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Barbra Novac

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EROTIC ROMANCE



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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

TAKE IT AS IT COMES

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DEDICATION

For Holly.

TAKE IT AS IT COMES

BARBRA NOVAC

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Chapter 1

“Oh my God! You can’t cancel on me tonight!” Linda Jacobs shrieked into the handset of her home phone. She had a crying baby balanced precariously on her left hip and two children pulling at the arm holding the phone. Although barely audible, two words stood out distinctly from the vague cloud of babble coming from her sitter, “sorry” and “tonight.”

“My apologies, Ms. Jacobs.” The woman on the other end of the phone raised her voice so she could be heard over the screaming children. “My mother is ill and, as I said, I can’t come this evening.”

“But this is the biggest night of the season for me! You know that. You know I’m supposed to be there in ninety minutes. I still have to prepare myself and you cancel on me *now*!”

Linda realized hysteria was gripping her and she was being irrational, but she’d slipped into emergency mode now and she needed help. She had to get to her beloved launch, preferably without three children. Panic seized her belly, adding to the existing compounded stress that lived resident-like in her neck. Taking her eyes off the mess of the sitting room floor—that just couldn’t matter now—she shook the two older children off her elbow, searching her mind for a way to talk this woman into coming over.

“I don’t do this easily, Ms. Jacobs. My mother—”

“Bring her with you.”

“She’s in the hospital, Ms. Jacobs.”

“I don’t care. Come get the children and take them with you to visit. How could you do this to me?”

The words blurted out before she realized what she’d said.

A chill in the pause told Linda she’d gone too far. Shifting Aaron to her other hip, she passed the phone from one hand to the other in a smooth, practiced move. She had it pressed to her ear in time to hear the expected words. She’d gone and created a stalemate again. Third sitter in three months, here it came.

“I’m sorry, Ms. Jacobs. This is not working out. I don’t think my request is unreasonable tonight. Please find another sitter. I won’t be coming back.”

Linda could just hear the click of the hang up over Aaron’s tears.

“Fuck,” she said under her breath. The exciting word caused three-year-old Aaron to halt his tears. He shouted “fuck” as loud as he could.

“No, no, Mummy said *duck*, darling,” Linda said through closed eyes and clenched teeth.

“You said fuck, Mummy! I heard it. It’s a rude word and we get into trouble if we say it at school.”

Jemma still hung off her arm, no doubt with the intention of catching Linda in the act of being a bad mother. Toby gave up and sat in front of the television in a silent rage.

“I did not say *fuck*, but I will in a minute!” Linda yelled at her daughter, causing the baby to burst into tears again.

As if satisfied, Jemma let go of her arm and skipped off to the other end of the apartment, singing, “Mummy said *fu-ck*, Mummy said *fu-ck*” in sweet lilting tones.

“Don’t say that, Jemma, or there’ll be trouble,” Linda yelled after her as she heard the song continue unabated in the distance. She’d have to deal with that one later.

She took Aaron and sat him on the couch in front of the television where Toby watched *Big Brother*.

Now in full emergency mode, Linda dialed the phone again as she called out, “I told you I don’t like you watching that, Toby.”

Mae answered with her cheery, “Hi,” as Toby said, “I’m twelve now. I’d like to see you stop me.”

Linda stared blankly at her son until Mae’s third “Hi” brought her back to reality.

“Mae! I need help. I have no sitter tonight. And my children seem to have suddenly become possessed by the devil.”

“What! You lost another one? Tonight? Your kids aren’t bad enough to go through this many sitters.”

As the words “I know” tripped off her lips, six-year-old Jemma strolled by the phone and yelled out, “Mummy said fuck!”

Mae chuckled. “Okay. We need to find you another sitter.”

“God, help me. I’m not even dressed.”

“Jesus, Linda. Do you have to have a family crisis at every big event? You’re forty years old! When are you going to get this sorted? I’ll call Kirsty. She’ll have an emergency person, like you should have.” After a pause she added, “Why did you call me? Why not Helen?”

“I got the last two sitters from Helen. I know you don’t have kids, but I thought it smarter to try you rather than risk being told my grace period had expired.”

“Good call. I’ll solve this. I’ll ring you back in five minutes.”

Linda breathed a temporary sigh of relief. She needed to dress as quickly as she could. The tension started an hour ago when she realized she’d missed her hairdressing appointment. Now she’d have to complete her whole look alone.

Shit, why aren’t I better organized? This is the story of my life. Well, my home life. Complete chaos, as usual.

Tonight’s launch of the latest Koan line designed by Linda was officially the fourth major Koan event interrupted by her chronically chaotic private life. It was almost exactly three years ago when Linda’s water broke during their first major meeting with the Japanese buyers. This event was soon outclassed by Linda’s husband calling to say he had run off with his secretary just as Linda was casting her eye over the models preparing to step on the catwalk for their first ever New York show. Linda kept her

composure with the models but cursed a blue streak into the phone later as she breastfed, with the exhausted models staring wide-eyed.

However, none of these competed with Linda's almighty screams from the corridor, having just asked for a few minutes time out from a meeting with the editor of *Paris Vogue*. Somehow, that day, they scored pride of place in the September issue as well as a successful divorce for Linda.

This combined with babysitters cancelling at the last moment gave Linda a well deserved reputation for a private life that was, to say the least, a little out of control.

Linda glanced at her watch.

Then the phone rang.

"Mae?"

"It's me. I found you a sitter. He'll be there in twenty minutes, and I have references from four different sources. Kirsty can vouch for him. She says he's perfect."

"He?" Linda suddenly felt her stomach lurch. This night only got worse, not better.

"Yeah. He. What's the big deal?" Mae used her this-had-better-not-be-a-problem warning tone.

"Um, can I leave my children with a man I've never met?"

"You can when you have four references to back him up and you're already an hour and a half late!"

"What if he is a pedophile?"

"What? It is the twenty-first century, for God's sake. Men can do this job, too, you know."

A mental picture of her ex-husband reading a newspaper article headlined "Stupid Mother Hands Children to Unknown Man While Putting Career First" leapt to mind. She shook her head, managing to erase the image, despite the concern brewing in her maternal belly.

"I don't know about this, Mae."

"Look!" Mae's tone moved from firm to aggressive. "This guy has references and he has been sitting for four of our friends for the past two

years. His certification covers childcare, as well as first aid. He is perfect, and you are in no position to let prejudice get in the way.”

Mae continued before Linda had a chance to argue.

“Here’s his mobile number. 0423560345. You call him and cancel if you want. He’ll be at your door in less than half an hour. His name is Andrew Barton.”

The click told Linda she’d been hung up on for the second time in ten minutes.

Linda stood for a moment in the middle of the room, holding the phone. She’d forgotten the number to ring and cancel. She looked at Jemma who sat behind Toby, slowly pulling his hair, and then at Toby trying to watch *Big Brother*. Her stare passed right through them as she wondered, trance-like, what to do. Noticing she was off the phone, Aaron used the moment to waddle to her feet, vying for attention.

Although trapped in an impossibly difficult situation, she dialed again.

“This had better not be you, Linda!”

