



Isle of Desire

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Isle of Desire

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Isle of Desire

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Dedication

To my fabulous critique partners, authors Gemma Halliday and Jennifer Colgan, for your honesty and careful eyes. To author Tempest Knight, for the whispered words of love in Spanish.

Also, as always, to my Divas, for your undying support in everything I do.

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Chapter One

She could hardly believe she was here, that she'd been brave enough, or foolish enough, to come. Isabel Asher swept her gaze across the fine white sand of Playa de la Luna, the serenely beautiful beach that had haunted her dreams for twelve years. In the distance, the brilliant turquoise and jade waves splashed against the shore, carrying the salty scent of the sea. That Caribbean scent was all around her, rippling the leaves of the date and coconut palms dotting the long crescent of beach and flowing through her waist-length brown hair. The entire island of Isla de Margarita, off the coast of Venezuela, smelled of the ocean, of sun, of the sensual and heartbreaking memories this place held for her.

The sun was just beginning to lower in the sky. Wispy streams of clouds marred the crystal clear blue; it would make for a spectacular sunset. But this particular sunset meant so much more to her than the breathtaking colors that would grace the horizon before the sun dipped into the ocean to rest for the night.

Today was her thirtieth birthday, but that in itself was not what was most important. No, she was here to follow a dream, to follow her heart.

If only she knew whether or not he would come.

Did he still think of her? She had no way of knowing. Nor did she know if he'd married, had children, moved away.

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Her sister, Samantha, had pointed these things out to her, over and over again, since Isabel had told her she was coming back to Venezuela to find him, to see if he remembered their vow made in the passion of youth so many years ago.

Isabel allowed herself a small sigh and scanned the beach again. Would she even recognize him? It had been twelve years; he could have changed...but no, she knew in her heart she would know him anywhere.

Rafael Cruz. The first, and greatest, love of her life.

She remembered still the smoky tone of his voice, his lightly accented English. She remembered the deep brown of his skin, the silky feel of it against her palms as she'd made those first nearly innocent explorations of his young, lanky body. His lips had been so soft, so sweet and lush, his kisses sometimes gentle, sometimes so hungry she had begged him to take her virginity, but he refused. It had to do with honor, he said. She wished later that she had given her innocence to him, so she would've had that one experience to hang on to over the years. Still, she had memories of him. Lovely, sensual memories.

They'd spent the better part of a month together on this very beach. If she let her gaze travel to the tip of the cove, she could see where the craggy rocks came down to meet the sea, and she knew that just on the other side of them was a small cave, the private hideaway they had shared. The things they had done together there, in the heat of the day, in the sultry tropical nights, had fed her fantasies her entire adult life. She shivered now remembering, her body yearning for his touch once more.

But her heart yearned for him even more.

The sky was beginning to glow with the first colors of sunset: amber, pink, orange. The sun would soon fall into the distant horizon, as though into the arms of a lover. Just as she wished to do. But not just any lover would do. Only him. Only Rafael.

Her stomach tightened as her gaze roved the nearly empty beach. There were a few scattered couples and a family with three small children. Only she stood here alone, in one of the most beautiful and romantic spots on earth, wishing, hoping, for what was probably impossible.

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Why had she come? Her sister was right. He wouldn't be here. Too many years had passed. Why would he even remember her? He probably had his own life by now, leaving their adolescent love affair far behind.

This had been foolish. What had she been thinking? Sighing, she pushed her hair away from her face, and turned to make the short walk back to her hotel, her heart heavy in her chest. She kept her gaze on her bare feet scudding in the fine, warm sand. She didn't want to watch the glory of the sunset. The idea of it meant too much for her and now she was faced with the stark reality of a broken dream. A foolish dream, yes, but still...

"Is it you?"

Startled, she looked up and found an intense hazel gaze fixed on her. Her pulse pounded through her veins. Could it be...?

He reached out and laid a tentative hand on her arm. Immediately she felt the heat of his touch.

"Ra...Rafael?" Even though this is what she'd dreamed of, she could not believe he was really here. Her heart slammed into her ribcage and a shiver swept over her skin. "You remembered."

He smiled, that dazzling flash of strong white teeth, the one that had melted her heart the first moment she'd met him. "Of course I remembered. I've never forgotten you. Did you truly think I would?"

His accent was smoother, his voice a little deeper, but she would have known it anywhere.

"God, I can't believe you're really here." She blinked, hard. She was trembling all over.

"And I can hardly believe you are. But I always knew you would come. I made a promise. We both made a promise, a pact."

She pulled in a deep lungful of tropical air, trying to get her brain to function. She shook her head. "I've thought of this for such a long time, but now that it's happening, I don't know what to say."

"Come back to the hotel with me. We can have a drink."

She laughed. "That's so grown up, isn't it? Us having a drink together."

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"We have both grown up these past twelve years. I run the hotel now. My mother moved back to Miami when my father passed three years ago."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" She put a hand on his shoulder, touching him for the first time.

"I miss him still. But come, let's talk of other things."

He slid an arm around her waist, and it felt both odd and completely natural at the same time. They were quiet on the walk up the beach to the Playa de la Luna Resort, the hotel owned by Rafael's family. The same hotel Isabel had stayed in with her family twelve years earlier.

The place was still as beautiful as ever; its Spanish architecture graced with intricate black ironwork. The stucco walls were draped in fragrant, flowering vines. Ground lamps lit the tall palms that shaded the maze of courtyards, dotted here and there with mosaic-tiled fountains and ironwork benches. She felt as though she were walking through a dream, with the colorful glow of the setting sun adding to the evening's surreal quality. His hand was still on her waist. His touch was warm, reassuring, and making every nerve in her body light up with need. How long had she craved this?

He led her into a bar to a table set before a wide expanse of windows overlooking the beach. The bar was mostly empty; it was late August and still too hot for most of the tourists. She was glad of the sense of privacy.

He held a chair for her and she slid in, missing already the warmth of his hand at the small of her back.

"I will get us something to drink. Do you still drink cherry cola?" His hazel eyes sparkled and she saw again the mischievous teenager he'd been.

"I think a real drink might be better suited to the occasion. Does your bartender make a *mojito*?"

"The best on Isla de Margarita. I'll be right back."

She watched him as he walked away with the easy grace of a man entirely comfortable in his own body. He was so beautiful, even more so than she remembered. His hazel eyes came from his American mother,

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she knew. But the rest of his dark, male physique was a gift from his Venezuelan father. The jet black hair he still wore long enough to brush his shoulders and fall into his eyes, the golden brown skin, the flashing white teeth, all reminded her of Alejandro Cruz.

Rafael talked with the bartender while the man made their drinks. In the dim light of the bar, she could tell his jaw line had widened, and his high cheekbones looked more finely sculpted. He'd grown even more handsome as he'd changed from a boy into a man.

He had more muscle now—a lot more. His finely-tuned body was clearly outlined beneath his cotton shirt and well-cut linen slacks. He'd been attractive as a teenager; at thirty, he was devastating. Yet the same boy with whom she'd fallen so madly in love was still there beneath all the muscle and cool, leonine grace. The warmth of his smile said it all.

As he came back to the table, his eyes met hers. She'd forgotten how stunning they were, how their luminescent golden-green contrasted with the tone of his skin. She melted inside.

But how could she be sure her reaction was really about him, rather than her years of longing and fantasy coming together now, the shock of seeing him after all this time?

He smiled as he placed their drinks on the table and took his seat once more, and deep down, she felt that flicker of lost love ignite, the embers slowly bursting into flame.

And her mind told her, *this is right*.

"Now," he said, "you must tell me everything."

"Everything?" She let out a small laugh. Where should she start? What should she include, or leave out? "So much has happened. I still can't believe I'm sitting here with you."

