



 PHAZE

Alessia Brio



6470A Glenway Avenue, #109
Cincinnati, OH 45211-5222

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, characters and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, organizations, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

eBook ISBN 1-59426-548-8

Erotique © 2005 by Alessia Brio

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover art © 2005 by Stacey L. King

Phaze is an imprint of Mundania Press, LLC.

www.Phaze.com

“You’ve gotta be kidding me!” Bruce took the proffered legal document and scanned it. “That’s just so... so *Scooby Doo*.”

Mandy snickered as she dove into her taco salad. “Wanna hear the best part? I have to do it on the next full moon.”

“Amazing. Just amazing. Where is this place, anyway? If it’s in a rough neighborhood, I’m going with you.”

“Oh, come on! Don’t tell me you’ve never heard of it? It’s only the most celebrated sex shop in Philly, maybe even on the entire east coast.” Mandy fished in her backpack and pulled out a glossy catalog. “This,” she said, proudly handing it to Bruce, “is *Erotique*.”

“Oh! Okay, I’m a little slow. I just put two and two together. So, your great aunt is... *was* the notorious Miss Vivian? I’d no idea.”

“Yup. I come from a long line of lusty ladies who’ve used sex—in one way or another—to succeed in this man’s world,” she winked. “The shop’s been in the family for generations. My great-great grandmother opened it in 1897 as a treatment center for ‘*hysteria*.’ It was one of the first places in the city to have electricity which, of course, powered the equipment. Once upon a time, there were eighteen electro-mechanical vibrators in operation from the time the shop opened in the morning until it closed in the evening. She made a small fortune. Booked months in advance. Regular customers, too, from affluent families. They just kept—pardon my pun—coming.”

Bruce just shook his head, still absorbing the news.

“As more and more households got electricity, she gradually shifted from selling the service to selling the actual merchandise for home use. And, she made sure her products were always cheaper than the model Sears advertised as ‘*a device for anxiety and female tension*.’ Those mainstream promotions disappeared in the 1930s, when the porn industry made it impossible to overlook a vibrator’s true purpose. Even so, a few of the ‘*climax closets*’—as Aunt Viv called ‘em—stayed in operation clear through World War II. Her predecessor, my great-great aunt Sophie, even accepted ration coupons in payment: sugar, coffee, gasoline, shoes.”

“Whoa! Slow down,” Bruce interjected. “Where’d you get all this information, anyway?”

Mandy shrugged, “I grew up with it. Some of it was bound to sink in. It’s fascinating stuff, huh?”

“And it’s all yours now—the whole enchilada? That makes you a very wealthy woman.”

“Not yet,” Mandy reminded him. “First, I have to meet the terms of her will and spend the night in the shop—alone.”

* * *

Mandy set aside thoughts of the full moon—still two weeks away—and focused instead on getting her affairs in order. While she’d known for quite a while that she stood to inherit *Erotique*, she really didn’t expect it to be for several more years. Aunt Viv’s sudden and purportedly accidental death threw a wrench in her plans to finish school before taking over the business. She received her undergraduate liberal arts degree in May and started work on her M.B.A. just a few short weeks ago. If she tried to juggle a full course load and run the shop, one or the other would undoubtedly suffer. So, graduate work would just have to become gradual work.

The circumstances surrounding Vivian Long's death were unusual, to say the least. But, then again, just about everything about Aunt Viv had been unusual. Found lying in a pool of oil beneath an exhibit in the renowned museum annex, the coroner's report postulated a slip and fall. Mandy didn't buy it but didn't yet have a better explanation. The oil, upon analysis, turned out to be olive oil. Ironically, she met her end directly beneath an exhibit about Ancient Greek *olisboi*—precursors to the modern dildo constructed of leather or wood or even ivory—for which olive oil served as the most common lubricant.

The police department investigated but found no evidence of forced entry or foul play, so the case was quickly and quietly closed. The press sniffed around for scandal in light of some hype a few years back about the artifacts being haunted but, finding none, also lost interest. Aunt Viv always insisted the annex had a supernatural aura, but most shrugged it off as part of her eccentricity.

Too many unanswered questions weighed on Mandy's mind. She wondered if the coroner had bothered to check the spry 74-year-old woman for traces of semen or signs of sexual penetration. "Mysteriouser and mysteriouser," she mumbled as she wrapped up her letter, as next of kin, requesting an official copy of the coroner's report and began the tedious process of withdrawing from all but one of her classes.

Mandy ached to take a day or three to grieve but knew that Aunt Viv would not approve. *Keep moving*, she could hear the matriarch's admonishment. The woman had been a role model for as long as Mandy could remember, and she refused to dishonor her memory by allowing herself to fall into despair over something as natural as death. *Ah, but was it really natural?* she asked herself for the umpteenth time. Mandy knew, with a certainty that defied explanation, the answers lay in

the museum.

