followed Jake into the vestibule of the inn, her thoughts racing ahead to the imminent delights of the night. Jake's voice brought her quickly back to the moment.

“Good evening, Carmen. How are you tonight?”

Lindy resisted the urge to glower at the beautiful Mexican girl. Carmen's dark eyes coldly met Lindy's gaze, then the girl turned on her heel, her long black hair swirling and glistening in the soft lights as she walked toward the rear of the house. Her thick accent drifted behind her.

“Fine, no thanks to *you*, *Señor!*”

Jake cursed under his breath, and Lindy's earlier sentimental feelings evaporated. He started up the stairs and she fell into step beside him.

“What was *that* about?”

He shook his head. “I had a little run-in with her earlier.”

Carmen seems to have inserted herself into this vacation in more ways than one. At the top of the steps, Lindy stopped.

CHARADE

“What kind of run-in?”

“Nothing important.” He pulled her close and ran his hand over her butt, pressing his hard cock against her mound. “*This* is all that’s important.”

His body heat permeated her clothing as he buried his face in her neck and began nibbling. Chills and shivers of excitement raced across her shoulders and chest, and her nipples hardened beneath the clips—which now felt too tight. She slipped out of his arms and pulled him down the hall toward her door.

Minutes later, Jake fumbled with the buttons on her blouse while she awkwardly tried to unbuckle his belt. His breath rasped next to her ear. “God, I’m gonna fuck you beyond your wildest dreams. The hell with the toys!”

She arched her back, pressing against his hardness. Heat roared into her crotch, the flames licking around her clit and deep into her core. Jake pulled the blouse back over her shoulders and dragged it from her arms, then flung it to the floor. The cool air raised gooseflesh over her bare skin. She slipped her hand through his open zipper, stunned to make contact with bare flesh. Jake was fumbling with the button on her skirt, but immediately stepped back and dropped his trousers. Lindy sucked in her breath and stared at his cock, glistening and dark red with engorgement.

“Oh, baby,” she whispered hoarsely.

She ripped off her skirt, and Jake moved in close, reaching out to trace his fingers lightly over her hard breasts. A sly smile crept across his face and he turned on the nipple vibrators. He pushed her back onto the bed, and spread her legs. Never breaking eye contact with her, he stroked his rod, then deftly unrolled a condom over the flared tip.

His voice dropped to growl. “Are you ready to be rammed?”

“Yes! Oh, my God, yes!”

The nipple clips hummed into her flesh and she spread her legs

CHARADE

even wider to touch herself. She massaged her clit with a forefinger, and Jake exhaled sharply and dropped to his knees. He roughly pushed her hand aside, then grasped her swollen sex between his teeth. She bucked against his mouth and cried out. The nipple clips vibrated and her core throbbed as she writhed beneath his torture. He released her clit, then slid his tongue inside her. Her breath came in ragged gasps and grunts, and she thought she'd go insane if she couldn't come right that instant.

Jake let go of her and stood up. Then, in one swift movement, he straddled her hips and grasped her wrists, pinning them to the bed. He pressed the tip of his shaft against her entrance, then pushed slowly and steadily, filling the opening, passing the gates, pulling her clit against his hard shaft. She bucked up, and he slid all the way in.

For a long moment, neither of them moved. Then Jake braced himself and stared into her eyes. She'd never seen such passion in a man's face—frightening, but intensely erotic.

She met his gaze and licked her lips. "Fuck me hard."

"When I'm damned good and ready and not before," he rasped.

Slowly, he pulled out to the edges of her, then slowly slid back in. She nearly went crazy, wriggling and pushing, trying to capture all of him inside her. He chuckled and pulled out.

"Jake, please don't tease!"

He reached down with one hand and squeezed her swollen nub, making her jerk with surprise. His cock slid back into her and he began to pump in earnest, filling her, rubbing against her pulsing clit, and feeding the roaring blaze that burned in her core. The wave started. She tried to relax and let it overtake her.

His voice caressed her as he worked. "You are so beautiful and you feel so good. I want to stay inside you all night."