“Hi, Mae, it’s me.” She tried to sound cheery.

“What is it?”

“I didn’t write that number down. Prejudice wins tonight.”

“I’m not okay with this, Linda. What are you going to do? Bring them?”

“I don’t know.”

At that moment, the doorbell rang.

“Linda, answer the door and get that sitter in with your kids and get your head around tonight. This guy has more references than any sitter you’ve had before. Your attitude is sexism, pure and simple, and we’ve got no time for it.”

Linda walked to the door and opened it.

“I’m sorry Mr.—” She drew her breath in sharply.

Mae chuckled on the phone. “I think I forgot to mention that he’s gorgeous and twenty-six. Now hang up, introduce yourself to your sitter, and get yourself ready for tonight.”

Without taking her eyes off the face of the man in front of her, Linda hung up. His six-foot frame towered above her as he stood and slouched in

her doorway, his hands resting in the tops of his jeans pockets, as if he'd been expecting this moment and felt completely at home with it. His teal eyes, with flecks of darker blue, had a twinkle in them that warmed her deeply, past her goose-bumped surface. The cheeky look he sent her way contained a spark of some connection that made her pulse quicken as it seemed to wriggle its way into her belly. But Linda ignored it for the pleasure of letting her eyes roam over the rest of his body.

Sandy hair reached just above his shoulders and hung in thick waves around a broad jaw that sported a six o'clock shadow. The loose fitting white T-shirt, old pair of blue jeans, and well-worn sports shoes looked casual, retaining a little elegance Linda suspected he naturally harbored. The profile he cut under his clothes meant muscle, the shape athletic young men have in their prime.

Speaking of under his clothes, Linda felt horrified when she noticed that her eyes rested on the bulge beneath his fly. Shaking herself, she glanced up, hoping that he hadn't caught her acting like a schoolgirl.

As her eyes met his, he stared at her with the same level expression and half-smile present when she opened the door. He had an air of respectful distance, anticipation, and that little spark.

"Linda Jacobs." Linda extended her hand. "You must be Andrew?"

"Yeah, Andrew Barton, Ms. Jacobs." His smooth, deep voice made her breath catch. "Can I say before we start that I'm a big fan? I still wear your City Road men's collection. I know Koan doesn't have a men's line yet, but I want you to know that as soon as they do, I'll be your best customer."

Linda smiled back at him, her mind parading him in some of the men's clothes she designed years ago for City Road. She thought of him in the tight, white tee with V-neck and black, designer dress pants and found her body responded with a dampening between her legs.

Good lord, get a grip, Linda. This is the babysitter.

"Wow. Thanks very much. It's always nice to hear those kinds of things. Come on in."

She turned just in time to see Jemma standing on the couch, ready to pounce on Toby's head from behind as he watched TV.

“Jemma! No standing on the couch. And do not jump on Toby.”

Toby started and turned, spinning out of the way. Aaron, sitting next to Toby, would have begun the tears again from the ruckus if it weren't for the remarkable new stranger. All the children stopped and turned to look at the unfamiliar person in the room, momentarily charmed by the novelty.

“Children, this is Andrew. He is going to be your sitter tonight.”

“He can't look after us. He's a man,” Jemma shrieked.

Andrew stepped forward, moving to her side. He sat down on the couch and peered up at her.

“I think your Mummy thought the same thing.” His eyes moved mischievously in Linda's direction. “But I've been looking after kids for a long time. How about you being my judge tonight? We make up a big list on some paper, and we write down all the things we do. Then you rate them A, B, or C. And if I get a bad score, I'm not allowed to come back again. Do you like that idea?”

Toby looked at Andrew intently and then he turned to Jemma. “Boys can be sitters if they want! Boys can do anything!”

Linda stepped forward. “Okay, okay that's enough. No more fights, you two. I have to finish getting ready. Why don't you get to know Andrew better while I'm getting dressed?”

However by this time, the children had gathered around him, keeping him busy by asking questions like, “Why is your hair so long?” and, “Are you going to sleep here tonight?”

Linda moved to the bathroom where she could hear their conversation while concentrating on her makeup and hair. Andrew seemed perfect with the children. He chatted with them, but remained firmly in control. And gosh, those looks of his could wound a woman.

I'd certainly like him to stay the night.

The situation had finally changed for the better. Linda, now free to get into work mode, started thinking about the show, getting dressed, and getting down there.

She emerged from the bathroom ten minutes later in her slim line, green velvet dress, one from the latest Koan line. She'd blow-dried her blonde hair

straight and long and applied the latest makeup trends effortlessly. Years of hanging around models and focusing on image paid off. Linda had many talents and making herself look fabulous stood right at the top of the list.

Andrew took a sharp breath as she walked into the lounge room. He opened his mouth, just as Jemma shouted out, “Mummy, you look so pretty. Better not say *fuck* tonight!”

“I think that you won’t look so pretty either if you say words like that. How about we give Mummy a break and cut down on our swearing a little?” Andrew cooed.

Jemma replied by diving into Andrew’s lap and then blowing her mother kisses. Linda flashed Andrew a warm smile that said *thanks* and then started on the instructions.

“Andrew, the kids have dinner ready in the fridge. Mona did them today, so they only need heating up. Because it is a special night, with you being new, they’re allowed to eat in front of the television, but no *Big Brother* or *Sex in the City*. None of them have had baths, but I am happy to have them skipped tonight as well, as it’s not a school night. Aaron needs to be in bed by seven, Jemma eight, and Toby eight-thirty. I keep the times strict because it is a hierarchy thing.”

Linda paused and looked around her at the disaster of a house.

“Don’t worry about anything else. I have Mona coming in on Tuesday and she’ll handle any mess. You just concentrate on having a smooth first night. My number is by the phone in the kitchen, as is the venue, and the phone number of the children’s father, should you need that. I’m sorry to dump all this on you, but I really need to go. Is it okay?”

“Yeah, go, Mummy, go!” Jemma said. Aaron tried to climb into Andrew’s lap and even Toby had a rare smile on his face. Linda leaned in to kiss Jemma and Aaron and to try to give Toby a peck on the cheek before he turned away, then she headed toward the door.

“Everything’s fine, Linda.” Andrew smiled as he juggled the two smaller children. “And you need to know, you look damn hot.”

Linda met his eyes and, for the briefest moment, felt distracted again by those incredible masculine good looks.

“Now, you kids be good, or Andrew may not want to come back again. Okay?”

She walked into the hall to a chorus of “yes, Mum” and heard Andrew say, “Who is Mona?” to the children as she closed the door.

She knew he’d be fine. She had a good feeling about him and not just an intuitive one. The other feeling she had would ruin her dress if she didn’t get her act together and focus.

Thinking about her dress and walking with her head held high, she caught the elevator down to catch a taxi and get on with her night.

* * * *

Forty-five minutes later, Linda stood at the back of the room, watching the final preparations made by the wait staff, who looked fabulous in Helen’s grey and aubergine uniforms. Her breath returned to normal, everything traveled smoothly, and she felt comfortable in her element.