Now that the official investigation had ended, she was eager to get the shop re-opened before business suffered. Legally in receivership until the estate settled, Aunt Viv had left explicit instructions for her heir via the probate attorney and those instructions included the management of *Erotique* in the interim. She scanned the press release, making only necessary changes in the dates, and sent it off to the local media outlets via e-mail. Prepared at least fifteen months ago—when Vivian Long last changed her will—it added to Mandy’s growing suspicion that Aunt Viv somehow knew her life would end at *Erotique*.

* * *

Bruce bit off a huge chunk of the dripping bratwurst sandwich and wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his t-shirt. “Geez, Man. I mean, the more I think about it, the creepier it gets.”

“God, you’re disgusting sometimes. Use a napkin, why don’t ya? And to think I dared to hope that law school’d make the frat boy grow up.”

“Once a slob, always a slob. But seriously, Man, I’m more than a little bit worried about this overnight gig. What if the rumors are true?”

“Aunt Viv had a good reason for everything she did. I figure there’s something I need to know or see or understand in order to run the shop—and that will become clear by following her wishes. Besides, if I don’t do it, I don’t inherit. Simple as that.” She wiped his greasy fingers with her napkin and grasped his hand in both of hers. “Bruce, I’ve been preparing for this almost my whole life. I’ll be fine. Trust me. If I’m not scared, Mister Alpha Male, you sure as hell shouldn’t be.”

“That’s ‘*hunk stud*’ to you, sweet cheeks,” he smiled.

“Speaking of which, have you given any more thought to my proposition?”

“Bruce...”

“Hear me out, okay? No pressure. Seriously. Just roommates. I can’t think of anyone I’d rather live with, and I really need help with the rent.”

“I promise I’ll think about it. That’s the best I can do right now. Everything’s changed, y’know? It’s like someone pressed ‘fast forward’ on my life when I wasn’t looking.”

“All the more reason to have a roommate to share the load, Man.”

“Maybe. I gotta run. Meeting the attorney in fifteen minutes to get the keys. We reopen *Erotique* in the morning.”

Bruce emptied their trays into the nearby trash can. “Call me later?”

“Will do, *dahlink*,” Mandy replied as they shared air kisses to each cheek and grinned at their silly ritual. They’d parted on the same light note for years, yet it felt different now—just a little strained. Their life paths were diverging, and their friendship would either adapt or atrophy. She’d kept secrets from him—big ones—about her heritage, and she knew it hurt him more deeply than he allowed her to see.

* * *

“Welcome to *Erotique*,” Mandy greeted each customer at the door. “Enjoy your visit, and please let me know if you have any questions.” Her lingering fears about Vivian’s death adversely affecting business were laid to rest as the day progressed. A steady stream of women and men from all walks of life flowed through the shop from noon until she wearily flipped off the neon sign at midnight. She thanked the staff and shooed them out the door with firm instructions to get some well-deserved rest. Collapsing onto the sofa in the back office,

she punched Bruce's number on her cell phone.

"Hello, Wong?" she said when he finally answered. "I'd like two orders of kung po chicken and a six pack of Tsingtao delivered to *Erotique*. Big tip for prompt service."

"Do you realize what time it is?" Bruce asked sleepily.

"Wuss! Get your ass over here. I need help restocking the store, and I'm starving. We were swamped all day. I haven't eaten since breakfast, and that was just toast."

"M'kay, but you owe me big time. Be there in thirty."

Mandy moved around the shop, tidying the displays and taking mental inventory. She passed through the retail section and into the annex, which seemed so airy and spacious without the throng of patrons. Stars sparkled through the many sky lights. During the day, the sunlight effectively vanquished the hovering seediness that threatened to overrun anything sexual. *Erotique* would never allow something as natural and as pleasing as sex to be buried by dogma. The large placard on the wall above the cash register featured a quote by the famous neuropsychologist James W. Prescott: "Deprivation of physical affection in human relationships constitutes the single greatest source of violence in human societies."

A *Post-Gazette* reporter who visited earlier spent a considerable amount of time browsing the exhibits and left with the promise of a glowing review, and it wouldn't be the first. Vivian had built the fascinating collection from scratch over the last two decades, beginning with an odd-looking replica of the first known cock ring, circa 1200, crafted from a goat's eyelids with the eyelashes still attached. From that point on, her vacations always centered around the search for more such "erotiques."

She'd renamed the business when the museum opened in 1995, and it quickly became a tourist attraction. Half price

admission with a minimum purchase in the shop certainly didn't hurt sales, either. Customers spent hours in the museum, mesmerized by the eclectic artifacts, and often added to their earlier purchases before departing. The modern products sold well before the museum tour; the reproductions, after. Nothing was done to either squelch or fuel the rumors which occasionally surfaced about the annex being haunted. They simply added to the *Erotique* mystique.