He reached across the table, took her hand, and lifted it to his lips. Ah, he was all smooth, Latin charm, just as he'd always been. But now he was more sophisticated. When his lips brushed the back of her hand, her whole body turned to liquid heat.

"Believe this, Isabella. I am here. I am real. *This is real*. We are together again. We will talk, acclimate ourselves to each other, and then decide where we go from here."

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Before she could help herself she blurted out, "But what about you? Did you ever marry?"

"No. Never." His eyes remained locked with hers, two hazel pools rimmed in long, dark lashes. "I have never forgotten you, all these long years. Never forgotten the vow we made to one another on your last day here. And just as we promised all those years ago, at sunset on our thirtieth birthday, which we share, we have come together again on our beach." He paused and laid her hand gently on the table. "I assume, since you are here, that you are also alone and unmarried?"

"I'm divorced."

"Ah, I'm sorry."

"I'm not. I'm only sorry I married him. That I didn't stay here."

"No regrets, Isabella. Life happens the way it is supposed to. Perhaps we had to grow up and experience life before we could be together. And there is no telling what will become of this meeting. That is, perhaps, part of the beauty of it, no?"

No, it wasn't. She wanted that surety. She wanted to know that after she'd come all the way here, their romance would pick up where it had left off the day they had both turned eighteen, when her parents had taken her back home to the States after their month-long vacation on Isla de Margarita.

But his words made sense. They would have to spend time together, to see if the old connection was still there. She was still too much in shock at seeing him to know what to do next, to figure out how it was all supposed to go.

The one thing she was entirely certain of was that she wanted to be with this man. In his arms, in his bed, as soon as possible.

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Chapter Two

Isabel and Rafael talked for a long time about their lives and experiences. She finally told him a bit about her marriage to an attorney whose life revolved around his law practice, rather than around her. Rafael could not understand why any man, married to such a woman, would not make her his first priority. But then, having grown up on this little Venezuelan island, he knew he often failed to comprehend the minds of Americans, even that of his own mother.

He watched Isabel as she spoke, enjoying the graceful movements of her slender hands. He couldn't prevent himself from thinking of the way those hands had felt on his skin twelve years earlier. The old memory was still as fresh in his mind as when she had touched him only a few moments ago. A ripple of desire ran through him, but he forced it back and tried to concentrate only on the lovely cadence of her soft voice, on the things she was saying to him.

"So, your husband took you to Chicago? A very cosmopolitan city. Do you have a career there?"

"Yes. I work as a corporate event planner."

"You throw parties." He couldn't help but smile. The young girl he had known had been so full of life. It seemed the perfect job for her, even if the grown woman before him had become much more somber. Too somber. Perhaps he could change that. If only she would stay for a while. But he had no right to think so far ahead.

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"Yes, I throw parties. Nothing like the festivals you have here, of course."

She smiled that beautiful smile, but it was more wistful than happy.

"You don't like Chicago? Your work there?"

"I hate Chicago. I've...I've left it for good. I'm not sure yet where I'll settle. Maybe I'll go back to California. I need to be someplace warm again. And my sister's there." She ran her fingers around the rim of her glass. "But she has her own life. Her husband, her kids. I don't know yet. I can work anywhere, so—"

"And now you are here."

"Yes."

She looked up at him, her long lashes framing her brilliant green eyes, like the emeralds that came out of Brazil. There was hope in her eyes, as well as confusion. He understood how she felt. He felt it, too. He also felt the longing he saw reflected in her sparkling gaze, and the growing heat between them.

He knew that heat would eventually bring them together. What would follow it, he couldn't say. But his entire body hummed with the need to touch her, to just touch her hair, her shoulders. Her full breasts rose and fell with her breath beneath the bodice of her white cotton dress. How innocent she looked. Yet he could sense the woman she would be in his arms. He had to be alone with her.

"Come, walk with me in the garden."

They stood and he led her to the large courtyard garden in the center of the hotel. Its greenery grew in the profusion of the Caribbean, the plants lush and full and punctuated by fragrant flowers. Overhead the almost full moon hung in the sky like a blue lamp, casting its pale light over everything.

They paused at the edge of the garden, by a low wall overlooking the beach. The waves, silvered in moonlight, crashed upon the shore, creating a musical rhythm in the background. Yet all he could really see was Isabel. She'd left her fine, golden brown hair long; it brushed the feminine curve of her hips like that of a mermaid. She was still as slim as

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she had been as a girl, but her breasts and hips had filled out. Glorious. She was more a woman than ever.

"Isabella." He reached out and brushed his fingertips over her bare shoulder and down her arm. He felt her shiver. "Are you cold?"

"No, not cold."

She caught his gaze. Yes, all his years of longing were mirrored in her eyes. He wrapped his fingers around her shoulders and pulled her close, until her soft, pliant body was up against him. She was warm. So warm. And her breaths came fast—but no faster than his. She was finally here with him, in his arms, where he had always known she belonged.

Nothing had ever felt more right.

He bent his head, and took her lips with his.

His mouth was soft, lush, and sweet. Better than she remembered. Better even than in her dreams of him. His body was all hard planes; her breasts crushed against him. He'd only given her a soft brush of those lips, but already he was driving her crazy with need. With a small sigh, she opened her mouth to him.

His warm, wet tongue dipped inside and her limbs turned to liquid. All she could think was that this was *him*, Rafael. Her Rafael.

His arms went around her, pulling her even closer, and she wrapped her hands around the back of his neck. His skin was hot and smooth. The texture of it beneath her fingers was overwhelmingly sensual. And god, the man could kiss.

She was coming apart inside already.

His hands moved into her hair, sliding until he held her face in his hands. His tongue explored her mouth, sinuously curling and tasting. Nothing had ever felt more purely erotic to her than his mouth on hers. The heat of him caused small tremors of need to flash through her system. Her nipples peaked hard against the muscular wall of his chest. She was sure he could feel it. She didn't care.

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Finally, he broke away. "Isabella." His voice was rough with desire. "I want you. But I will not take anything you don't want to give."

"God, can't you feel it? I want you. *I need you.* Now." She couldn't believe he'd had to ask. She was panting so hard she could barely speak.

"You are bolder than when we were young." His wicked smile lit up his eyes, causing lovely creases at the corners.

"I'm no virgin anymore, Rafael."

"Shall we find out if there is still something I can teach you?" He paused to kiss the tender flesh at the base of her throat. "Or perhaps there is something you can teach me, *querida*."

He dipped his head to brush his mouth over hers, and she shivered.

"Take me somewhere, Rafael, where we can be alone," she whispered against his lips.

Silently he moved away from her, took her hand and led her across the courtyard, through a narrow tiled walkway to a private bungalow at one end of the hotel. Her pulse raced and her heart hammered a sensual cadence in her chest as she anticipated what was about to happen. He would finally be naked with her, touching her, just as he had in twelve long years of fantasies. She knew already it would be better than anything she had ever imagined.

He opened the heavy wooden door and pulled her into the cool interior of his home. One small wrought-iron lamp cast a golden light over the tiled floors, the heavy beamed ceiling, and potted palms scattered here and there. Through a wall of windows overlooking the beach, she heard the muted roar of moon-tipped surf. But she wanted to concentrate only on him; she would explore this lovely place later.

He stood with her a moment in the entry hall, watching her, a small smile on his lush mouth. "You are more beautiful than ever, Isabella."

His words warmed her, but she didn't want to talk anymore. And as though he could read her thoughts, he moved in and kissed her again, his hands going to her cheeks, then sliding down to caress her shoulders, her arms. His warm tongue pushed into her mouth like silk, opening her up. The warmth inside her turned to volcanic heat when his hands moved

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in to cover her breasts, the weight of them filling his palms. She groaned into his mouth and pushed her body closer, her nipples pressing into his hands.