He stopped thrusting and released her arms. Easing down onto his elbows, he kissed the full length of her neck. She buried her face in his

CHARADE

soft hair, inhaling his unique scent and exploring the velvety softness of his broad shoulders with her fingertips. His smooth muscular back tapered into hard buttocks. He groaned at her touch and raised his head to look into her eyes. She pulled his face down and kissed him, deep and greedily, stroking the soft inner flesh of his mouth with her tongue. He responded instantly and rose up on his hands again.

His belly flattened against hers, and he remained still for a moment. Then slowly, he began to move rhythmically, teasingly. Each time he pulled out to the very edges of her throbbing flesh, his eyes would ask her the question: *Want more?* Then he'd plunge back into her and start the tease again. She could barely breathe, and her fires burned hotter as he tormented her with her own passion. She felt his surging need. He would climax any moment. Thrusting her hips up hard to meet him, she captured his eyes with her soul.

Sparked by her bold move, Jake's control disappeared and basic instincts replaced tenderness. His eyes closed and a vein stood out on his temple. A fine sheen of sweat glistened across his forehead as he pumped harder and deeper.

Then, abruptly, he stopped, his smoldering gaze sending a jolt through her chest. He pulled her up by the shoulders and rolled over onto his back, staying inside her. She now straddled him, his shaft penetrating so deep she could barely take a breath.

Suddenly, a strange rasping sound shattered the moment, followed by a familiar soft drawl. *"Pull your dress up over your butt."* Rustling and static. *"God, what a beautiful heart-shaped ass."*

* * *

Jake shrugged his shoulder away from the sharp object digging into his skin.

Horried comprehension sprang into Lindy's eyes and, confused, he let go of her. She lunged forward, nearly tearing his cock off. He heard more rustling, then *"Relax, I won't do anything you don't want*

CHARADE

me to."

He rolled away from her and leaped off the bed. "You bitch!"

Lindy was fumbling for the switch on a tiny silver recorder, and he snatched it out of her hands. Her eyes widened with fright. He strode away from the bed, turning the volume up. Lindy's voice whimpered through the speaker. "*Touch me, please.*" Fury raged in Jake's chest as he listened to his own voice. "*Don't you worry about that.*"

Lindy scrambled off the bed. "Jake, let me explain. It's not what—"

He hurled the recorder to the floor, and grabbed his pants. "I don't care *what* it is." Lindy was crying, but he didn't care. "I thought you were special, and I passed up a lot of snatch today because of it." He tore open the door and looked back. "You're a bigger phony than I am."

CHAPTER 15

Adrenaline clanged through Jake's body as he raced down the stairs and slammed out the front door into the night air. He gulped a deep breath, trying to break the band of pain crushing his chest.

A soft voice filtered through his misery. "Trouble in paradise?"

Carmen's exquisite features mocked him, her dark eyes glowing.

He turned his back on her and descended to the terrace. Her footsteps echoed lightly as she followed him. He walked along the path toward the garden, his brain reeling. Why had Lindy recorded their sex games? Blackmail? He snorted. If that was the case, she'd picked the wrong guy. Tammy had already cleaned him out.

Carmen touched his arm and he jerked with surprise, then glowered down at her exotic face. "What the hell do *you* want?"

Her soft fingers moved up his bare arm. "I can make you feel better."

He snatched his arm away from her touch and stepped back.

CHARADE

"You women amaze me. None of you are ever what you pretend to be!"

He turned and strode away, his head reeling with devastating disillusionment.

* * *

Lindy sank to the floor by the bed and sobbed. "Oh, God, Jake, what have I done?" Her body ached with unfulfilled need and sorrow, plus the harsh realization that she'd destroyed any chance of a relationship with the man of her dreams. She leaned her head back against the bedspread, trying to stop the torrent of tears. She couldn't leave it like this—she must try to explain.

She slipped on shorts and a T-shirt, then tiptoed quietly down the hall to Jake's room and knocked on the door. Nothing. She rapped again, and leaned her head against the wood, listening for sounds of movement within. Still silence.

"Jake? Please open the door."