A neighborhood coffee shop was contracted in 1998 to maintain a small refreshment area when one patron who'd spent the entire afternoon staring at a carved whalebone dildo collapsed. That soon grew into a café named *Appetites* with its own street entrance and a balcony overlooking the museum floor. The menu featured desserts with catchy names dripping with sexual innuendo. Folks traveled from all over the city for a *creaming tart* and stayed for a *chassé* through the annex.

Mandy's attention was drawn by the latest addition, an authentic hand-cranked vibrator from 1910 Germany. She opened the display case and carefully lifted the mechanical device from its velvet cradle, recalling when Aunt Viv first showed it to her less than a year ago. She said it had been discovered in a crate amongst other belongings from the estate of a Nobel Prize-winning chemist, although what use the lifetime bachelor had for the device was a mystery.

The stringed music of "La Traviata" filled her mind and the seductively sweet aroma of oleander enveloped her. She gathered the heavy silks of her train and, with a surreptitious glance in either direction, stepped off the asphalt path into the shrubbery. He was there, waiting, and took her immediately into his arms.

"Were you observed?"

"Nein," she whispered in a tongue never before spoken.

“Bitte.”

He growled into her neck, a sinister sound that resonated between her legs. “Turn around and lift your skirts,” he said as he pulled the long metal phallus from his overcoat and spat upon it. “Quickly now.”

She could do naught but obey, driven by an overwhelming desire to have the implement inside her. The cold metal roughly parted her ass cheeks, and she bit her sleeve to stifle a cry.

Mandy jumped as her cell phone interrupted the... The what? Vision? Memory? Possession?

“Yeah,” she answered, still a bit dazed.

“I’m at the front door. You in there?” Bruce’s voice brought her all the way back to the present.

“Be right there.” She returned the artifact to its creche and scurried through the shop to unlock the door—looking over her shoulder and half expecting to see the bearded man in the heavy wool overcoat.

Bruce held a steaming bag in one hand and beer in the other. The smell of food reminded Mandy of her hunger. “You’re an angel,” she cried as she pulled him inside by his jacket collar and led him to the back office, where she spread a gingham tablecloth on the floor. “It’s from the erotic picnic basket,” she explained when he raised an eyebrow. “Thirty-nine ninety five, which includes the champagne, chocolate-covered cherries, and furry handcuffs.”

“Gracious! Do we get those, too?” Bruce inquired, adopting his mock leer.

Mandy grabbed the bag from his hand. “Slut,” she teased, sitting cross legged on the floor. “Let’s eat. What d’ya think of the place?”

“Haven’t seen much yet. Do I get a tour?”

Mandy stuffed half an eggroll in her mouth. “Yeah, after I

sate myself on this feast. There's something I want you to look at, too."

"I take it," Bruce said as he picked at his food, "that the grand re-opening was a smashing success."

Mandy nodded enthusiastically as she ate, pausing only long enough between mouthfuls to wash them down with hearty swigs of the Chinese beer. "Are you gonna eat that?" she asked when she'd finished her own portion.

"Help yourself. Damn, Man! I've never seen you so ravenous."

"Hard work increases the appetite." Washing the last of it down, she corrected herself, "Appetites. Plural."

Bruce's eyes went wide. He took Mandy's extended hand as she rose and brushed the crumbs from her lap onto the cloth. She led him through the shop and into the museum, straight to the exhibit which had entranced her earlier. Again opening the acrylic case, she cocked her head toward it. "Pick it up."

"What is it?"

"An old vibrator. Pick it up, please."

Bruce looked wary, but did as requested. "Man..." he started, then froze.

She was ready and caught the antique toy as, moments later, it fell from his hands.

"What the fuck was that?" he shouted, backing away.

"Tell me what you saw—or felt," Mandy urged.

He left the annex and returned with two more beers. Handing one to Mandy, he sat on a nearby bench, took a long drink, and ran a shaky hand through his hair. "There was something... something cold... in my ass, and I heard music."

Mandy nodded. "Me, too. I guess Aunt Viv wasn't crazy after all. Let's check the other exhibits."

"Um, Man? Are you sure that's such a good idea?" Bruce

still looked shaken. "I'd rather talk about this over coffee... somewhere else."

"Just one more, then we'll go. M'kay?" She walked toward the statue of Amon-Ra with its large erection. Legend had it that women would mount it in hopes of increasing their fertility. Such statues still existed in Egypt and were now provided armed guards to inhibit the practice as it eroded the artifacts' impressive stone phalli.