God, she needed to be naked with him, to feel his touch on her bare flesh. She could hardly stand it. "Rafael, please..."

"I know what you need, Isabella. And I will give it to you. I will give you everything. But it has been so long, and I need to get to know your body again."

God, that name. *Isabella*. Nobody else had ever called her that. Only him. She loved his voice and that lovely rolling accent. Hearing that name from his lips made her shiver all over.

He moved his hands down, away from her aching breasts, and smoothed them over her waist, her hips. "Yes, it is still you, but with more curves. You are more a woman now." His hands slid downward, his fingers moving beneath the hem of her cotton dress and roving up her thighs. The moment his hands touched her naked skin, her sex went wet. She was immediately drenched in heat and need.

Touch me.

"Your skin is like silk, just as it used to be." His voice was a husky whisper, turning her on every bit as much as the feel of his hands on her body.

Then he was kissing his way down her neck to the valley between her breasts and over her stomach, until he was on his knees before her, his cheek against her belly. His hands were still on her thighs, gently kneading her skin. Then he raised the hem of her dress, revealing her white lace panties, and she wanted to keen her need to him, to beg him to put his hands on her flesh. Yet she remained silent—the wait an exquisite kind of agony.

"There is so much heat coming off you, *querida*, it drives me crazy. I can scent your desire. *Mi Dios*...do you know what you do to me?"

All she could do was groan as he bent his head and kissed her bare stomach, just above the white lace that was so unbearably in the way.

He kept kissing her, his mouth leaving a trail of molten heat across her belly. Her hips moved forward of their own accord, pressing into the

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velvet warmth of his lips. Her body was on fire, the need, breathtaking in its intensity, a sharp ache that centered in her sex and spread outward.

"Yes," he said between achingly soft kisses. "Yes, you need me. As I have needed you."

His voice, his mouth on her flesh, was driving her crazy. She wanted her clothes off. She wanted that soft mouth on her breasts and her pussy, which was swollen and burning with need. Why wouldn't he hurry and undress her?

She buried her fingers in his thick head of hair, which was like satin in her hands. He looped a finger around the edge of her panties and pulled them down her thighs and calves in a slow, sensual sweep, taking his time, just as he'd said he would. Her legs began to shake.

Still on his knees, he pushed her back until she nudged the wall behind her, using it to steady her. Then he pushed her dress up around her waist. He was so close to her, she could feel his breath on the curls between her thighs. Her pussy clenched in anticipation. She closed her eyes, let her head fall back against the wall, and waited.

He didn't move, yet she could sense the change in his breathing as he knelt before her, his face only inches from her sex.

"Isabella, move your legs apart for me. I need to see you. All of you."

God, that voice again. She did as he asked instantly.

"Ah, yes." He brushed his fingertips over her curls, so that she could almost feel his touch, but not quite. Torture. She'd never been so wet in her life. "You are so beautiful. I want to taste you, *querida*, and I will. But later."

"Rafael, you can't do this to me." Oh god, was he really going to make her wait?

"Yes, I know, *mi cariño*. But it will be better, you will see."

He stood then, moving his way slowly and sinuously, up her body, until he towered over her once again. She felt incredibly naked, hyper-aware of her bare flesh as he let the hem of her dress fall around her thighs once more.

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Reaching behind her, he unzipped the garment and moved the narrow straps down her arms. The dress fell to the floor in a heap of white cotton. She stood before him, naked, needing him, while his eyes roved over her body. She didn't dare move, didn't dare to break the sensual spell in the air.

His hazel eyes glittered with lust as he reached out one finger and dragged it down the center of her body, beginning at the hollow of her throat and moving inexorably downward. She had never felt so gloriously naked. His touch made her tremble as he moved lower, until he stopped just below her navel.

"You are magnificent, Isabella." His eyes moved up to meet hers.

She needed him to kiss her, to press his muscular body up against her. She was absolutely shaking with sharp, stabbing desire.

"Rafael, I need you to touch me. I need your clothes off. I need your skin on mine."

Without saying a word, and with his hot hazel gaze still locked on hers, he quickly unbuttoned his shirt and slid it off his broad shoulders, revealing a chest dense with muscle, his golden brown skin smooth and hairless. His flat male nipples were a dark, dusky brown. She wanted to press her lips there, to lave them in her teeth.

Oh, god.

The ridges of his washboard abs were defined in the contrast of shadow and light inside the room. A narrow line of dark hair ran from his navel into the waistband of his white linen slacks. She licked her lips, barely able to wait to see what lay beneath that fine material.

She smiled when his slacks came off, revealing nothing underneath but a fine, large erection, jutting out from a nest of dark curls. God, his cock was beautiful. Thick and long and light brown. She remembered their nearly innocent groping so many years before. She'd felt the size of him then, but she'd been too young to know what it meant. Now she understood, and she needed desperately for him to be inside her. She wanted to touch him almost as badly.

His gaze was still on hers when she tore her eyes from him and glanced up. They were both completely naked now, standing on the cool

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tiles. She had wanted this for too long not to pause and take it all in, the sight of his beautiful body, his proud cock, and his warm eyes on her. The sensation of being only inches from the object of her most intense fantasies was overwhelming. She trembled all over. The tingling started somewhere deep inside, moving through her limbs so quickly she was surprised she was able to stay on her feet. Her heart thundered with an even stronger longing, but she would have to deal with that later. For now, they were here together, naked, and waiting.

She stretched out her hand and his cock jumped, as if trying to meet her touch. She wrapped her fingers around his velvet length, and he groaned. He was thick in her hand, pulsing. Her pussy clenched in response.

Then his hands were all over her at once, roaming her body. Her skin was hot, branded by his touch. And she was up against the wall, his cock in her hand, when he bent his head, pushed her breasts together with his big hands, and flicked his tongue over first one nipple, and then the other. Her nipples peaked hard, the sensation driving straight into her sex, as though he were using his hot, lancing tongue there.

Oh, yes.

Her legs almost went out from under her when he pulled one nipple into his mouth and began to suck. It was as though he were sucking on her hard and needy little clit.

"Rafael, please! Touch me. Fuck me. I need you."

She slid her hands up and down on his thick shaft, and he buried his face between her breasts and moaned.

"Isabella, you must slow down, or I will come in your hand like a school boy."

She stopped and let him go. He stood still for a moment, panting. Then he slid to his knees once more and buried his face in her mound.

She thought she would come the first moment his warm breath touched her. It was even better when he used his hands to spread her pussy lips so he could flick his tongue over her clit. Pleasure stabbed through her, sharp as glass. She pressed her hips into his face, into his hot, flickering tongue.

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Then he pushed his thumbs inside her, and she thought she would come apart. The climax hit her like a bolt of lightening; it was that hot and intense. She shattered around his probing thumbs and into his hot, waiting mouth.

“Rafael!”

He didn’t stop until the last rolling waves of sensation slipped away and went quiet. She was left shaking and weak. He scooped her up in his strong arms and carried her into the bedroom.

Very carefully, he laid her on the big bed, as though she were something precious. And even though she still quivered with the power of her orgasm, she wanted to feel him inside her, needed him to fill her with his cock.

She slid her hands over his body while he held himself over her, loving every hard ridge and plane of his muscular form and reveling in the feel of his silky brown skin beneath her searching hands. And then he was kissing her again. Yes, that was what she needed, to feel his mouth on hers, to taste her own musky sea-scent on his lips.

When she reached for his cock again, he pulled away.

“Not yet, *querida*. I want to make you come again.”

She laughed, still breathless. “I don’t think I can. Not like that, anyway.”