The room, warm and inviting but brushed with a hot, contemporary edge, evoked a strong sense of style. A rush surged through her. She knew that her perfectly-laid plans had no choice but to execute faultlessly tonight.

She felt an arm snake through hers and looked up to see Mae.

Mae, a tall and elegant Aboriginal, had been a model for years before she hopped off the catwalk and into the sales yard. Still incredibly beautiful, Mae’s image filled the room and stares gravitated toward her, becoming unselfconscious gawks. Something remarkable happened to women with coffee-colored skin. They didn’t age. Tonight she had on the same design Linda wore, only short and in burgundy. She looked incredible with her wavy, waist-length hair and her long, brown legs showing under the tight-fitting dress.

“It’s gonna be great, babe! It’s all in place.”

Linda smiled and hugged Mae. “Helen’s uniforms come across beautifully. We are going to sell a fortune tonight. God, I’m glad it looks this good.”

Low flower arrangements, small tea lights on cocktail tables, and the sonorous jazz in the background made the room look and feel elegant in preparation for their meet-and-greet at the door. Although at home all over the world, as Aussie girls they wanted their country on the map. Great designers and fashion houses had already given Australia a name as a place to watch, but Koan remained uniquely Australian and this was a small point that the two women, and now Helen, had a knack for exploiting. Tonight they were to take another significant step forward. Adding the commercial line gave the company one more touch of genius, hopefully adding to their already lustrous reputation.

“Um, by the way,” Mae said in a soft voice as Helen came into earshot. “Do you think you will be sleeping with your sitter any time soon?”

“Okay! I’ve missed a hell of a lot in the last few hours if you are now thinking of sleeping with a sixty-year-old Italian woman.” Helen smiled at them. Standing on the other side of Linda, she put her arm around her and gave her a fast squeeze.

“Is this the calm before the storm? It looks so beautiful and peaceful out there,” Linda said, trying to change the subject. Mae corrected that immediately.

“We have meet-and-greet in ten minutes! I wanted to use the time to hassle Linda about her new babysitter.”

“My God. Did you lose another one? You had such a great sitter. She taught the kids Italian. I am glad I didn’t get some desperate phone call tonight. I would have given you hell!”

“I assumed as much and chose instead to call my childless friend, who thinks that it is a miracle that I gave birth and that I have the patience of a saint.”

“Helen has the patience of a saint. I actually yelled at you when you tried to argue over this one.”

“What’s wrong with her? Your new sitter, I mean.”

“It’s a him, not a her.” Linda whispered, as if telling some shocking secret. “And he’s hot.”

“Linda thinks she may have a moral dilemma on her hands.” Mae had a sideways grin that implied she couldn’t see a dilemma here at all.

Helen’s eyes grew wide. “I think it’s an excellent idea. The fathers are always running off with the babysitters. It’s about time a woman did it.”

“No, no. Look, I’m not running off with him. First of all, I could go to jail.”

“He’s not that young.”

“He’s young, too?”

“And secondly, as much as I hate to admit it,” Linda threw a meaningful stare toward Mae, “he is excellent with the kids. I have only seen him in action for thirty minutes, but the kids really took to him. He put me at ease right away.”

“It would be good to see you get laid by a young stud. Just what the doctor ordered,” Helen said, idly looking over the room.

“I am not taking advice from a woman who is so happily married that there may as well be no other men on the entire planet. You know nothing about post-divorce trauma, thank God. And I am insanely jealous because of it.”

Linda hugged her as the three women moved toward the front door of the reception house. Staff stood poised, hands on the front doors, waiting for instruction from the three women to open up and let everyone in.

* * * *

Finally, past midnight, Linda collapsed in a heap at the table closest to her.

She glanced at the time and realized they still had to have the completion meeting fast. She lifted her head and saw Mae, Helen, and Darren, the financier, looking as weary as she felt, and heading right for her.

“Great night, girls!” Darren grinned from ear to ear. He’d invested one million initially and then funded every expansion they’d taken after that, keeping his loans to the company high.

“I’m beat, guys,” Linda chimed up. “But we’re having this meeting. We need to know where to strike Monday. Take a seat, folks.”

The others sat at the table as a bustling waiter, looking fabulous in grey shorts and an aubergine tailored jacket, brought a pot of fresh coffee. He poured the hot liquid into each of the cups as Linda started the meeting.

“Okay, reports up first. Mae, how did you do with department stores?”

“Fine night. Harrods is in for another season and we have Bloomingdales and David Jones. It means we have the market covered by the larger stores. Because they’ve agreed only to stock us in the city stores, the boutiques and other major department stores can use us in key demographic areas. We pretty much sealed it tonight. Also, Helen’s line has them all interested. The idea of a designer creating their uniforms has them on fire.”

“Yeah, that one worked for me as well.” Darren had sat at the money-heavy table full of potential investors. “The idea that couture can get over itself and get commercial might be hard to sell to the industry, but its funders love it. And I scored a coup! Apple is on. They want Helen to design all their stores’ uniforms!”

The three women “oohed” and “ahhed” to this one. The Apple stores were the biggest thing in retail at the moment.

“I didn’t even know the Apple representatives were in town, let alone attending our show. Well, speaking of the industry, it will be tough.” Linda had sat at the designers’ table and the work had been excitedly accepted, but the commercial concept wasn’t.

“My table wanted to know if sports uniforms or the Olympics could be next on our agenda. I think it is the main reason we didn’t get the heavyweights to the launch. We have the New York launch in a few months at fashion week, and I’ll have a better idea how we’re received then. But for the moment, I think the idea has hurt the brand a little.”

Helen looked worried, so Linda flashed her a reassuring smile. “Hey, it doesn’t mean we are on the wrong track. We are going to ‘Madonna’ them. Just keep breaking the rules till we are seen as the avant-garde rule breaker and not the new kid on the block.”

“My table stayed positive through the night, but I have to say that overall this sell is a toughie for me, too.” Helen had sat with big restaurant names. “They loved the uniforms, but felt that they didn’t want to be associated with the department stores. They asked why we had gone to them at all. Why didn’t we stay with hospitality? I think they liked the idea of Koan being exclusively for them and couture. It increased the value of their individual lines.”

“Okay, so we can see what we have here. The newcomers love the idea and the establishment wants to know how they will be singled out in the future. We just have to think of a way to up the snob value and get everyone back on board again.”

Mae cleared her throat. “All the big names reduce themselves to prêt-à-porter, otherwise they’d never make any money. We’re taking a different road. We’re still exclusive. You can’t buy us cheaply in any old department store and we didn’t design for Target.”

Helen gave a small giggle at Mae’s cheap shot. Linda and Darren smiled.

“I think we can market it that way. Posit us against the down marketing of our product. Just because you get a uniform at Harrods or Bilsons doesn’t mean you got it cheap in a small department store,” Mae continued.

“I like it!” Linda said. “Also, don’t forget, I still have the work on the latest Givenchy line. There’s also the option of Second Summer, which we can keep completely couture. We can reveal just ten pieces and keep it exclusively for the higher end of town. It’ll be an expensive-looking line and slightly out of the limelight. Only high-level fashion will know anything about it, and we won’t do a fancy launch.”