Standing directly before the statue, Mandy extended her hand and rested her palm upon the sun god's chest. *Nothing*. Slowly, she traced her fingertips down its abdomen until they came to rest upon its cock. *Oh!* At first, her face held an expression of rapture, but then her whole body convulsed and she screamed in pain.

"Mandy!" Bruce cried as he yanked her away from the statue. "That's it. I don't want you staying in this place alone. Inheritance or no inheritance."

"Don't be ridiculous, Bruce. I was in no danger. See? I'm fine." She spun around, arms extended, demonstrating her okay-ness and praying that he would not see how truly shaken she'd been by the experience. The warm stickiness between her legs, she feared, was not from the arousal.

* * *

The next several days passed so quickly that Mandy hadn't time to return any of Bruce's calls. A couple of rushed e-mail messages, reassuring him that she'd suffered no ill effects and would exercise caution, had to suffice. In truth, her abrasions, of which he knew nothing, were minor.

The promised newspaper article turned out to be a half-page spread above the fold in the Sunday *Lifestyles* section, which brought in even more business. She steered clear of the annex when *Erotique* was closed and had decided she'd sequester

herself in the back office when she spent the requisite night. The desire to delve into the mysteries—to learn the tantalizing secrets of each exhibit—tugged at her almost constantly. First things first, though. There'd be plenty of time for exploration once the estate settled.

Mandy made arrangements for the staff of *Appetites* to keep an eye on the museum visitors, noting the times spent at each exhibit and if any behaved strangely. With only a few days' data, a pattern was already emerging. Most of the displays seemed to have at least one period each day during which they attracted more attention; some lasting longer than others. Since visitors could not actually touch the artifacts, the effects were not as pronounced as those experienced by her or Bruce, but noticeable nonetheless. The reproductions even affected the patrons, although not as deeply.

Fortunately, the sandstone statue of Amon-Ra was not "active" during business hours else it'd need a barricade to prevent injury—or worse. Priapus would require scrutiny, too; more so for its protection than that of the patrons. Mandy suspected that ancient boners, especially those made of wood, might be rather brittle and susceptible to damage. Thus far, the Greek god of fertility with its renowned hymen-piercing erection had shown no cause for concern, perhaps because most of those old enough to enter *Erotique* had already lost their virginity.

Mandy pulled the chain on her desk lamp and collected her jacket and purse, glancing at her desk calendar one last time as if she needed the reminder. The following night was circled in red: full moon. She passed quickly through the store, denying the urge to visit the annex. The exhibits beckoned her. She felt certain she could easily lose herself amongst them, perhaps eternally so. *Was that what happened to Aunt Viv?*

Taking a deep breath, she forced herself out the door. To

her surprise, Bruce was waiting in front with a pair of hot chocolates. “My! Aren’t you sweet?”

“Don’t tell anyone,” he insisted with a wink. “I have my reputation to protect, after all. Wanna lift?”

“I’d love one. Can we swing by Little Caesars and pick up a pizza on the way?” Without waiting for an answer, she punched the number and ordered a large sausage and extra cheese to go. “Don’t you have classes in the morning? Oh, wait! It’s Friday, isn’t it?”

“You can’t keep up this pace, Man.”

“When did you become my mother?” she shot back with more vehemence than intended. Silently kicking herself, Mandy quickly apologized, but the wounded expression on Bruce’s face confirmed that her attempt to lessen the sting was not successful. She grabbed his hand and brought it to her cheek. “I really am sorry.”

“It’s okay. I’m a big boy.”

“A big boy who deserves a better friend than I’ve been lately. How can I make it up to you?”

“Um... blow me?”

Mandy sprayed a mouthful of hot chocolate across the dashboard then dissolved into fits of belly laughter punctuated with an occasional snort which, of course, engendered even more laughter. “Damn you!” she wheezed when she finally caught her breath. “You did that on purpose.”

“Guilty, as charged. Do you realize how long it’s been since we shared a good laugh, Man? I miss that. I miss you.”

The light ahead changed from green to yellow. Under normal circumstances, she knew, Bruce would have raced to beat it. Instead, he rolled to a stop.

When she looked at him quizzically, he leaned over, cradled her face in his large hands, and delivered a kiss like

nothing Mandy had ever before experienced. “I miss *us*.”

To say she swooned would be an understatement. Without another word, he resumed the drive as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

While Bruce never hid the fact that he wanted to be more than friends, he’d never pushed the issue. Mandy valued their friendship too much to let it get bogged down in all that angst-y, mushy, emotional stuff. She had to admit, though, that Bruce was as close to her ideal as she’d ever encountered: patient, kind, witty, intelligent, and very easy on the eyes. *What more could a girl want?*

By the time they picked up the pizza and reached her apartment, it was nearly one o’clock in the morning. Mandy invited him in, but Bruce politely declined. “I don’t think it’d be a good idea tonight, Man. Plus, you’ve got a big day... er, night... tomorrow. Get some rest, okay?” And with that, he drove off, leaving her standing on the sidewalk holding a pizza and wondering what just happened. Mandy didn’t know what to make of it all, but she knew that pizza would help. Pizza, like chocolate, always helped.