Tears filled her eyes. There'd be no talking to him right now. She wandered slowly down the hall and descended the wide staircase in a sorrowful fog. How could she have screwed this up so badly? And if she did have a chance to explain, what would she tell him? The truth? How would he react to being used as a guinea pig? Though her heart had taken her well past that shallow phase, she'd never be able to convince *him* of it.

The front door opened suddenly, startling her out of the deep thoughts. Carmen stepped into the hall and stood stone still, staring with something akin to anger. Tossing her head, she brushed past, leaving a wake of spicy perfume hanging on the air.

Her accent emphasized every word. "If you are looking for lover boy, he went to the beach."

Lindy stared after the girl as she disappeared down the hall to her private living quarters. For a housemaid, Carmen had seemed awfully

CHARADE

familiar with Jake ever since they'd arrived. Then, Jake's comment about passing up some sex hit home. The slut had been hitting on him!

Lindy snatched open the front door and stepped outside, her heart suddenly lighter. He'd passed up that gorgeous piece of ass, and then admitted that she, Lindy, was the reason. She scanned the garden and spotted an opening in the hedge.

The gravel bit into her bare feet, but she didn't care. Jake was out there somewhere, thinking she'd betrayed him. She had to make it right.

A gentle breeze rolled off the surf, tossing her hair around her face. The soft slurp and lap of the gentle waves kept time to her step as she trudged through the soft warm sand. The beach spread for miles in either direction, and she had no idea which way Jake had headed. She took a deep breath and turned north.

Fifteen minutes later, she saw a dark silhouette a distance up the beach. She began to run toward him, her mind racing, composing her thoughts, planning her speech. Her lungs began to burn and her legs ached, but she plunged on, closing the gap between them.

"Jake! Please wait!"

She slowed to a trot, gasping for breath. To her relief, the silhouette stopped and turned, just twenty feet away.

"¿Sí, Señorita?"

Lindy nearly threw up with disappointment. Her pulse thundered in her ears, her heart pumping furiously beneath her ribs.

"Oh...I'm sorry...I thought you were—"

The tall thin Mexican man took a deep drag on a cigarette and stepped closer. In the brilliant moonlight, his features were sharp and menacing, his jaws and chin blanketed with scraggly black beard. A jagged white scar ran across one cheek.

Suddenly frightened, Lindy took a step back, but he closed the gap between them. His deep-set black eyes quickly scanned the immediate

CHARADE

area, then dropped to her chest. Horror billowed into her head. She was naked beneath the T-shirt, and her nipples had hardened in the cool night air, forming little peaks beneath the cotton fabric.

"You lost, *Señorita*?" He flicked the cigarette into the sand.

"No, I—"

His hand snaked out and grabbed her upper arm, his fingers biting into the flesh. She cried out and tried to wrench free, but the large hand clamped down like a vise.

"I show you good time, eh?"

"No! Let go of me!" Lindy struggled as the man pulled her against him, but the sinewy arms were solid muscle. Her only hope would be to knee him in the crotch if she got the chance.

His breath reeked of cheap tobacco. "I fuck you like movie star, *sí*?"

He grabbed one of her breasts and squeezed, pinching the nipple between his fingers while he ground his bulging penis against her. Lindy screamed and he clamped a hand over her mouth, his eyes dark with malice.

"Quiet, whore!"

He roughly pushed her down into the sand and straddled her while he unzipped his filthy trousers. Lindy struggled to get up, but he pinned her down, then ripped off her shorts in one quick movement.

CHAPTER 16

Jake leaned against a huge piece of driftwood and stared at the sparkly pattern of moonlight on the vast expanse of black ocean. The sand still felt warm beneath his legs, and the breeze flowed over and around his body, touching every inch of bare skin, caressing him into a calmer state of mind. Lindy didn't seem the kind of woman who'd try blackmail. There had to be a reasonable explanation for what she'd done. He shook his head. Maybe he'd feel more like finding out after he'd had a good night's sleep.