This brought a round of agreement from the four weary heads.

“I think we’re done,” Darren said, looking suddenly very tired. “At least, I know I am.”

Linda glanced down at her watch. One-thirty! “Damn. I promised I’d be home thirty minutes ago.”

* * * *

The satisfied feeling of total exhaustion engulfed Linda as she put the key in the lock of the apartment door. It fell open. Andrew opened it from inside. Linda jumped. The show had distracted her from Andrew's appeal. She wasn't used to being met at the door when she got home, especially by a gorgeous young man.

Andrew put his finger to his lips. "Shh! They are all asleep. I didn't want your key in the lock to wake them. They'll get excited too easily."

Following his hard, jean-clad ass, her eyes glued to it, Linda tiptoed as well as she could in six-inch heels into the kitchen. As she walked through the house, she tore her eyes away from his behind long enough to notice he'd tidied up. Not cleaned as a cleaner would do, but tidied up just the same. In the kitchen sat a pot of tea with three cup-strength peppermint tea bags hanging out of it. Just what she felt like.

"How did it go?" Andrew asked gently, so as not to wake the children. Linda felt distracted again by his voice and the spark in his eye. The soft cleft between her legs tingled as she found herself staring at his face. Inwardly, she shook herself.

"God, it went so well. Very successful. We have a lot of work to do in the overflow, but the night ran right through without a hitch." Linda tried to see him professionally and to stop lusting after him.

Grow up, Linda. He's the babysitter and way too young for you.

"You know, you were amazing tonight. And I have to tell you, I owe you an apology. I thought you may not be any good because," she paused and took a deep breath before continuing, "well, because you're a man."

Andrew looked into her eyes with a complicated stare that didn't pass judgment but seemed to read her clearly just the same. "It's okay. I get it all the time. I actually expect it these days. Most of my jobs start this way. You'll take me in an emergency and then find out that I'm great."

Linda sank into one of the kitchen bar stools. "Well, you certainly saved my life tonight. And frankly, I'd like to hire you again. I think I lost my full-timer tonight. What is your work schedule like?"

“Between jobs at the moment. Truth is, I put my name out there a bit with Kirsty’s friends in the hope that exactly what happened tonight would happen. I’d love to be the kids’ sitter. You know, it’s quite trendy to have a *manny* these days.”

Linda couldn’t help herself. She laughed as quietly as she could, but failed miserably. Then, glancing over to her left, she noticed a large piece of paper written in a childish hand in different types of crayon. It read *story, dinner, baths, TV, Monopoly, story number two, bedtime*. A roughly sketched “A” passed judgment at the end of each line.

Andrew noticed her looking at the page and extended his hand to grab for it. Linda reached at the same time, brushing him, skin against skin. For Linda, a bolt of raw energy shot up her arm. Self-consciously, she pulled her hand away too fast, leaving the page with Andrew. He must have caught the blush in her cheeks. She felt foolish and transparent.

She glanced up to see him looking at her, an amused, lopsided, sexy smirk on his face. He brushed it away and turned to the paper.

“Jemma’s score,” he said almost absently, as if focused on something else. “I’m a straight-A student.”

Linda sipped on her tea, suddenly feeling very uncomfortable.

“Um, Andrew, it’s almost two, and I really need to get to bed. Look, I am not sure how you feel about this, but our nannies often sleep in the guest bedroom on late nights. I know it is Saturday tomorrow, and I’d be asking you to start Monday, but you are welcome to crash in there if you want. It’s up to you.”

“I appreciate it.” He looked at her intensely. “I am pretty tired now and don’t want to have to go out in the cold. I’ll be gone early, though. It will be better if the kids don’t see me. I will be back on Monday, however, raring for work.”

He smiled at her, and again, she could not believe his good looks. Her sex ached unashamedly this time.

Girl, you gotta get yourself to bed!

Chapter 2

Standing at the door, Andrew's body swept Linda's slightly as he walked into the room he would spend the night in. She caught the aroma of his cologne. It intoxicated her, mingling with electricity, creating havoc with her senses from the point of contact. Perhaps he'd touched her deliberately? Linda scolded herself for foolish fantasies.

Man, I really need my vibrator.

She glanced around the room, satisfied he'd have a good night's sleep. Excellent design and quality pieces extended through the entire house. Linda understood and insisted on good interior decorating, even if emotionally the house might be a mess. The room had a low light, comfort, and everything one could need in easy reach. Andrew had a private bathroom and an excellent bed.

"Wow," he said, sitting onto the bed with a bounce. "I think this may be better than my room at home."

Linda pictured a studio box apartment, probably closer to the beach than affordable on his salary, with clumsy furniture and tie-dyed tapestries on the wall.

"Glad you're comfortable." She smiled back, in control, showing a guest around. "The bathroom is equipped, so anything that you need is in there. Feel free to lock yourself in if you prefer, or not. Whatever you like to help you get to sleep."

He looked at Linda with those almost cocky eyes again, and she caught the faintest glimpse of something naughty before the mood passed through them and his well-behaved professional self took hold.

I swear to god, he's flirting with me.

"I'll be up early in the morning. I surf and tomorrow there's a group of us going to a northern beach." He patted the bed beside him. "But this will give me the perfect sleep I need to be properly prepared."

"Okay, then. Goodnight. Sleep well."

"Goodnight."

Linda left the door open as she walked to the other end of the apartment. Her weariness distracted her again and she thought of her bed. Aware she still had her formal gown on, all of a sudden she wanted it off and to be barefoot.

She meandered into her bathroom and started up the shower. No matter how tired or how late at night, Linda always took off her makeup and gave herself a fast rinse and applied her body lotion. Working in fashion meant good-bye to luxuries like neglecting grooming for a day.

After her shower, she relaxed deeply and wanted her bed. She wandered past the children's rooms, sticking her head in to check on them. Leaning over the edge of her bed, her hair sweeping the floor, Jemma lay asleep, half in and half out of her bed. Linda never got used to the way she slept anywhere, in any position, any time. In the other corner of the room, Aaron lay in his little bed, a sweet smile of contentment on his face.

Linda glanced in on Toby's room. He had his back to the door, but the heavy breathing told her enough about her son. As she turned to go, he called out.

"Mum."

"Yes, sweetheart. A little quieter, darling, the others are fast asleep."

"I missed you tonight, but that guy Andrew is nice. He didn't do anything that he wasn't supposed to and we had a good time."

Toby had troubles Linda couldn't find answers to. His moods flew all over the place and his tendency to shut down made connecting with him difficult. She padded over to him in her robe and slippers, leaned in, and hugged him over his covers.

"I am so glad, darling. How about Mum behaves herself and we keep this one?"

Toby didn't hug her back, but he let her hug him. Heaven for Linda in itself.

"Yeah, okay. Don't scare him off."

And he turned his back on her, pulling away from her arms as he did.

Careful not to appear dejected, Linda walked softly out of the room and called "goodnight" to the empty space between them.