She paused only long enough to shed her work clothes and toss on some old sweats before plopping onto the sofa with her pizza and a Snapple, mulling about Bruce as she ate. Her last few relationships self destructed within the first few months, not that she really cared. None had anything resembling an emotional investment on her part—just pleasant pastimes. She wasn’t the type of woman who felt incomplete without a man; a take-it-or-leave-it attitude which probably didn’t help matters. Going against the young male stereotype, everyone she dated seemed to be angling for something more serious. Mandy just wanted a fun companion and a good hard fuck every other night. *Not too much to ask*, she reasoned. *In fact, it was probably too*

little to ask of a man like Bruce. He deserved more.

“Why now?” she asked her pizza. “I don’t have time for this.” After sticking the leftovers in the refrigerator for breakfast, Mandy padded toward her bedroom. A box of sample products to be evaluated for possible addition to *Erotique’s* inventory sat on her bureau, and she rummaged through it until she found a suitable vibrator. For the first time, it was Bruce who occupied her thoughts as she pleased herself and then drifted off to sleep.

* * *

The alarm woke her at ten thirty Saturday morning. Within the hour, Mandy was showered and on her way to *Erotique*, stuffing cold pizza in her mouth as she trudged up the sidewalk. She stopped en route to pick up the last batch of instructions from Aunt Viv’s probate attorney. Once everything settled, she’d not have to be on site from noon until midnight each day. Maybe then she’d have time to fully explore her feelings for Bruce.

The day passed very quickly. At midnight, weary but grateful that she had been too busy to dwell on the night ahead, Mandy bid the staff goodnight and locked the door. She hurried to the back office where an envelope waited on her desk: ‘Open at midnight’ scrawled upon it in Aunt Viv’s barely legible hand. Thankfully, the letter itself was typed:

My dearest Amanda,

Congratulations! You are now the owner of *Erotique*. Managing the shop per my instructions for the past two weeks, you have undoubtedly observed odd happenings in the museum. The fact that you’re still here—ready and willing to spend the night

alone—tells me that you’ve got what it takes. I am satisfied. You can go home now, if you wish.

However, if you choose to stay, I must caution you. Some exhibits can be dangerous if approached at certain times of the day or, in some cases, the night. Others can be enjoyable—extremely enjoyable—and they are all active during a full moon.

I know you’re wondering about my death, and I want to assure you that there was no foul play. I’ve known for a while that I’d eventually join my entrepreneurial sisters from Miletus. I belong in that time. Please do not be sad. I went willingly—joyfully, even.

Now, let me leave you with what I know about each exhibit....

Mandy devoured the rest of the three-page letter. It confirmed much of the data she’d already collected and filled in the gaps elsewhere. The part about Vivian’s death seemed a bit wacky, she thought, but only slightly more so than the premise of ancient sex toys haunted by memories of users long dead.

She was headed toward the annex to get better acquainted with a particularly enticing, per Aunt Viv, exhibit when her cell phone beeped. Mandy chuckled as Bruce’s text message appeared: *Call if you need ANYTHING tonight*. She returned his call without pause.

“Can you come over—like, right now?”

“Just unlock the door,” he replied.

“Okay. Let me know when you get here. I don’t want to leave it open for just anyone to stroll in.”

“Man, I’m right outside. I, um, wanted to be nearby in case... Oh, hell. I was worried, y’know?”

Mandy dashed through the shop and threw open the door, grinning at the sheepish expression on Bruce's face. "Well, don't just stand there! Come inside."

"But what about the... y'know, the will and stuff?"

By way of explanation, Mandy simply extracted Aunt Viv's letter from her skirt pocket and handed it to him. She led him back to the office and busied herself with some paperwork while he read.

"So," he said when he finished, "d'ya believe all this?"

"I've seen nothing to convince me it's not true, and I've seen quite a bit to convince me it is. Remember that German vibrator? You felt its effects, too."

Bruce ran his hand through his hair, a gesture Mandy found endearing. "Yeah. But, Man..."

"But what? You need more proof? I was just about to conduct my own, um, research when you called. Perhaps," she purred, "you'd like to join me."

"Research, eh? Sounds dull," he teased. "But, I suppose I could be persuaded..." Bruce grabbed Mandy's hand and tugged. "This one first," he insisted, pointing to the letter.