“We shall see.” His eyes gleamed wickedly. “Here, turn over, onto your belly.”

It never occurred to her to argue with him. She simply did it.

“Now, up on your hands and knees. Yes, that’s it, so you are wide open to me.”

She felt wide open, exposed, but gloriously so.

“Now close your eyes and focus on my voice. My touch.”

She did as he asked, her body trembling already with the anticipation of what he might do to her.

She felt the feather-soft touch of his fingertips first, brushing over her swollen pussy lips. She was soaked again instantly. He continued the gentle stroking for what felt like an eternity, over her lips, over the tip of her clit. Each motion sent a thrill of desire rushing through her, like the

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rhythmic waves of the ocean. It was even better now that she couldn't see him, and didn't know exactly what to expect.

The sweep of his tongue took her by surprise. He licked her, and then pushed it right into her, into her tight, waiting little hole. Her sex clenched. She needed to come again already. He pulled back when she moaned aloud.

Suddenly, his face was next to her ear, and he was whispering, "Do you ever use toys, Isabella?"

"Toys?" Her breath was a ragged pant in her ears.

"Sex toys."

"No." But the idea made her quiver all over.

"Would you like to?"

"I want you to do whatever will please you." She could barely get the words out. "Yes, do it."

He was gone for a moment. Then the bed shifted beneath her and she heard a soft buzzing.

"Get ready, Isabella."

She took in a deep breath, and waited. Her pussy was on fire, needing to be filled. She didn't know what he was about to do.

Then something touched her, something hard and unfamiliar, grazing her pussy lips. Without thinking, she spread her legs wider.

"Ah yes, I love to see you do that."

He moved the tip of the vibrator over her pussy, teasing her. A shiver of sensation reverberated through her. She felt it in her limbs, in her nipples. When he moved the device up a little higher, touching it to her clit, she almost came right up off the bed.

He chuckled. "Try to hold still. It will be worth it. I promise you, my Isabella."

She tried. But as he teased her clit with the vibrator and pleasure stabbed into her, over and over again, she couldn't hold still. Yet despite her squirming, he never let the toy lose contact with her weeping flesh. And he never did more than tease her with it, not letting her come. The pressure built and built, her sex soaking wet, until her juices slid like slow teardrops down the inside of her thighs.

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"You are so wet, *querida*. And I can see your pussy, soft and pink as an orchid. You're driving me insane. I want to put my mouth on you again. I want to push my tongue inside you, to suck on you until you come in my mouth."

"Oh, god." Just hearing him say these things sent brilliant little flickers of arousal through her system.

"Yes." His voice was a low, sensual whisper.

She thought he would use his mouth on her, but instead he slid the tip of the vibrator into her. Just the tip, just enough for the vibration to send tremors of sensation through her sex. She bit her lip, trying to grasp the intensity. She took in a deep breath and moved back against the smooth shaft, wanting to impale herself on it. The vibrations, inside of her, became even sharper than they had before.

"I'm about to come, Rafael!"

"Yes, come for me. I want to watch your beautiful pussy while you come."

He slid the toy farther inside her, filling her up, then angled it until it hit her g-spot.

"Oh, god!" The climax ripped through her like a wild and reckless storm. Wave after wave of pleasure roared through her, knife-edge sharp and blinding. Her pussy clenched hard and she called his name, over and over.

She was still shaking when he pulled the toy from her body. She dropped down immediately onto her stomach, unable to hold herself up any longer.

He bent over her and blazed a trail of kisses down her spine. Her skin was still so incredibly sensitized, each kiss was like a tiny orgasm, searing through her system once more.

How was it possible she needed more? She craved him, wanted to feel his thick cock inside her. Even after two mind-blowing orgasms, she still needed to feel him inside her body.

As though reading her mind, he gently turned her over onto her back.

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"I can't wait any longer." He scattered kisses over her breasts and her stomach, murmuring, "Your skin tastes like sugar cane. I could kiss you all night long. But now I need to fuck you, my Isabella."

"Yes, now, Rafael. Please..."

He reached into a drawer in the nightstand next to the bed and pulled out a condom. Then he paused and locked those beautiful hazel eyes on hers.

"Look what you do to me, *querida*. You make me harder than any man could possibly be."

He reached down and stroked his shaft. She watched, fascinated, as he closed his eyes and let his head fall back. She'd never seen a man touch himself in this way, and she loved it. An image flashed into her mind of him bringing himself to orgasm, spurting into his hand...and onto her naked skin...

Yes!

But his burning gaze was on her again and he quickly tore open the condom packet with his strong white teeth and sheathed himself. She spread her legs for him, reached out with her arms, and wrapped them around his broad, muscular back as he lowered his body over hers.

His face was next to hers; she felt the faint rasp of stubble against her cheek. He whispered into her ear, "Yes, this is what I have needed for twelve long years. To be with you like this."

His cock nudged her opening, and she opened her thighs wider. He reached down with one hand and spread her pussy lips with his fingers to help ease his swollen cock between them. When its head entered her, a sharp thrill raced through her, her body tingling with pleasure and the anticipation of more. He inched in, a tiny bit at a time.

"Please Rafael. You won't hurt me."

"Yes, you are so wet. Take all of me, Isabella."

And with that he pushed inside her to the hilt, filling her completely. The slick walls of her sex grabbed his shaft and held him tight. A small groan escaped his lips. He stopped there, buried deeply inside her, and showered her face with kisses. She wrapped her legs around his hips and sank her hands into his hair, while her heart beat

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with emotion. How long had they waited to be this close? To be a part of one another?

Soon he began to move, and all conscious thought was driven from her mind by the unhurried slip and slide of his heavy, swollen flesh. Pleasure washed over her body in long, leisurely waves, like the ocean meeting the beach outside, a slow, steady rhythm that rocked her in his arms. With each devastating stroke, her hips rose to meet him, her clit pressing his body. She had never felt anything this good. This *intense*. Pressure built inside her like a slow fire, spread out, and saturated her body a little at a time.

He slid his hands under her, cradling her buttocks, and raising the angle of her hips. Then he suddenly changed his rhythm, moving more urgently, whispering words in Spanish into her ear. It was too good; she was on the verge of coming again, but she wanted to hold back.

His panting breath dampened her ear. Her body thrummed with pleasure. Each thrust brought her closer to the edge. It was pure ecstasy.

He began to push harder, deeper, his body hot and his muscles tense beneath her hands. She could sense his climax approaching as he plunged into her, his cock searing her sex, his body pressing onto her swollen clit. She couldn't think, didn't want to. All she knew was pleasure, that intense build of sensation upon sensation.

When the first wave of orgasm hit her she gasped, and wrapped her arms more tightly around him. Then the wave turned into an electric surge. Heat slammed her, and spread throughout her system. Her pussy clenched and shuddered, squeezing his hard cock, which was still pounding into her body.

"Ah, *querida...*"

Then he was coming, too, his body tensing all over. He shivered and groaned, over and over, slammed into her, driving the last wave of her climax.

When it was all over, they both shook and panted with exhaustion. He pressed his mouth the side of her neck, searing her moist skin with warm, sweet kisses.

"This is how we were always meant to be, Isabella," he whispered.

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“Yes...”

She held him tight while her heart hammered inside her chest. She felt it, too. But she still had to question how much was pure chemistry, and how much was truly their destiny.

This was the most intense sexual experience she'd ever had, and her heart yearned for him. Yet only time would tell if they were truly meant to be together, or if their coupling was nothing more than a lovely fantasy.

Isle of Desire

Chapter Three

Rafael ordered all of her favorite dishes from room service. Freshly made *empanadas*, small pastries stuffed with seasoned meats she'd loved as a teenager, *aroz con coco*, rice made with coconut, tender slices of fresh mango and guava, and grilled plantains.