Toby had problems. He didn't get on too well with his dad and some other troubles with his schoolwork surfaced often. It seemed so hard. Jemma found her home in the gifted and talented class and seemed to have a knack for everything and little Aaron took so much time and attention because of his age. Toby sat trapped in the middle, even though the oldest. He seemed to carry the brunt of the strain of living in two households, as well.

Linda tried to stop thinking and climbed into her large, soft bed. God, it felt good. The bed linen, dangerously white, indulgent, fluffy, and too high, with too many pillows, engulfed her, drawing her into a personal cocoon. The decadent kind of thing a woman loves when there is no man around to insist he be included.

She tossed her robe onto the floor and climbed in, the cool sheets nestling and caressing her still shower-warm body. As she lay there, she thought of the successes of the evening and realized Andrew scored an "A" on her list too. Andrew.

Mmm! Now there's a thought.

It might have been the devil's own hour, but she looked over at the side table next to her bed that had her "hardware" in it. Maybe she could have just a little relaxation before sleep? She reached over to her bedside table and very quietly pulled the drawer open. She slid the dark purple one out and whisked it under the covers with her. Her favorite! Dark purple, a nice heavy latex, and in the shape of a penis. A thin penis. Sure, if a vibrator could be called conservative, this one was, but it just did the trick in the way Linda liked. She went with her moods. Sometimes she liked the tremble against her clit, murmuring and gently buzzing her to a climatic thrill. Other times, she liked the vibrator to be moving hard and fast inside of her as she thrust with intensity and passion. But this lovely toy did the job no matter

what her mood. It wasn't her only piece of equipment, but, as Linda liked to joke to herself, it understood her as no one ever had.

Linda ran her hands sensuously up and down the shaft of the vibe to get it warm and avoid the shock of cold latex on her hot skin. Closing her eyes, she mentally wandered through the list of fantasies in her repertoire to see which one she would use tonight to make herself come. The wonderful thing about masturbation is the choice! The safe choice. No hurt, no dramas. Just a relaxing wonderful moment without the complication of relationship.

Film stars, rock stars, that guy she used to work with who had never asked her out, or maybe a faceless man with no identity and no complications. As she flicked through her regular repartee, Andrew's face kept popping into each scenario. There he stood, sweaty and panting, having just run in from the beach, beads of salty spray trickling down his body. Or lounging in a dark business suit, relaxed, arrogantly checking her out as she stood before him. The potency of her attraction to him overrode the most cherished fantasy reserved for moments such as these. Without pausing to make a decision, Linda let her mind run free with the images it provoked. She found it hard to move away from the idea of Andrew sitting before her in a dark suit, his hair swept back, white shirt, dark tie, looking every bit the in control, confident businessman.

With the vibe at the perfect temperature, she moved it between her legs, resting it on her throbbing clit. The light buzz whirred confidently against her, immediately electrifying the flesh surrounding her sex. Linda spread her legs wider, the feeling making her wanton, uninhibited, and erotic. Idle and relaxed, she ran her other hand over her breasts, cupping each in its turn, gently flicking her nipples, enjoying the heated feel as they pebbled beneath her own hand. With vividness Linda hadn't experienced before in her masturbatory fantasies, she watched herself in front of Andrew, as if on a large screen. She wore the same dress she'd worn earlier, the high heels accentuating the curve of her legs, the round fullness of her behind, and the sumptuous contour of her breasts. She stood before him, eyes turned away, as he sat, the smirk of one who knows he has everything he wants on his face.

“You’re beautiful, Linda, and you know you are mine, don’t you?”

Linda pressed the vibe into her body, increasing the pressure and thereby the pleasure. The image of herself in her fantasy didn’t answer.

He stood and walked toward her. He took her chin in his hand. Linda almost felt the sea-worn callousness of his masculine hands as he turned her face toward his.

“Look at me when I speak to you. I know you think I can’t own you, but I will teach you differently.”

Gazing into his defiant blue eyes, she felt herself weaken. The strength and confidence of his scrutiny, as he searched for her deepest self through her eyes, unnerved her even in fantasy, but the power of it jolted her between her legs. Linda felt the wetness beginning to pool, the vibe losing its place a little as the surface it pleased became more and more slippery.

“Still, no words.”

In her fantasy, Linda remained mute. She wanted to say something, tell him she’d love to be his, show him she could play in fantasy as well, but something held her back. A reluctance she recognized affected her even in her vision.

Andrew walked around her. She felt examined, as if she were the prize heifer at a show. Full, round, a sumptuous feast for the senses, ready to be taken to the chopping block. In a minute, he stood in front of her again. His eyes full of possessive fire.

“You will be mine, Linda. There are ways to persuade a woman if she is hesitant.”

He reached out and ran a finger down the curve of a breast.

“I have waited for you, you see, and I don’t want to be kept waiting any longer.”

His gaze met hers as he lifted his hand and caressed the back of her head. He stepped forward and Linda could almost smell him again, that heated masculine scent, a combination of his warm body and his cologne. Suddenly, he pulled her face to him and kissed her hard, using his tongue on and in her mouth expertly, weakening her at her knees, and exciting her nipples into a fever. Heat surged through her as she felt him move his body

in closer and wrap his other arm around her back. He kept one hand against her head, holding her in place, as if she'd consider moving it away. As his other hand sunk lower, finding the sensuous swell of her behind, erotic thrill burst from her sex up through her belly, causing her heart to flutter wildly. With his hand on her ass, his fingertips curved into the divide between her two cheeks, and she imagined him placing the smallest amount of pressure into that forbidden place, driving her toward unbridled lust.

His tongue deftly explored her mouth, demanding, unrelenting, and covetous. The result of this kiss sent wave after wave of aftershock through Linda's body as she moved the vibe over the top of her now aching pussy, letting it buzz against the outer folds and pressing it over the aching entrance to her body.

As fast as the kiss began, Andrew pulled away.

"You want me, don't you?" Linda heard him say in the depth of her mind.

"Yes. Oh God, yes, I do." She answered, unaware of whether she said the words aloud or not.

"I want all of you. Not just your sex, Linda, but the time will come for showing you what I really want. Now, I will just take what you offer."

He twisted her around hard, and Linda spun. Before she realized it, her fantasy took a new twist and Andrew had her pressed hard against a wall. She could feel the power of his body leaning in, pinning her in place, the hot hard heat he packed in his suit trousers pressed through their clothing into the cleft of her behind.

Andrew grabbed each of her wrists and pinned them to the wall above her head. Linda imagined herself struggling to regain control, wriggling against his weight, a kind of panic mixing with excitement churning in her belly. She felt Andrew take her wrists and with a click and heavy thud, he had her bolted to a large D-ring that hung from the wall.

"Now I have you where I can do what I want with you, and you have to accept it Linda. Now you understand the darker needs I harbor for you."

In her imagination, Linda pulled at the heavy metal encasing her wrists, tugging hard against it despite the uselessness of the effort. Andrew, behind

her, kissed the back of her neck and nibbled on her ears, each in their turn. Always an erogenous zone for her, her ears burned instantly, sending a flood between her legs. Again she moaned, not knowing if it was out loud or in her fantasy.