She leaned closer to read the paragraph indicated. "Why am I *not* surprised?"

They stopped at the entrance to the museum, shared a kiss, and as one, stepped across the threshold. The air sparkled with activity—and for a moment they merely stood there, getting acclimated. A buzz, like the myriad of conversations in a crowded restaurant, swirled around them; some loud, others very faint, all sexually charged. Mandy felt the presence of malice, as well as desire, joy, hope, fear, love, and above all, passion.

They moved toward the fragment of a work of art recovered from an Upper Paleolithic burial site near Tushka which clearly showed the use of an implement resembling an erect penis.

Predating the invention of the wheel by over six millennia, the crude dildo depicted was purportedly crafted of camel dung and coated with layers of resin.

Mandy received no lucid images from the exhibit until Bruce slipped his arm around her waist. Then, the air grew thick with the sounds of insects and an occasional splash through the reeds along the river bank. In the distance, revelry: drums and chanting from Kom Ombo. She knelt on the bank, her knees pressing into the cool muck and her hands cupping his smooth, hard ass as she swallowed his turgid cock. Their primal noises joined those of the night.

He towered over her, one callused hand fisted in her hair and the other fishing inside his belt pouch. His hips thrust with as much force as the precarious footing allowed. When at last his hand fell upon the desired tool, he pulled it from the bag. It was crafted to mimic his own size and shape and covered in myrrh to smooth and harden it. She took it from him, shifted onto one knee, and moistened it with her own juices before ramming it inside with a muffled grunt.

Matching her thrusts to his in both force and speed, she dragged the knuckle of her thumb across her aching clit with each pass. His body shook and he howled at the full moon as he erupted, bathing her throat in pulses of liquid fire.

She was lifted into his arms, deeply kissed. As she shared with him the taste of his own essence, Mandy's awareness returned to the museum. Bruce carried her toward an exhibit featuring the bedchamber of Emperor Tai Tsung of the Tang Dynasty. Her eyes danced in the purple glow of moonlight on the large panels of polished glass surrounding the ornate bed. Servants massaged her body with fragrant oils as he watched, slowly stroking himself. Once they'd finished, he shoed them from the chamber. She lay supine upon pillows of the most

elegant silks and admired his impressive physique through the reflecting glass as he circled the bed like a predatory cat.

When he finally stretched out beside her, she moved to embrace him. Grasping her wrists and holding them together over her head, he ate the exclamation of surprise from her lips. “Be still,” he commanded, “so that I may adore you.” In a fluid motion, he bound her wrists together with a length of silk rope and passed another through the knot to the carved headboard.

A strong arm lifted her torso and a bolster slid beneath her shoulder blades, arching her upper body such that her head fell backward. Her gaze fell upon yet another mirror; this one angled to catch the reflection from the one above. She had a bird’s eye view of her own sex—warm, wet, and waiting.

He leaned over her and kissed each pink nipple. “My garden,” he whispered in awe, more to himself than to her. Mandy whimpered as his tongue journeyed from one breast to the other and back again, leaving tingling trails of memory. He tormented her with deliberation. Every inch of skin craved the burn of his lips, the sting of his teeth.

Positioning himself between her legs, he studied her for a long while; his hot breath upon her thighs causing tremors of anticipation. “In all my lands,” he finally spoke, “there is no finer silk than that of your flower.” A fingertip traced her cleft. “Open to me, flower. I have a gift for you.”

The two jade marbles slid into her cavern, pushed by his agile tongue. “Only the finest from Khotan to bathe in your nectar. They will remind you of me while I am away, and I will envy them every sweet moment. Hold them inside as you would hold me.” He spoke no more words, using his mouth instead to worship her until her legs shook and her cries echoed off the glass.

* * *

Mandy took Bruce's hand and rose to her feet, clinging to him for balance. Her eyes shone in the moonlight. "Next?"

"I've always wanted to visit Renaissance Italy," he replied.

"And I've always wanted to be a high-priced whore. Lead the way, *signore*. Venice awaits."

They cut across the center of the museum, giving the statue of Amon-Ra a wide berth, until they stood before a rare *diletto* of creamy white Carrara marble. It was purportedly carved from a stolen fragment of the same block of stone used by Michelangelo Buonarroti to sculpt his Pietà.

Mandy stood topless near the *Ponte Della Tette*, the Bridge of Tits, shivering in the early evening chill. The Venetian government, in an attempt to cure homosexuality, paid courtesans to bare their breasts, believing such displays would convert gay men and lessen the threat they posed. "No one comes tonight," Olivia observed, "and our patrons are waiting. We should go."

Neither woman needed the extra money, but they'd seen too many men beheaded or hanged for nothing more serious than loving another man. Bridge duty provided a way to protect those accused of such crimes, since an evening with a well-known courtesan usually convinced the authorities of a man's rehabilitation. No one need know what really transpired behind closed doors.