"You must eat, to regain your strength. You will need it later."

She laughed at him, a sound which was music to his ears. He had missed her laughter, had missed her. More than he had realized. Now that she was here with him in his bed, where she belonged, he never wanted to let her go. But it was far too soon to know what fate had in store for them.

He wouldn't let her out of bed to eat. Instead, he set the feast around her naked body on the blue, brown, and white striped bedspread. Ah, that body...how could he eat when all he wanted to do was touch her, taste her, and make her come over and over?

She seemed delighted by the picnic in bed, which made his heart soar. He would do anything to make this woman happy. When she reached to pick a piece of mango from the plate he tapped her fingers playfully. "Let me do that for you."

He picked up the slice of fruit and held it in front of her mouth. She smiled at him, the lazy, sensual smile of a sated woman, before opening her pretty pink lips to take the mango into her mouth. *Mi Dios*, he was hard again already, just watching her eat. He watched the movement of her throat as she swallowed, making him want to kiss her there. He

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leaned in and did just that, kissing her long, graceful neck. She smelled like sex and woman. Beautiful.

He tore off a piece of the *empanada* and held it to her mouth. She took a bite, dropping crumbs onto the covers and onto the curve of her full breasts.

She laughed. "I'm making a mess."

"Then I will have to clean up after you."

He bent his head, darted his tongue, and licked the crumbs off her sweet flesh. Her dark, rose-tinted nipples went hard at once. He couldn't resist taking one into his mouth, and sucking on it. She let out a soft moan.

When he sat up she looked at him, her emerald eyes luminescent in the pale silvery-blue moonlight coming in through the windows. He leaned in and placed a soft kiss on her lips, and then pulled back and fed her another piece of mango, just to watch her take the juicy flesh of the fruit into her mouth. He was getting harder by the minute.

Yet the look in her eyes spoke of more than mutual lust. She was watching him closely, as if trying to figure something out. He understood how she felt. But it was too soon to talk about it. Later, after their various appetites were sated and they had a chance to rediscover one another, they would talk.

For now, he had to have her again, right here amid their little picnic. He wanted to fuck her while he fed her more mango, while she sucked the fruit into her mouth, between those beautiful lips.

Yes, they would talk, but he couldn't think straight right now. Not with her naked in his bed. His body sizzled with sexual hunger, which dimmed his mind. Yes, he would feed his hunger for her first. Later they would have time to think about the future.

Isabel stood in the bathroom of Rafael's *casita*, drying her skin with a fluffy white towel. Her limbs were sore and she felt stretched all over, well used. Well loved.

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She took a second towel from her hair, and shook it out around her shoulders.

Yes, she felt loved. Amazing. She still could not believe she was here, that she'd found him, that he'd come looking for her. That he still wanted her.

Yet something inside her warned her that what seemed too good to be true just might be. But she couldn't turn away. Not until she knew if they were meant to be together.

Meanwhile, she had to hurry and get dressed; he was taking her to breakfast. He'd sent for her bags to be brought from her hotel down the beach this morning, and they now sat in a corner of his bedroom. He'd had to leave for a little while, telling her he had a few minutes of business to take care of but would be back soon. She took a few moments to take a good look at the room where she'd spent the night getting too little sleep.

The décor was a mixture of Latin and Caribbean, and very male, but done with an artistic eye. Heavy wooden pieces with simple lines sat against walls painted a pale turquoise. A large area rug in varying shades of brown covered the tile floor. His bed was nothing more than a king-sized mattress on some sort of wooden platform and piled with pillows in the same brown, blue, and white as the bedspread. Here and there were locally handcrafted baskets. Two paintings of local scenery adorned the walls, and on one stood a shelf with a small collection of what appeared to be pre-Colombian pottery and several tiny bronze pieces—antiques, she was certain.

A glance at her watch on the nightstand told her she'd better get herself put together. If he found her naked, they'd just end up back in bed and she'd never get her breakfast.

She pulled out a pair of thigh-grazing khaki shorts that showed off her long legs, and slipped on a white gauze top embroidered with red and yellow flowers, forgoing a bra. She slid her feet into a pair of brown leather sandals, added a pair of silver hoop earrings and looked at herself in the big mirror over the heavy wooden dresser. The shorts were awfully short and she could see the shadows of her nipples through the sheer fabric of her top. Her ex would have had a heart attack if she'd ever

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dressed like this at home. But Chicago wasn't home anymore; she didn't have a home. She realized she felt more at home here, with Rafael, than she had anywhere in years.

He called out as he came in the door, "Isabella, are you ready?"

He walked in, unbelievably handsome in his faded jeans and a simple white T-shirt that showed off his beautiful golden-brown skin. Her throat went dry.

"Yes. I'm ready."

He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, a simple, yet oddly intimate gesture. "You look beautiful. Come, we'll go."

Once outside, he picked up a canvas backpack, slipped his hand around hers, and led her down the beach. It was early, and they had the strip of white sand to themselves. The waves crashed on the shore, bringing with them the scent of the sea. Other than the sound of the ocean, the day was quiet and peaceful. She took a long, slow breath of the soft, tropical air, and held it in her lungs for a moment. She loved this place. She couldn't think of anywhere else in the world she'd rather be than right here, with her hand in Rafael's.

"So, where are we going? I thought you were taking me to breakfast."

"There is no better place to share a meal than right here on Playa de la Luna. We'll eat down by the caves."

The caves. She saw the craggy rocks at the end of the beach that came down to meet the sea. They had spent a lot of time in the caves all those years ago, with the tide surging into the entrance, their mouths and hands everywhere, tasting, exploring. A thrill of lust made her stomach flutter at the memory.

They settled beneath a pair of tall palms, sitting on a small blanket Rafael had looped through the straps of his backpack. He unpacked their simple meal. Bread, fruit, and a thermos of fresh-squeezed pineapple juice—and they ate facing the ocean, with a gentle breeze blowing through their hair.

Once he'd finished eating, Rafael leaned back and supported himself on his elbows. The morning breeze ruffled his dark hair.

Isle of Desire

He asked quietly, "When do you have to go back to the States?"

"My plane leaves in a week."

"Can you change your flight?"

"I...I'm sure I can. I hadn't thought about it. I mean, I didn't want to plan too far ahead."

"In case I wasn't here? Of course."

She turned to look at him. His profile was so fine, so noble, with his high carved cheekbones and his strong jaw. "But you are here."

She reached out and stroked one finger down his cheek, making him smile. He turned his face and kissed her fingertip. Her body immediately burned with the need for him again, her nipples coming up hard against the gauze of her blouse.

"Rafael..."

He licked his lips. "Yes. I know, *querida*."

He stood and pulled her with him. Wrapping an arm around her waist, he tugged her body close to his. She felt the hard ridge of his cock through the denim of his jeans. He leaned in and whispered, "Why don't we explore the caves, as we did when we were younger?"

Too aroused to speak, she nodded. They kicked off their shoes and waded hand in hand through the knee-high surf to the mouth of the cave. Inside, the pitted cavern rose high over their heads. Beneath their feet was a smooth bed of sand.

Rafael immediately pulled her into his arms and kissed her, his tongue sliding into her mouth, tasting of pineapple. God, the man could kiss like no other man she'd ever known. She opened her mouth, curled her tongue around his, and swept her hands over his big body. Overwhelmed with urgency, she pulled at his clothes, needing them off, needing to be naked with him.

He moved away long enough to slip his T-shirt over his head and kick off his jeans. His cock was huge, hard, and beautiful. He helped her out of her shorts, sliding them down her legs, pausing to shower fluttering kisses over her thighs. Shivers of desire ran up her spine and settled into the V between her legs.