A sharp sound pierced the quiet night, and he sat up straight, straining to hear. The sound came again, this time definitely a scream. He leaped to his feet, scanning the beach for the source. Down by the water, two figures grappled in jerky movements. Jake took a couple of steps forward. Another scream, and one of the silhouettes fell to the beach and the other figure leaned down. Jake grabbed a slab of driftwood and took off at a dead run.

CHARADE

As he drew near, he saw a man fumbling with the front of his pants. In the sand, a woman struggled to escape.

“Hey! You!”

The man turned in surprise and Jake swung the wood as hard as he could, connecting with the assailant’s shoulder and knocking him off balance. The woman rolled away from her attacker, and Jake swung again as the man rose to his feet and started to run. Jake heaved the piece of wood as hard as he could, but it fell short of the man sprinting down the beach.

Jake took a deep breath, trying to slow his racing pulse, then turned to the sobbing woman. His breath froze in his aching chest as Lindy’s tear-stained face sent horror shafting through his senses.

* * *

Lindy’s stunned brain struggled to sort out Jake’s words echoing in the night air.

“Oh, my God, Lindy! What are you doing out here? Are you all right?”

He dropped to his knees and gathered her into his arms, hugging her so hard she could barely breathe. Every nerve in her body jangled at the physical contact, but something in her subconscious told her it was all right. She leaned against his chest and began to sob, her words coming in jerks and starts.

“I’m so sorry...I wanted to explain—”

“Shh, not now. Let’s get you back to the room.”

She looked down at her nakedness and felt a wave of shame. “My shorts...”

Jake released her, and picked up the tattered garment. He shook the sand out and handed it to her. “You can hold them together until we get back to the hotel.”

He helped her to her feet, then slipped his arm securely around her waist. “Can you make it? It’s a long way back.”

CHARADE

She nodded and pulled on the shorts, leaning against his solid body for support. His arm felt so good, so protective and strong.

Her thoughts raced in several different directions as they trudged along the beach in silence. He obviously cared something about her—she'd seen it in his eyes when he found her. Could she be honest about her own feelings if she got the chance? Could she finally let go and trust her heart?

When they'd covered half the distance to the inn, Lindy's legs began to tremble and she stopped.

"I have to sit down for a minute."

Jake dropped into the sand beside her and, for a couple of moments, they sat without speaking.

A hollow sensation moved into Lindy's chest and she swallowed hard. "Jake, I was doing research for a book. That's why I used the recorder."

She chanced a peek at his profile.

The muscles in his jaw hardened, and his response was terse. "What kind of book? I thought you wrote teen stuff."

She took a long deep breath. "I do—did...I've also been writing...erotica."

His head snapped around, surprise widening his eyes. "You're kidding."

She shook her head. "No, I'm not...I've made more money with my secret stories than I ever made with the goody-two-shoes stuff."

A brief silence drifted around them, then Jake started to laugh. "I'll be damned! And I've been an unsuspecting research assistant?"

Relief washed over her like a rainsquall, and she giggled. "Sort of, but I got side-tracked by how much fun I was having. I haven't written a friggin' word since we got here!"

"A librarian with a secret life! I *love* it!"

Twenty minutes later, Jake opened the front door to the inn, and

CHARADE

Lindy padded past him into the hallway. When they reached the door to her room, she turned and gazed up at his face.

"Thank you for saving me."

A tender expression softened his features, and he brushed a lock of hair away from her cheek. "I'm just glad I was out there." He leaned forward and skimmed her lips with a light kiss. "You get some sleep. I'll see you first thing in the morning."

She watched him walk back to his own room. *From now on, there'll be no secrets between us.*

Standing under the hot water, washing away the terror and stench of her close call with danger, Lindy's muscles relaxed. Tomorrow she would tell Jake the whole story of her life, and start getting to know the man with whom she wanted to share the rest of it.

* * *

Early the following morning, Lindy hurried down to the breakfast room. *Señora* Rodriguez emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

"*Buenos días, Señorita.* Where you like to sit?"

Lindy gestured toward the open terrace, and the woman hurried ahead to pull out a chair and smooth the tablecloth.

Lindy glanced around. "Where is Carmen this morning?"