Covering themselves, they set off at a brisk pace, both eager to reach their destination. Two very wealthy businessmen awaited their arrival. Mandy walked in silence, each step increasing her anticipation and the warmth between her legs. It had been months since the men last called, having been in Florence on business, and their safe return was cause enough for celebration.

They dined and danced on the terrace, expecting to be

observed, before retiring to the privacy of the parlor where the dynamic shifted. Giacomo turned at once to his partner and kissed him deeply. "Please forgive us," he said to the women, "if we are abrupt. We dared not share a bed in Florence. Savonarola is now dead, but the Office of the Night yet inspires terror. We were twice accused of the abominable vice of sodomy."

Olivia nodded her understanding as she pulled Mandy into her arms and began to toy with the laces of her bodice. "We are pleased to be of service. You have both been quite generous. Will you be watching us tonight?"

"Not this night," he replied. "We have been too long apart and wish only the company of one another. We have, instead, a gift for you." With a gracious bow, he presented the wrapped parcel. "We will retire now in the hopes you enjoy yourselves. In the morn, I will tell you the story of its origins."

Mandy tore open the package to reveal the smooth stone phallus. Cradling it in both hands, she touched it to Olivia's cheek. For a moment, its color blended with her lover's pale skin until a blush overtook it. She traced it across Olivia's lips and down her neck, bringing to rest against her fluttering pulse.

"Bella," Olivia whispered as she reclined upon the cut velvet chaise, one foot on the floor. Mandy knelt alongside and lifted Olivia's gown and layered underskirts, kissing the exposed skin of her upper thighs and running the tip of her tongue along the tops of her stockings.

Olivia's dark curls glistened in the candle light as Mandy parted her labia with the cool marble dildo and followed it with her hot tongue. The sensations—the scents and the sights—were new to Mandy, but the sentiment was not. "Sì," she agreed between passes, "bella. Mia bella."

* * *

“Um, Man?” Bruce looked a bit dazed, and the bulge in his jeans looked rather uncomfortable. “Which of those courtesans were you? I mean, did you...?”

“Did I what? Did I just go down on a woman? Did I like it?”

“Well... Both, I guess.”

With a devilish grin, Mandy wiped her mouth on the back of her hand and simply asked, “Where to next?”

“You, my friend, are a tease! Let’s see what the good Dr. Taylor has to offer,” he suggested, “unless you’d prefer to hit the Annie Sprinkle exhibit.”

“Masturbation on stage is just not my idea of a good time. Private showings, however, are another matter.”

“Y’know, I had no idea you were so...”

Mandy laughed. “Yes?”

“Uninhibited,” he finished, although clearly not his first choice of word.

George Taylor’s *Manipulator*, the first known vibrator, occupied its own place of honor in a separate room. Due to the size and the cost, only a few dozen of the steam-powered devices had been produced, and *Erotique* owned the only one extant. Skeptics branded it a fake because it differed slightly from the available documentation, but Aunt Viv swore it was instead the prototype. Given her recent experiences with the other exhibits, Mandy favored her predecessor’s unproven assertions over those of the so-called experts.

“How’d it work?” Bruce wondered as he studied the padded table with a sphere protruding through a hole near the center.

Mandy approached the table. “See the drive train underneath? It connected to a steam engine. The engine turned this wheel,” she pointed, “which jiggled the ball.” Climbing onto the table to demonstrate, she continued, “The woman

would lay face down on the table so that her crotch rested against the ball.”

“Are you in here again?” The voice was not Bruce’s.

Mandy turned her head to the other side and beheld her husband. “George, I...”

“Woman, you’re going to wear the damned thing out before I have a chance to present it to the College.”

“But,” she protested, “you wanted me to test it, darling, and my *hysteria* has been particularly troublesome of late.”

George sighed as he started the engine. “I shan’t lack for data, that much is sure. I’ll return shortly,” he said on his way out of the room.

The vibration was deeper and slower than that of most modern products, more percussive than resonant, but it would eventually get the job done. *It’s like sitting on top of a washing machine during the spin cycle*, she thought, *only noisier*.

She squirmed a bit, trying to optimize contact with the jiggling sphere, but her layered clothing interfered. With a grunt of frustration, Mandy yanked her heavy skirts out of the way so that only her thin bloomers remained between skin and surface. *Ah, much better!* Ass in the air, she ground her clit against the device.

“Well, there’s a pintle-keek if ever I’ve seen one!” George whistled from the doorway. “You look positively fuckish, woman.”

Well, then fuck me, damn it! Mandy’s mind roared, although only tiny mewling sounds escaped.