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He made his way back up her body, kissing her stomach and the undersides of her breasts, before taking one of her nipples between his teeth through the fabric of her blouse and tugging on it. The sensation was sharply, almost painfully, arousing. She never wanted him to stop.

She held his head to her breasts and he pushed up the fabric with his hands, exposing her bare flesh. He used his mouth and hands, sucking, licking, rolling her nipples between his clever fingers. Her breasts pulsed with sensation, waves of pleasure driving into her belly, and lower. Her sex was soon swollen and aching.

He pushed her down on the sand with a growl and lowered his body over hers. She reached between them and held his cock in her hand. God, he was hard. She felt the power throbbing just beneath his silky skin. She couldn't wait to feel that power inside her.

"I need you now, Rafael."

"Yes." His voice was a low, heated rumble.

He took a moment to pull a condom from the pocket of his discarded jeans and slipped it on his rigid shaft. Then he parted her thighs with his hands and plunged into her.

She took him in with a groan of pleasure, the walls of her sex grasping him tight. Her arms went around his broad back.

"I need to fuck you, Isabella. I promise to take more time with you later, to make love to you as you deserve, but now I need to do this."

He pulled out, and then thrust hard inside her once again. She gasped.

"Yes, do it."

He began a primitive rhythm of thrusting, pushing into her over and over, filling her up. Her pussy clenched around him while sensation poured through her, immobilizing her until all she could do was hang on to him. Then his hands went to her breasts, and his fingers tightened around her taut nipples, pinching and tugging, until she thought she'd lose her mind. In the background, the scents and sounds of the sea were everywhere, every bit as wild as they were together at this moment.

Pleasure stabbed her with every exquisite stroke of his cock, until she teetered on the brink of climax. She tried to hold back, to linger on that

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lovely edge, but he drove into her, making everything impossible but coming. And she did, her heart slamming into her ribcage, his cock ramming into her aching pussy. She cried out, trembling all over with a pleasure so pure she was lost in the sensation. Lost in him.

Before her cries faded away he tensed, shuddered, and called out her name. She felt the pulse of his orgasm in his cock, in his wild heartbeat against her breasts, in the heat of his body. His panting breath matched her own.

A few moments passed in which all they did was breathe together. Finally, he raised his head to kiss her. Her chin, her cheeks, her forehead. When he moved to her lips, she tasted his salty sweat mixed with the musky scent of sex. The way he kissed her was so sweet; a rain of tiny kisses.

Her heart squeezed inside her chest. She closed her eyes, trying not to think, not to feel. But it was hard with him pressed up against her so tightly, with him still deep inside her. How could she fight this surge of wanting, of hope?

How was she to know if there was anything more between them than this lovely, surreal moment? If this was meant to be something stronger, more lasting than the two of them living out a faded dream? Could she use the yearning in her heart as her guide? Could she trust herself? Trust him?

Only time would tell. But they didn't have time. They only had this one week together before she had to return to the States, to begin a new life, whatever that might be. One week, possibly another, if she extended her trip, but she couldn't linger here indefinitely with no plans, no direction for her future. Would this time together be enough?

Her body told her to stay with him, whatever the cost or the risk to her heart. Her mind told her she was being rash, foolish. She had no idea who would win this battle. She only knew that she was lost to him again already.

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Chapter Four

Rafael and Isabel moved through the crowds in the Plaza Bolivar in the town of Porlamar, one of the larger towns on Isla de Margarita, a short ride down the coast from Playa de la Luna. He had a hand on the small of her back, guiding her. The gesture was both protective and sweet. What was it about his merest touch that made her blood heat and made her feel treasured all at the same time?

He led her past shops selling baskets, jewelry, and gorgeously painted pottery, past the beautiful domed church of St. Nicholas. On low benches, old men played eternal games of chess. Here and there young men sat beneath palm trees or strolled through the plaza, playing a *cuatro*, the small guitar so common in Venezuela. The air was like silk, warm and smooth and moist.

Like sex.

God, he was turning her into a nymphomaniac. But she had to admit, no man had ever affected her the same way Rafael did, on so many levels.

She had been here with him for a week, spent largely in his bed, stretched out on his cool sheets, exploring, tasting, teasing, and finally, always, satisfying. He was tireless, insatiable. So was she.

Rafael slid his hand up her back to her bare shoulder.

"Here, this is the place."

He opened a door and took her into a small jewelry shop. It took a few moments for her eyes to adjust to the dimness inside.

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Glass cases held lovely pieces of silver, gold, and precious stones. Rafael went right to the counter, where an older woman greeted him.

"Hola, Señor Cruz."

He spoke with her quietly in Spanish. The woman smiled, revealing a gold tooth, then disappeared into a back room.

"Rafael, what are we doing here?"

"You will see in a moment, querida."

The woman reappeared and put something into Rafael's hand. He nodded. *"Perfecto. Gracias."*

He turned to Isabel with a smile on his face. Then he took her hand and led her to stand in front of a long mirror. He moved behind her, leaned in and whispered into her ear, "I had this made for you."

Then he lifted her hair and laid the cool silver chain around her neck. She looked down; a large, square-cut emerald pendant hung between her breasts, its simple setting showing off the glorious stone.

"Rafael, what have you done? This is too much."

He fastened the clasp and laid a light kiss on the back of her neck, sending a chill of desire down her spine. "It matches your eyes exactly."

Behind her, he smiled at her in the mirror. He seemed so pleased, she couldn't argue with him. Her heart swelled at the expression in his eyes, a look of pride, tenderness, and adoration.

She brushed her fingers over the beautiful stone. Tears stung the back of her eyes. "Thank you." She was barely able to say the words.

Behind the glass counter, the old woman smiled and nodded as though the whole thing had been her idea.

Isabel sniffed as a series of emotions raced through her.

"Ah, Isabella, don't cry. We are celebrating."

"What are we celebrating?"

"Being together once more. This day, the sun, and whatever tomorrow will bring." He stroked a finger over her cheek.

She turned to face him. "And what will tomorrow bring?"

"That is the beauty of life, querida. We never know."

There it was again, his dismissal of the future and her place in it. She was so confused. Was it simply that he was someone who lived in the

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moment? Or was he happy to simply spend a week or two with her, and then no more? She wasn't sure what his gift meant, to him, anyway. She knew what it meant to her; that he had thought of her, that he had done something to make her happy. But he did that every day, in so many small ways.

"You look so thoughtful. Do you not like my gift?"

"No, I love it. It's gorgeous. I'll wear it every day."

He leaned in closer, said quietly, "I can't wait to see you in nothing but this emerald. You should be dressed always in emeralds."

God, just his voice made her shiver all over with need for him.

After an early dinner they drove in his Jeep back to Playa de la Luna. The sun was setting in a burst of fiery color, lighting the sky in shades of gold and pink when he opened the door to his *casita*.

He immediately pulled her into his arms. "I'm hungry, Isabella," he growled.

"What?" She laughed. "We just ate."

"I had plenty of food, but I haven't had you for hours. Come and let me feast on you."

Liquid heat raced through her system, her bikini panties instantly damp. All she could say was a murmured, "Yes..."

It only took a moment for them to undress one another. He kissed her breasts, then the emerald that hung between them before moving on to her neck, her jaw. She stroked the strong lines and planes of his big body, his skin like brown satin beneath her hands. She brushed her fingers over his rosy-brown nipples and they stiffened. Smiling, she leaned in and laved her tongue over first one, then the other. He let out a soft moan as they hardened. Pressing closer, she took one between her teeth and bit down. He moaned louder, his obvious pleasure making her hot all over, making the ache between her thighs more insistent. He pressed against her, his cock hard against her belly.

"No. As much as I love the way you touch me, this is my feast, Isabella."