The woman beamed. "She is at church. She is such a good girl."

Right. And I'm the Virgin Mary.

The woman turned toward the door and her face brightened. "Ah, Meester Breton! Good morning!"

Jake chuckled. "Practicing your English, Mrs. Rodriguez?"

"¡Sí! ¡Sí! I am coming to America with my daughter one day." She bobbed her head and hurried away toward the kitchen.

Jake slipped his arms around Lindy's shoulders and kissed her forehead. "Did you get some rest?"

She nodded and nestled into his soft knit shirt, inhaling his freshly

CHARADE

showered scent and thinking about the future.

After Mrs. Rodriguez served their breakfast, Jake slathered thick honey on a wedge of bread, then looked up. "Have you always lived in DC?"

"No, I grew up in a tiny town on the Chesapeake—Oxford, Maryland."

"Do your parents still live there?"

The happy glow of the morning faded, and a heavy weight pressed against her chest. "I don't know."

Jake's tone softened. "Want to talk about it? I'm a good listener."

She tensed for just a moment. Seeing the sincerity in his eyes, she remembered Dr. Madison's firm prediction that the wounds would heal, but only with her own acknowledgment, and the determination to move past it. Was Jake the one to close the door on her past? Did she dare risk losing him? Was he even hers to lose?

She looked down at her plate and began to talk. "I left home when I was seventeen. I've never been back."

Jake said nothing, and her courage grew. "When I was in sixth grade, I was really fat...I still am. Anyway, my father..." *Oh, God, can I do this?* Her pulse began to thump in the old, frighteningly familiar way, and she swallowed hard. "He started making suggestive sexual comments when my mother wasn't around."

Lindy chanced a look at Jake, but saw only serious interest in his eyes. She took a deep breath and plunged on.

"It became worse as I got older and started developing breasts. He kept telling me that fat girls had to be grateful for any attention they could get." Tears burned her eyelids and she looked up at the slowly turning ceiling fan. "I spent my teen years trying to stay out of his way and avoid being alone with him..." She exhaled softly. "It was awful."

"Lindy, you don't have to tell me this if you don't want to."

"No, it's okay. My therapist said the day would come when I'd

CHARADE

want to talk about it, that the purge would free me.”

Jake’s gentle concern gave her strength.

“Nothing ever happened with him, but I felt so ashamed that he would want to have sex with his own daughter. I was sure I’d done something to make him think it would be okay.” Lindy pushed her plate away. “I left home the morning after high school graduation and never looked back.”

* * *

Lindy’s pain and shame were almost more than Jake could stand. Anger stirred in his gut. *Sick son-of-a-bitch shoulda been strung up by his balls.* Jake remembered wondering what painful secret haunted Lindy, and now he almost wished he hadn’t found out. What could such an experience have done to her ability to love openly and without fear? A thought jolted him. And how was *he* so different? Tammy had effectively castrated his heart with her cruel deception. Hadn’t he also avoided any opportunities for further emotional pain?

He watched Lindy’s sad expression as she gazed into her coffee cup. The two of them were broken people who might be able to mend each other into one whole.

He reached for her hand. “It’s all behind you now. You’ve come to terms with yourself. A whole world waits out there, yours for the taking.”

Her eyes puddled with tears, and the lovely mouth curved up in a grateful smile. She squeezed his fingers and whispered, “I hope so.”

“Lindy, you are *not* fat. You’re gorgeous and voluptuous, like the models for the master painters.” He shook his head. “I can’t stand scrawny, bony women. I see enough of that at—”

Lindy cocked her head and leaned forward, curiosity brightening her eyes. “On a road crew?”

Oh, shit, goofed again! He cleared his throat. “Uh, no...I’ve been doing some physical fitness consulting.”

CHARADE

He didn't have to wait long for her reaction.

She sat back and laced her arms across her chest. "You are certainly a man full of surprises."

He shifted nervously in his chair. *You have no idea...and you ain't gonna find out, either!*

"Yeah, it's been a dream of mine for quite a while. I hope to have my own small gym and clientele someday. In the meantime, I work nights at a small fitness center in Fairfax, and build roads during the day."