As Andrew sucked, kissed, and nuzzled her ears and neck, Linda felt the slippery sensation of her dress riding up her thighs. He held the material as far down as he could reach and he lifted it, sliding the flesh of his hands up her legs with the dress.

Pent up to bursting, Linda pushed back into his body, her own desperately trying to draw him in closer. She could feel his hard as iron strength in his own clothes. It seemed desperate to get out to her, to get into her. He ran his hands up to her hips, her dress bunched around her waist, her soaked panties the only thing between her and nakedness now.

Immediately, Andrew cupped a hand over her mound, the thin silky material forming a pathetic barrier between her most intimate parts and his possessive intrusion. He ran his fingers in circles around her outer lips, over the top of her panties.

“Oh, my God, you’re so wet. You like this rough treatment, don’t you, Linda? I sensed this side of you when we met. I recognized the depths in you as soon as I saw you.”

His hand disappeared for a moment and she heard the noise of his zipper moving down. Her heart began to race as her body ached for what she knew was going to happen.

Without a word, she felt a hard yank as the flimsy material of her panties broke away hard, collapsing in shards of material at her feet. Linda felt electrified, small darts of excitement writhing in her belly as she prepared herself. The cleft between her thighs ached. She wanted his cock in there so badly.

It didn’t take long for her to have what she wanted. She felt the fleshy knob of his tip at her entrance. Just as she spread her legs wide, hoping to suck him into her, he thrust hard, sending splinters of electric thrill through her centre. In real time, Linda drove the full length of the vibrator up into her, pushing it from the base, not turning it off, so that it churned and

buzzed deep inside. She imagined Andrew's dick pounding in and out of her hard, his delicious sensuous grunts and moans behind her, sending her into a frenzy of wanton pleasure.

Suddenly, Linda heard a creak outside her door. She turned the handle of the vibe off, and lay still in the dark, her heart racing.

In the frozen silence, she heard nothing. She lay panting for a few seconds, waiting for another noise. More silence met her strained attempts to hear.

Must have been my imagination. It seems to be working overtime tonight.

Barely interrupted from what she concentrated on, Linda went back to her own pleasure, immediately taking up where she left off, mentally and physically.

The swirl and the hot, heavy blackness whirled around her head. She could feel herself floating away with it. A moan in the background started to bring her to a kind of consciousness and she realized that she'd been moaning into the dark.

And then she heard another creak on her floorboards in the hall.

What the...? Again she heard a noise. Someone's there.

Linda raised herself up in the bed and swung her feet over the side. She stood up, feeling the fresh air on her still-flushed body. Grabbing for her silk robe, she slid the cool lightness of it over her skin. She put her small slippers on and padded softly out of the room.

Down the hall a little way, she came to Toby's room. She moved her head into the door and heard the sounds of his rhythmic breathing as he lay fast asleep.

Thank god. I've staved off the child protection agency for another day.

While there, she crossed the hall and stuck her head into Jemma's room. She still slept with her head over the edge of the bed, unchanged from before. The gentle baby snores coming from Aaron's bed convinced her he was asleep.

I must have imagined those movements. Very nice. Now I'm imagining interruptions to my masturbation fantasies. Time to see a therapist!

But as she turned to go back toward her room, she heard a faint groan coming from the other end of the house. She tiptoed down the hall a way and saw that light came from the spare room where the door stood ajar.

No you don't, Linda Jacobs! Leave the poor man alone. You don't need to be spying on a twenty-six-year-old man when you are about to turn forty-one.

She crept very softly down the hall toward the spare room. When she got down to Andrew's room, she noticed the door open enough to see inside. She stood in the small alcove just next to the door for a minute, her mind racing with the images of Andrew kissing her in her fantasy. Listening in the dark, she heard heavy panting again.

He's masturbating in my house. Just as I did a few minutes ago!

Suddenly it occurred to Linda that perhaps Andrew had stood in the corridor while she masturbated. He would have heard the faint sound of her vibrator and maybe even heard her soft moans out into the night.

The thought of Andrew standing there in the dark, listening, made her ache and throb between her legs.

Damn sexual peak! I'm like a sixteen-year-old boy on the school bus.

She knew that her pussy and her brain were not going to walk her away from this situation, even though she also knew she needed to leave. Fascinated, Linda tried to see into the room to catch a glimpse. Very slowly, she curled her head around the corner so she could see through the thin-lit crack between the door and the wall. In the thin sliver, she saw Andrew standing in the room, completely naked.

His naked body was a delight and feast for Linda's eyes. She watched his penis as his hand traveled its length, long, thick, and intricately veined, almost exactly as she'd imagined it in her fantasy. His hand moved up and down sensuously, the erotic pumping sending shivers down Linda's spine.

Watching him pleasure himself, Linda saw the muscles in his arm flex and relax with the work he performed on his body. Tanned all over, the honey color of his skin made his already bulging muscle shine in the lamplight. Linda had never seen anything more erotic in her life. She'd seen men masturbating before, but never like this. Never with so much abandon

and freedom. It looked natural and still deeply sexual. He looked so comfortable with himself as he worked his rod, caring only for his own pleasure.

Linda imagined herself walking in, slipping off her robe, and climbing on. The ache between her legs intensified now. She could see herself free of inhibitions as well, claiming her place in the natural flow of two consenting adults with no other obligations, taking their pleasure from each other's bodies.

And what a body he had. It wasn't just that his muscles were well proportioned and the pleasure tool between his legs large and commanding, but he also had that beautiful face. No matter what part of his body held her focus, Andrew inspired intense desire.

Watching, Linda slid her hand between her legs and started to fondle her own sex, immediately feeling the hot, heavy wetness between her intimate folds. The thick wet strands of her own lubricant clung to her thighs, making a sexual web just below her hand. With her other hand, she pulled gently on her nipple. The tug sent little electrical currents between her legs straight away and caused Linda to let out the faintest little groan from between her lips.

She'd moaned before she remembered to stop. As it emerged, she realized she'd groaned aloud!

Andrew stopped suddenly, his hand in mid stroke and opened his eyes toward the door. He looked startled for the briefest second, and then he seemed to be thinking. Then very softly, but clearly, he said, "Stay there, Linda. Watch me."

Then he closed his eyes again and went back to pleasuring himself.

Still frozen, Linda stood with one hand between her legs and the other holding her left nipple just a little too hard. For the briefest second, she felt awkward and foolish, as if her hand had been caught in the cookie jar. Then a more complicated response overtook her. He'd invited her to play voyeur. Watching him sparked some wild animal instinct in her, something deep and alive. To Linda it was as though he made her an offering or issued her an

invitation. This was something primal, yet contained. Alive, yet not all consuming.

Hesitantly, she continued to move her hands over her own body. Andrew's permission opened up feelings in her that excited her, but also scared her. Linda's heart raced and her mind was a blur. As if he sensed her mood, he spoke to her again. He addressed her but kept his eyes focused on the wall in front of him, in her line of vision, but easing the intensity of the moment. "I heard you coming in your bed before and I'd never heard anything that turned me on so much. I had to come here and join in what you were creating in my own way. I wanted to add my pleasure to yours."