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He picked her up in his arms and she laughed as he moved across the room and laid her down on a pile of pillows on the wooden floor, in front of the big window overlooking the beach.

She heard the ebb and flow of the surf outside. The glow of the sunset cast a golden light over their bodies as he gently pushed her onto her back and parted her thighs. When he bent his head to blow his warm breath over her mound she moaned, her sex going wet and hot at once. She let her legs fall open and he slid both hands down the inside of her thighs, her skin coming alive beneath his touch.

He used his tongue to dance over her pussy lips, to dip teasingly inside. A pulsing beat of desire began deep within her body, spread from her core to her breasts, her limbs. She had heard the term 'weak with desire', but this was the first time she had ever felt it, that trembling weakness, and she knew it meant much more than simple lust. The desires of her body mixed with the desires of her heart, and made her go limp all over, made her entirely open, vulnerable.

When he flicked her clit with his warm, wet tongue, she stopped thinking and gave herself over to sensation. He lapped at her, each touch of his tongue bringing her to new heights of pleasure. She felt as though her entire being, and his, were centered on her sex; her mound, her swollen pussy lips, her hard and needy little clit.

She thought she'd lose her mind when he drew her clit into his mouth and began to suck. He created a steady rhythm of pure, relentless heat. He sucked and licked until she was shivering, on the edge. He pulled back, let her balance there, then started again, this time using his fingers, pushing into her tight hole.

It was too much for her; it sent her right over the edge. Her body tensed all over, color flashed behind her closed eyes in a firestorm of pleasure, in her head and inside her pulsing, clenching sex. She shuddered, moaned, and before she'd stopped he slid right into her, thrusting slowly while he kissed her neck and the tops of her breasts, bringing new sensations to dance over her heated skin.

They moved together, her hips meeting his. Faster and faster, their breaths panting in unison. She felt that knife edge of pleasure approaching

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once more, felt the rapid beat of his heart against her breasts, the tensing of his stomach muscles, signaling his imminent release. He paused and pushed himself up onto his arms. His hazel eyes looked into hers, his gaze hot, intense.

"Rafael? What is it?" She could barely breathe. She was too overcome with lust, with the emotion of the connection she felt between them at this moment.

He shook his head. "You can't go, Isabella. How can I have this time with you, be a part of your lovely body, only never to see you again? It's not possible."

"Rafael..."

Tears spilled over onto her cheeks before she could do anything about them. He bent his head and kissed them away.

He leaned in and whispered into her ear, "Feel our bodies together. This is so right." He moved inside her, just a slight shift that sent shivers of delight through her system.

It felt right. *He* felt right. But how could she be sure? She'd never been one to act on impulse. Not until she'd come all the way here, to this little island off the coast of Venezuela, to find the lost love of her life.

Perhaps not lost anymore...

Overwhelmed by the feelings, both physical and emotional, that surged through her body and her mind, she wrapped her arms around his neck. "Make love to me, Rafael."

He growled low in his throat and began to move again. His powerful hips thrust deeply into her, bringing her back up again, to that lovely peak. He buried his hands in her hair. His ragged breathing was in her ear as her second orgasm crashed over her, shattering her, body, mind and soul. She called his name, clung to him, and then he was coming, too, spilling into her body in a rush of heat.

After a moment he rolled onto his side, taking her with him. He lay with his arm over her hip. With his other hand he stroked her hair, over and over. Isabel relaxed in his arms, his body warm against hers. She inhaled deeply, taking in the sea-scented air, the scent of sex, that unique perfume their two bodies made together.

Isle of Desire

"Stay with me, Isabella," he said quietly.

Her pulse sped up, hammering through her veins.

"How can I know if it's the right thing to do? We've had so little time."

"How much time do we need to know we are meant to be together?"

"I don't know."

"Isabella, there is a reason why we have come together again after twelve years apart. Do you believe that?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Then trust it. Trust what we have. Stay here with me."

"Rafael, I can't think like this. Not now." Not with his body pressed up against hers, not with her sex still pulsing, her body still humming with satisfaction.

"Then don't think," he purred into her ear. "Just do it. You said you have no plans. Just that you wanted to move someplace warmer. Isla de Margarita is warmer. And my love will keep you warmer still."

Love? *He loved her?*

She started to cry again; she couldn't help it. She'd known for days, since the first moment she'd set eyes on him again, if she wanted to be truthful, that she was still in love with him. Maybe that love was worth taking a chance on.

He pushed himself up onto one elbow so he could look into her eyes. She saw his love shining through, felt it deep down inside her body.. And she knew what she had to do.

"I'll stay."

He smiled, that smile that had always brought her to her knees. Then he kissed her lips, tenderly, sweetly, and she knew she'd made the right decision.

She had come to Isla de Margarita looking for hope, for that old connection, to fulfill her long years of yearning. Here, with Rafael, she had found physical desire more intense than any she had ever known.

But now she knew with a deep certainty that the desires of her body had also led her to her heart's desire.

Eden Bradley

Author Bio

Eden Bradley works as an administrator and senior book review and features editor at Romance Divas, an award-winning writer's resource website and discussion forum. She has published three erotic novellas for e-publishers, as well as a steamy romance novel and a number of articles on writing craft. Her full-length erotic novel and a three-novella anthology are due to be released from Bantam in 2007, and her erotic novella, *Sanctuary*, will be released by Berkley Heat in 2007 as part of a multi-author anthology.

Eden lives in sunny Southern California with a small menagerie and the love of her life.

Excerpt- Tourist Attraction by Shelli Stevens

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Tourist Attraction by Shelli Stevens

Chapter One

Melanie Kemble took a sip of her Daiquiri and watched the Hawaiian sunset. The dramatic swirls of orange and purple clouds hypnotized her. Even after the sun melted into the water and the sky began filling with stars, the heat barely dissipated.

This was paradise. No doubt about it. Almost every item had been scratched off her To Do List. Parasailing, snorkeling, a helicopter tour, and ingesting enough alcohol to maintain a decent buzz throughout the entire trip.

There was just one item left. The one with a big honking question mark by it. A symbol in itself an admission that she wasn't sure she had the nerve to go through with it.

"Mel, you kinky broad!" a voice rang out, followed by a high-pitched giggle. "What the hell are you doing out here alone?"

Melanie tossed back the rest of her drink before turning to face her friend. Unlike her, Piper had absolutely no problem completing that last item. It showed in the glow in her face—not to mention the sexy Greek arm candy.

"You remember Nikolos, right?" Piper clutched the bulky arm of the man next to her.

"Mmm hmm." Melanie glanced over the couple. God, they were disgustingly perfect. Piper was tall, blonde, and gorgeous. Nikolos was taller, dark and just as pretty.

Piper leaned forward, and in a bad attempt at a stage whisper asked, "You find someone to have sex with yet?"

Melanie's cheeks warmed. "Yeah, about that. I don't know if I will."

"Excuse me?" Piper's eyebrows shot up, and then she turned to Nikolos. "Baby, will you please get me another piña colada?"

He nodded and gave her an intimate smile. "Of course."

After the sexy Greek had left them alone, Piper spun back to face her. "We had a deal."

"I know." Melanie groaned and crossed her arms across her chest. She should've known it would come to this. "And I've been thinking about it, and well, I just don't know if—"

"No," Piper interrupted. "No, no and no. We booked this vacation with two intentions. One: to have fun and get a great tan. Two: we each have a fabulous fling that we remember when we're old, shriveled, and surviving on hormone pills."

"I know," Melanie conceded. Piper had every right to be mad. They'd made a pact. A pact she was trying to weasel out of. "I just haven't seen anyone worth flinging with."

"Hello there, beautiful."