A sly smile edged up the corners of Lindy's mouth. "Maybe you could help me firm up my voluptuous figure, as you so diplomatically describe it."

He chortled. "It would be an extreme pleasure, believe me!"

Mrs. Rodriguez appeared to refill coffee cups, and Jake glanced at his watch.

"I have to run, but I should be finished today by one or so. Meet me in the Castle Hotel lobby, then we'll go check out that lighthouse."

Lindy's tremulous smile made her look like a Rubens angel. "I'll be there." Suddenly, her eyes darkened and the smile faded. "Wait a minute—if you're not in public relations, then what kind of meeting do you have today?"

Jake's gut wrenched at yet another lie.

"I'm helping a local actress tone up."

CHAPTER 17

Lindy let herself into the room, her thoughts still reeling from Jake's comments. How many men preferred plump to sleek? Had she ever lucked out, or what? And thank God she hadn't shot off her mouth about Jake's companion at the café. Now that she thought about it, she knew that hugging was the normal and accepted greeting in these countries.

Her gaze dropped to the still-packed suitcase and she laughed out loud. Her vacation had been so exciting, she'd literally lived out of her luggage the entire time. She shrugged and walked past the jumble of clothing. No point in unpacking now—she'd be heading home tomorrow. At the window, she studied the deserted shoreline for a moment and shivered at the memory of the man on the beach. She turned away, shaking off the disturbing images.

Dr. Madison had been right—the confession had freed her soul from its ugly prison. Tears sprang to her eyes and a lump rose in her

CHARADE

throat. With Jake's help, she could leave the past behind and focus on her future—maybe even have a life like a normal woman.

She began collecting the sex toys from their various resting places. Roger Rabbit was under the bed. The vibrating egg still sat on the table. The purple butterfly and one nipple clip were on the end of the bed with the rest of the contents of her shoulder bag. She dropped all the items into the suitcase, then scanned the floor for the remaining nipple clip, thinking briefly about the possibility of Carmen's secret life. *Everyone has something to hide.* She smirked and shook her head. *And here's the pot calling the kettle black!*

She found the elusive nipple clip at the corner of the closet door, and picked it up. Compared to her own secret life, Jake's deception about his work was mild. Tenderness moved into her heart. He was a good, honest man with strong values, the kind of man that women her age seldom met—and she was going to make darn sure she didn't screw it up. She tossed the nipple clip into the suitcase, then grabbed her notebook and headed for the table.

Her bare foot kicked something solid and pain shot through her toes. "Ouch! Dammit!"

She massaged her stinging big toe, then peered under the table, looking for the culprit. The tape recorder had wedged itself under the table leg. She got down on her hands and knees to retrieve it, then rocked back on her heels. Staring at it for a moment, she pursed her lips, then firmly pressed the erase button.

"I sure don't need a recorder to remember *this* adventure."

Minutes later, she bent over her notebook and the words began to flow. "*Spring Break in Mazatlan. Three high-school seniors have just arrived for their last fling together before embarking into the grown-up world. They meet up with four other students from a neighboring town, and the group begins what will be the most terrifying experience of their young lives.*"

CHARADE

* * *

Jake looked down at the flimsy loincloth draped over his hips. “Do I *really* have to wear this? Can’t the graphic designer just add one to the final picture?”

The blond photographer sighed. “Jacque, please cooperate. What is the matter with you this morning?”

Jake took a deep breath. *Nothing some time with Lindy won’t solve.* He planted his legs wide apart and crossed his arms over his greased chest. Thoughts of Lindy’s luscious body meeting his thrust sent his lust into fast-forward, and his cock lifted the loincloth like a tent pole.

The man behind the camera chuckled. “Mmm. I like it! Whatever you’re thinking about, keep it up!” The photographer giggled shrilly at his own play on words, then sighed. “Of course, the designer will have to take *that* out of the picture.”

Jake’s thoughts traveled to the future, and worries about the final secret that might keep him from having a life with Lindy.