Her message apparently understood, he mounted the table between her legs and began tearing at the cotton undergarment. Mandy gasped when the fabric gave way and a rush of cool air met her warm, wet sex. One hand fumbled with his trousers while the other thrust roughly inside her, causing a guttural shift

in her sounds. Her body throbbed to the rhythm of the engine, and her entire being centered on her cunt.

The intoxicating scent of her own arousal filled the small room. When cock replaced fingers, Mandy's awareness of the world around her disappeared. Hard and hot and tearing through her with regard for neither pain nor pleasure, he pounded her. Each thrust brought her closer to the edge: the place where falling and flying became synonymous.

His thumbs teased her anus, rimming it with her own juices and probing to the knuckle. Mandy clawed and bit the padded surface of the table as the 'hysterical paroxysms' rocked through her.

* * *

"You should do this with all the newer exhibits," Bruce commented, studying the framed newspaper on the wall as he buckled his belt. "It puts them in perspective, y'know?" The headline, *Johnson Impeached*, cemented the time period for those who visited. On the opposite wall, hung a sample of the only other notable invention from that year: barbed wire. Mandy believed the vibrator to be the more significant, by far.

"Good idea," she cooed, wrapping her arms around his waist from behind. "There are a couple new acquisitions in the store room that Aunt Viv didn't get around to displaying, and I just bid on a beautiful pair of *anneaux de seins*. I could start with those."

"Speak English, Man."

"Nipple rings—from late 19th century Paris. Hey! Wanna see the new stuff before we call it a night... er, morning?"

"Sure. Then, let's get some breakfast. I've worked up quite an," he paused for emphasis, "*appetite*."

The store room housed both retail inventory and items to be exhibited, the former far outnumbering the latter. Mandy wove

her way through the aisles of stacked boxes, Bruce in tow, until she reached the rear corner.

She lifted a small box and read the label. "This one is supposed to be an early 15th century ivory cock ring in the likeness of a dragon with," she added as she tore open the package, "a strategically-placed tongue."

Bruce peered over her shoulder. "Very pretty, but it doesn't exactly look comfortable."

"Hmm, agreed. I'm not getting any images from it," Mandy observed. "Not even faint ones. You?"

"Nada. By the looks of it, though, I'm not sure I'd want to. Maybe it was never used."

Mandy placed the box on a nearby table and moved toward a large crate. "I don't remember seeing anything this big mentioned in the inventory. Hand me that crow bar."

She pried off the front panel and packing material spilled onto the floor revealing a rather gruesome statue of a woman giving birth. Bruce cleared away more of the styrofoam peanuts while Mandy opened the manila envelope found inside.

"Tlazolteotl," she read aloud, "Aztec goddess of guilty pleasures. Says here that she ate sins of the flesh which were confessed to her, but she only granted absolution once per lifetime—often saving supplicants from execution for the capital offense of adultery. Ugly bitch, isn't she?"

When Bruce didn't respond, Mandy looked up from her reading. His hands rested on the knees of the squatting deity, and he seemed in some sort of trance. As she drew nearer, the obsidian blade hovering over his bare chest became visible. Blood dripped from the knife, although Mandy could see no wound. The systolic chant of the throng of onlookers provided an eerie backdrop to the ritual.

He looked sedate, relaxed, but the acrid scent belied his

fear. The damiana-induced stupor prevented his movement, not that he could have escaped with a temple guard holding each arm. “Bruce!” she shouted into his ear. “You gotta confess.” He gave no indication that he’d heard. If she touched either Bruce or the statue, Mandy knew she’d be sucked inextricably into the vision. She also knew, from first hand experience, that the threat of physical injury was very real.

Running her hands through her hair, she looked frantically around the store room until her eyes fell on the crow bar. Mandy swept the tool upward, knocking Bruce’s hands from the statue. He fell backward and slumped to the floor, unconscious. While his chest bled, the wounds appeared to be superficial—just scratches. His wrists, however, would be severely bruised where the crow bar made contact. She made sure he was resting comfortably before turning back to Tlazolteotl.

“Snot suckin’ turd breath maggot infested skank!” Hot tears coursed down her cheeks as she resealed the crate. “Goddess or not, you’re history, bitch!” Mandy proceeded to throw every colorful curse she could muster at the statue.

“If I didn’t know any better,” Bruce croaked from the floor, “I’d swear you were worried about me.”

Mandy spun and rushed toward him with such enthusiasm that Bruce flinched, fearing the force of impact. She cradled his face in her hands and laughed while she kissed him. “The next time you feel the urge to pork one of Ahuizotu’s married daughters, come see me first.”

“It’s a deal!” Bruce sat up, trying to leer but only mastering a grimace. “In the meantime, let’s go home.”

“Home. I like the sound of that.”

~ ~ ~