Melanie turned to appraise the beefy blond surfer who'd come up to hit on her. He was pretty cute, but probably more bronze than brains. "Not interested, thanks."

After he'd wandered off, Piper shook her head. "You're too picky. He had a great ass."

"I saw that, but I'm looking for more than a great ass."

"For a fling? Why?"

Good Question. Melanie shrugged. When they'd made the pact, it had sounded so exciting and spontaneous. But now that she was here and actually contemplating the idea of throwing herself into bed with some

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stranger—

“We have two days left, Melanie. Two days for you to find some yummy guy to hook up with.”

Melanie nodded, drawing her bottom lip between her teeth. What should she do? Just say screw it? That guy a minute ago would have been perfect to have a fling with. Hell, he’d been a walking sex symbol. Her gaze drifted back to the surfer who was now walking down the beach away from the resort.

“You’re going to back out on me.” Piper sighed. “I should have known. You’re way too straight-laced for this.”

“I’m not straight-laced,” Melanie protested. Who was she trying to convince, though, Piper or herself?

Tons of people had flings. There was no reason she shouldn’t do it too. Just as long as she took precautions and made sure it stayed purely sexual. Would it be so bad to let her hair down and have some fun?

“Go after the surfer, Mel. Come on, you’ve got to admit he was hot.”

“He was a little hot.” Piper was right. She needed to loosen up. This wasn’t about finding a soul mate; this was about having some good vacation sex. “Okay. I’ll do it. I need to lose my born again virginity anyway.”

“Mel’s gonna get some,” Piper sang, and then squeezed her hand. “Hurry, before he’s gone.”

Piper’s excitement for her made Melanie’s enthusiasm kick up a notch. “All right, here I go. Wait!” Melanie hesitated. “What if he says no?”

“To a cute, busty, redhead? Shut up and get going.”

“You’re just saying that so I’ll go have sex. But its okay, I expect no less from you.” Melanie grinned. “Wish me luck.”

“Good luck. I’ll stay with Nikolos tonight. You can have the room.”

Melanie barely heard her. She was too busy running. *Shit!* She was actually doing it. Her blood pumped through her veins with the adrenaline rush.

“Hey,” she shouted, trying to catch up with the surfer.

She emerged from the palm trees onto the sandy beach and tried to

pick up her pace, but her feet kept sinking and slipping in the sand.

"Hey!" she yelled again, gaining on him.

He started to turn around. *Bingo. He's mine.* Her heel twisted in the sand and she yelped, flailed her arms, and fell flat on her face.

Of course. Of course I would fall. And why wouldn't I?

When she looked up, the surfer had turned and walked away.

How embarrassing. What the hell had she been doing? Chasing after a surfer to convince him to have sex with her? This was a whole new low for her.

Screw the pact with Piper. The whole idea had been ridiculous anyway. She wasn't that desperate for sex.

"Are you okay?"

Oh God, someone had actually witnessed her tumble to the ground? Melanie looked up.

"I'm..." she trailed off, dazed by the man who knelt beside her. He was... "Fine."

Visually, he was male perfection. His shoulders were broad, and a well-defined six-pack rippled his abdomen. Lowering her gaze further she observed the muscular legs under the black board shorts.

He must have been out for a jog, because a slight sheen of sweat shone on his mocha-colored skin and his breathing was slightly labored. He looked like a local.

"That was quite a fall," he said. "Next time you go running on the beach, you might consider taking off your heels."

Melanie's face warmed with a blush. "I didn't—what are you doing?" The man had unfastened her sandal and was pulling it free from her foot.

"I'm checking to see if you broke anything or if it's just a sprain."

At the mention of something actually being wrong with her foot, she became aware of its painful throbbing. But the pain faded the moment he lightly traced his fingers over her swelling flesh. Tingles of awareness moved up her leg. It felt right. Like he had every right to touch her. Like she'd been waiting an eternity for this moment.

Umm, not going to dwell on that bizarre thought. "Are you a doctor or something?"

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"I'm just finishing up with my residency," he replied, circling his thumb over her ankle.

Wow, a doctor? Good guess.

"What's your name?"

"Melanie."

"Nice to meet you, Melanie. I'm Brian."

He lifted his eyes, and she almost heard a click as their gazes locked. His mouth curved into a smile. The whiteness of his teeth showed bright against his tan skin and dark brown eyes.

"Well, it looks like you've got yourself a minor sprain."

"Oh," was all she could say. God, he was sexy.

"Why don't we go get some ice on it?" he asked, sliding an arm around her waist and helping her to stand.

"Okay." The tingles followed wherever his fingers touched.

"Unless," Brian paused. "Were you meeting someone?"

Melanie thought briefly of the surfer and flushed again. Best not to bring up that moment of insanity. "No. I'm...no. Ice sounds great."

He gave her that smile again, and everything inside her turned liquid.

With Brian supporting her, they moved slowly across the beach. His hand rested on the side of her bare stomach, burning the flesh underneath. She stumbled and his hand slid up her ribcage to just beneath her breast. Her nipples tightened under her bikini top.

He glanced down at her. "How are you holding up?"

Brian's gaze went from her face to the swell of her breasts. His eyes became an even darker shade of chocolate, and she had no doubt that he'd noticed her hardened nipples.

"I'm okay." She dropped her gaze. Oh yes, he'd definitely noticed. The semi-erection he sported was pretty good evidence. "You know, my room's pretty close if you want to just drop me off there."

"What's the room number?" Brian asked, as he helped her through the lobby.

Melanie told him. Would he just drop her off and leave as she'd suggested? She hoped not. She wanted him to stay. Maybe even all night.

"What do you do for a living, Melanie?"

"I teach art to eighth graders."

"Really? I'm impressed." A small smile tipped his sexy lips. "Do you have your key?"

She blinked. They were already standing outside her room. *See what this guy does to your head?*

"Oh, yeah. Hold on." She grabbed the key card out of her wristlet purse and slid it into the lock.

Brian opened the door and went inside first, flipping on the lights.

"Thanks." Melanie hobbled in after him. Now was the moment he either left her or...

"I'll go grab some ice." He snatched the ice bucket, took the key from her fingers, and then headed for the door. "Why don't you sit down and stay off your foot?"

"Will do."

Watching him leave, Melanie realized he had a fabulous ass. Hmm. Had she actually diminished the importance of a great ass to Piper? She *must've* been drunk.

Melanie hobbled over to the bed and fell backwards onto it, throwing her arms above her head. She thought about sitting up, but the combination of too many drinks and a throbbing ankle made horizontal a much more appealing position.

A moment later the door clicked open.

"Here's your—"

He came over to the bed, his feet barely making a sound on the plush carpet, and sat down beside her.

Melanie's breath hitched as his gaze traveled over her body like a caress. A sensual caress that made her tremble.

"You look like a sacrifice to the gods," he murmured, his voice a bit thick.

She gave a throaty laugh. "Sounds kinky."

Brian dropped his gaze as he wrapped a few pieces of ice in a towel, and then set it against her ankle. He was so gentle with her, so tender to someone he didn't even know.

She narrowed her eyes and moved her gaze to his naked chest. No hair, all smooth and defined. Solid. She bit her lip and tried not to groan at

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the heavy pressure settling between her legs. She wanted him, why deny it? Maybe she could still go through with the pact with Piper. Yes, having Brian as a lover seemed like a great idea. At least, her body seemed to think.

“Stop it,” he said in a soft voice as his hand settled on her calf.

Uh oh, was I that obvious? “Stop what?”

“Giving me that look. You have no idea what it’s tempting me to do.”

Melanie’s pulse raced. Okay, so she was that obvious. Ah, well, no going back now. She raised an eyebrow and said, “I confess, doc. I’m a little curious about your bedside manner.”