* * *

Lindy climbed out of the taxi and headed toward the front entrance to the Castle Hotel. The breathtaking historic building again sent chills of excitement over her skin. Inside, she took her time and examined the structural design and ornate embellishments. Moving into the lobby, she found a glossy brochure detailing the history of the place. Mazatlan had originally been settled by the Spaniards in 1531 and had a bloody history. Despite this, the Castle had been built in the early 1900s, still echoing the Spanish influence.

She closed the brochure, disappointment crawling through her thoughts. She’d envisioned a romantic and intriguing history of the place...dungeons, secret stairways, turrets with skeletons in shackles—not some dumb hotel. She peered at her watch, and a flutter of anticipation moved through her chest. Jake would be there in a few

CHARADE

minutes. She walked across the lobby toward the glittering displays in the gift shop.

Sparkling glass shelves held lovely Mexican crafts, charming figurines depicting traditional men in serapes and sombreros, and round-faced women in brilliant native dresses. A small gray donkey sat obstinately on its haunches beside a small barefoot boy.

Moving along the shelves toward the rear of the shop, she spotted the entire back wall filled with books.

A tiny wave of homesickness moved over her, and suddenly the imminence of her departure became real. What would happen after she returned to Washington? In the remaining time in Mazatlan, would Jake make some move to keep their connection going? Could *she* do it, or would she just have to wait and see?

She scanned the array of paperbacks glowing in precise rows, some titles more prominent than others. Four slots with Grisham's latest. An entire shelf of Nora Roberts. Patterson, Cussler, and Clancy marched across two more rows. Lindy sighed. A writing life was tough and, even if one couldn't make the best-seller lists, the compulsion to keep doing it was something that could not be ignored. Her gaze drifted to the romance section, and she smiled at the intriguing titles and elaborate covers. Most of the world had no idea that romance novels made up more than half of the total book sales in the world.

An uneasy murmur moved through her stomach and she stopped smiling as she gingerly picked a paperback off the shelf and gazed at the title. *Capture My Heart—the saga of one woman's courageous love for an outcast*. Bold rich colors leaped off the cover, a panoramic scene of mountains and forests, and a beautiful dark-haired woman held captive—in Jake's arms?

A small sound distracted Lindy's focus and she whirled around to stare at the now-familiar handsome features. Jake's gaze dropped to the book in her hands, and his broad smile faded.

CHARADE

“Oh, shit.”

Lindy gaped at him, then looked again at the book in her hand. The man on the cover was definitely Jake. A flash of anger surged through her chest, followed immediately by the absurdity of the situation—and the poetic justice. She searched Jake’s anxious expression, holding his gaze just long enough to make him squirm, then took a step closer and licked her lips seductively.

“I think we’re even now.”

His worried features eased into a sexy smile, and he ran a finger lightly down her arm.

“Not quite. We haven’t finished *our* story yet.”

He took a step backward, and held out a wrapped package.

Lindy’s fingers trembled as she carefully peeled back the layers of white tissue paper. A lump rose in her throat and her eyes filled with tears. Inside a gleaming snow-globe, silver glitter swirled around a tiny Mexican bride and her dark-eyed groom.

DREAMA FAIRE

Dreama Faire lurks behind a woman with wire-rimmed glasses, no-nonsense business suits, and sensible shoes, but both hearts hammer the same breath-stopping beat: romance and erotica.

In her visible life, Dreama's professional career spans over eighteen years in the legal field. In addition to her Amber Heat story, *The Journey*, Ms. Faire has written a steamy full-length novel.

Dreama's website is <http://www.dreamafaire.com>.

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* * *

***Don't miss The Journey, by Dreama Faire,
Available at AmberHeat.com***

When tragedy-scarred Deirdre Phillips meets sexy Bruce Long on a thirty-six-hour journey home for Thanksgiving, she struggles with her deep-seated propriety, stunned by her attraction to him. Erotic daydreams turn into reality as the train races toward Vermont, and Deirdre's resistance to the handsome stranger falters.

Leaving the past behind, she opens herself to desire, self-reflection and discovery, and the healing power of love. A journey within a journey...

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