Linda continued to watch as his movements developed to something faster, more strained. She imagined him over her as she watched, taking her, pleasing her with his body, embracing her with his mind. Adrenaline shot through her veins, making her flesh tingle and her sex ache. She slid her fingers seductively over the slippery surface of her skin, dipping a long, thin finger into her body and sliding it out in time to his movements.

As he reached his climax, his body grew rigid and he worked himself into an erotic frenzy. Plunging her fingers into her sex harder and faster now, Linda let her mouth fall open and let another small orgasm escape her body.

As her orgasm swept through her, Linda became aware of herself again, and the intensity caught up with her. Self-consciousness overtook her, mixing with a feeling of exposure that churned inside, making her terrified. Before Andrew came, Linda stood up, confronted by her own behavior, and ran back to her bedroom, blushing, nervous, and ashamed.

She leapt into her bed and hid herself under the covers, confused thoughts and feelings ricocheting through her. Never had she experienced her body so alive, so tempted, so in control of her choices.

Linda pressed her eyes closed and willed herself to get some sleep. He'd be gone in the morning before she woke. Linda wouldn't have to face him and, therefore, wouldn't have to face herself and this erotic fever that engulfed her.

As the deep wells of sleep began to overtake her, she calmed down. Under all of the fear, an excited stirring tickled at her. Exhausted, she drifted off, her thoughts on Andrew, her body starting to ache for him again.

Chapter 3

“You did *what*?” Mae stared at Linda as they both stood at the counter of the local coffee house, ordering their Monday morning cappuccinos.

Linda looked sheepishly from side to side. “Babe, keep your voice down.”

“Oh, hello! I think it’s a little late for modesty, don’t you?”

“I don’t need everyone to know the story.” Linda self-consciously looked deep into the shocked gaze of her friend. “I’m not sure about this anyway. Have I done something wrong?”

“Well, Lord knows I’m no mother, but I’m fairly sure that masturbating in the hall of your house when you have children there is missing from the good parenting guidelines.”

Linda blushed when the guy behind the counter looked up sharply, a cheeky grin implying he heard everything. Mae either ignored it or didn’t see his reaction.

Mae seemed to think for a minute, then she went on.

“But if the guy was your husband, everyone would be saying go for it. As long as the kids are definitely asleep, what harm can it do?”

“I know for sure the kids were asleep.”

“He-he-he, then all it sounds like to me is a hell of a lot of fun.”

Linda grabbed her friend by the arm and pulled her aside before the whole building queued up to come to her house for a sleepover.

“Mae, it went beyond fun. It tapped into something very primal in me. Does that make sense? I found it almost as intense as design. As if it were a creative act.”

Mae looked as though she would tell a good joke, and then she seemed to change her mind.

“Honey, that’s how sex ought to be. You’ve just had it too bad for too long.”

“Do you think so? Is it that simple?”

“What do you want me to say? That your experience is otherworldly and you’re having a powerful spiritual connection with a twenty-six-year-old babysitter who happens to have a very hot body? C’mon. Don’t analyze this. Just enjoy it. Maybe you should seriously consider a pleasure affair. Something just for fun.”

“He’s my babysitter.”

“Coffee’s up,” called the guy behind the counter who’d been straining not to miss a word.

Linda and Mae picked up their coffees in silence and headed toward the stairs to the office. Alone in the stairwell, Mae said, “Leave it till lunch. We’ll discuss it with Helen and get her conservative opinion. But as far as I’m concerned, this one’s calling you, babe!”

And with that, they entered the double front doors of the Koan label headquarters.

As soon as Linda walked through the door, she could tell by the vibe that Friday night had been a huge success. Phones rang as the staff ran around in a frenzy. She grinned up at Mae, who grinned back. Without another word, the two of them split up and went to their separate offices.

As soon as she opened the door to her office, she saw her secretary making a beeline for her.

“Morning, Linda. We’re going to need to talk. There’s a ton of overflow from Friday night, and we’ll have to work out what the priorities are for the day.”

Millie took the cake for brilliant secretaries. Driven, intelligent, and studying design, she had all the essential career requirements in this industry. Linda smiled. “Okeydoke. I have coffee. Do you need tea? This may take a while. It’s not even nine yet and it’s been a big day. Come and sit with me. We’ll get Jane to handle phones and then we’ll get at it for an hour or so.”

Without saying anything, Millie went off to make her tea. This gave Linda a brief second to go to her desk and unpack her handbag. As she placed her cell on the desk, it beeped a message at her. She picked it up casually and read it.

Children at school okay. Aaron at pre-school. Everyone happy. I'll be picking them up this afternoon, and I will text you then to confirm all is well. Have a great day. Andrew.

Linda froze. A warm feeling rode up her spine. She had an immediate flash of Andrew in the spare bedroom, legs apart, pulling on himself, exciting both of them. Linda's pussy started to ache as she stared at the text message.

"Anything wrong, boss? You look as white as a ghost."

Millie had walked back into the office with her cup of tea and Linda hadn't even noticed. She looked up at her, staring, taking a moment to remember what she had to do. That guy could really get under her skin.

"Um, no, everything is cool. I have a new nanny, and it threw me when he sent a text to tell me everything's running according to plan."

"Wow, a dude as a nanny? Aren't they called mannies?" Millie laughed as if she'd made up the joke herself.

"Yeah, that's a joke that goes 'round about them."

"They're very chic, boss. I'm not surprised you have one."

"Mae found him for me. Anyway, he's gotten the kids to school well, and now it looks like I have no more child care worries." Linda put the phone down and decided she needed the distraction of work. "What's at the top of your list, Millie?"

"Ten calls, all before nine in the morning. Mae's list is better. They really want to buy up."

"How's distribution going on the current season?"

"Okay, but we've got production issues still and warehouse issues. Which do you want to start with?"

Linda felt a strong irritation in her belly.

"Shit! Production issues this late into the delivery time? Okay, let's go through the problems."

Thus the dramas of another day at work sideswiped Linda's massive success.

Before she knew it, lunchtime had arrived and Mae buzzed her on the intercom.

"God. How shitty is this morning? How'd you do with Mah Lings?"

"Disaster. I still only have promises. Did Singapore pan out okay?"

An entire style had been sent from Singapore with the wrong gauge wool used and Linda simply didn't have the time to follow it up. So Mae had told her that she'd get it sorted.

"Yeah. I had a bit of a breakthrough. They found the correct material and are working the style through now. It seems a botch-up with incoming shipments held them back because some idiot swapped yarns. Anyway, they've started production on the next line and will have it to us by the end of next week. It'll make the market in this season for sure. I need a break, though. Helen is ready for lunch. Can you make it with us?"

"Yeah. Oh God, yeah! I need a break. Do you want to do Buon Ricardo up the road? I don't want to go far."

"Pasta is cool with me. If it's too much for Helen, she can have salad. We'll be fine. See you at the front door in ten."

With a little time before lunch, she decided to check e-mails. Linda hadn't even realized that she'd not gone through her daily rituals. One hundred and five e-mails waited for her, all neatly separated into their different inboxes. Absently she flicked to Personal first, thinking she'd get that one handled right away and it could be emptied before lunch. She saw one from her mother who lived in New York, one from her brother who had a question about a family birthday, and one from her ex-husband regarding the weekend coming up. This weekend he'd have the kids and she'd be going to the Gold Coast for a meeting. By the look of the subject line, though, he might want her to take them instead.

When she opened it, she had another shock.

He needed her to take the children because he wanted to elope with his twenty-two-year-old girlfriend.

Linda felt sick.

This wasn't the woman that he'd left Linda for. That woman now worked for Linda in a Koan store because they'd become good friends when the woman had found him cheating on her and gone to Linda for support. Linda gave her support in spades, including free legal advice so that she could get a financial settlement even though they weren't married. That woman turned twenty-five when Linda was thirty-six and pregnant with their third child. No, this was the young girl he'd left the twenty-five year old for. The twenty-year-old he'd taken up with when twenty-eight seemed too old.

And now, he'd marry that one!

Linda could see it all. James and Betty wouldn't like this marriage one little bit and they controlled the family money. Linda had chosen to take almost no money in the divorce. She'd split everything equally down the middle, but fought hard for custody of the kids. In the end, money talked via her ex-husband's expensive lawyer and Linda had to accept joint custody. This made life tough for the kids. They lived in two houses and Toby especially seemed to struggle with it. Now that her business out-succeeded her ex-husband's accountancy firm, Linda enjoyed the small pleasure of seeing his occasional envy.

Now he planned to marry that child. Linda needed advice on this one. She grabbed her bag and headed for the door.

* * * *

When the three women had placed their orders, Helen turned to Linda. "Mae tells me there is news, and that I'm the last to know something wonderful. But she wouldn't let me in on anything."

Linda cocked at eyebrow toward Mae. "I can't believe you kept your mouth shut!"

"I didn't. She's being nice. I told her the whole story in the four minutes we waited for you at the door."

Linda turned to Helen. "Is that true?"

"Yup. I was being nice."

“Well, it’s gotten worse since that part of my saga. Ed is marrying the infant. He wants me to take the kids this weekend so he can elope.”

The three women chorused, “Ew, gross” amidst general looks of disapproval.

Then Mae said, “That settles it! You have to sleep with Andrew. It’s a matter of pride, if not revenge. After that we engineer some way for Ed to see the two of you together.”

“Hold on, hold on. I don’t care about Ed anymore. I couldn’t give a flying fig if he should go to jail for how young his wife is. I am not interested in revenge. No matter whom I date, or when or where, Ed will think it’s about him because Ed thinks I’m still in love with him, and can’t get over him.” Linda shivered. “Foul! Do you realize that he is twenty-eight years older than his soon-to-be-wife? He is more than twice her age.”

This brought about more choruses of “Ew, gross.”

“That poor child,” Helen sympathized. “She has no idea what she is getting herself into. He’s going to have to marry her because as soon as she realizes she can actually get lots of guys she is so not going to want Ed ever again.”

“No, no,” Mae injected, with a cheeky smile in her sparkling eyes. “He will work hard at keeping her self-esteem really low so she never finds out she is attractive to anyone else. Then when she’s put on weight, has two babies, and is approaching thirty, he will tell her that she’s over the hill, and that he’s sleeping with a twenty-year-old.”

This brought about another chorus of “Ew, gross,” this time accompanied with lots of laughs.

Linda smiled. Lunch with these two constituted the perfect antidote to extinguish the power of the e-mail.

“Yes, yes, but ladies, none of this addresses the *true* dilemma on the table and the main reason I wanted to get the two of you alone for an hour today.”

The waiter brought their food and Linda stopped talking, choosing not to share with the staff this time, seeing as the guy in the café stared at her meaningfully as she walked out the door of her building to get to lunch.

They all agreed that lunch looked fabulous and thanked the waiter. Patiently, they waited for his back to turn and then they struck into it again.

“The real question is, do I sleep with my babysitter?”

“I say yes,” declared Mae. “I just wish I had your luck at the moment.”

Helen and Linda knew this said more about Mae’s generosity than anything else. She definitely held her place as the most breathtaking woman in Sydney and could have her pick of any man who wasn’t devoted to a wife. Add to that, she’d brought the latest Calvin Klein model as her date on Friday night. They all knew she enjoyed being deliciously laid all the time. But she did have the good grace not to gloat in front of her two dear friends who had children.

Linda looked over at Helen. “What do you think?”

“Um, is he a good sitter?”

“Yes. He’s excellent.”

“Will sleeping with him interrupt the good work that he’s doing with your kids?”

Linda felt a twinge of guilt. It never occurred to her that Andrew actually belonged to her children, not to her. Toby had specifically asked her not to mess with the situation.

“Err, I’m pretty sure it will. If I start having sex with Andrew, eventually it will get to the point when we won’t be having sex anymore, and that place will most likely be reached by the dissatisfaction of one of us. We won’t want to be around the other anymore and I guess at that point, it will involve the children.”

“Are you saying, Helen, that Linda can’t be attracted to this man because he’s the nanny? This would never stop a man.”

“And we are always criticizing men for it. We constantly sit here at lunch saying things about our friends’ husbands who run off with babysitters like, ‘what, he couldn’t find anyone else?’ or ‘the worst part is, now she doesn’t have a decent sitter.’”

They all laughed at this point. Then Helen continued.

“Seriously, Linda. Don’t you think it’s a double standard?”

“No! I’m not married and neither is he. The only people who will be losing out are—”

“Your children?” Helen finished for her.

“Can’t I find them another sitter?”

“Yep. And then maybe you can sleep with him, too.”

“C’mon, Helen, this is getting a little serious. Maybe they will just do it a couple of times and then won’t want to anymore. Sort of get it out of their systems,” Mae said, a frown across her brow.

Linda thought aloud.

“Yeah. I think it has the potential for that. It’s a bit of fun and naughtiness.” She paused, thinking about the feelings Andrew aroused in her and how out of control she felt. With resolve, she continued. “There is no possibility of a relationship here. This is just some fun because we are very attracted to each other.”

Helen smiled at Linda.

“Look. I don’t want to be the prude. It’s always the role you two assign me because I am the married woman and you assume the wife has to be a prude. I’m just throwing in the potential drama of the situation.”

Linda looked into her food, then up at Mae who was watching her. Mae leaned forward so that her huge coffee-colored breasts almost dipped out of her T-shirt and into her linguini.

“Think about Ed’s face when he finds out you’re bedding a young stud.”

“I can’t just do this as an act of revenge against Ed.” She thought for a moment as a cheeky thrill rippled through her. “Can I?”

Mae burst out laughing. “Of course you can.”

Linda studied Helen who had a puzzled look on her face. Helen flushed then glanced into her food.

“Well actually, the most pertinent point about the entire thing is that I am supposed to take the kids this weekend. And I have the Gold Coast trip.” Linda turned a pleading face toward Mae. “Are you sure you don’t want to go?”

“No way, babe! I’m in Bali this weekend, and you know I deserve it.”

Mae had a beautiful hidden resort in the hills in Bali that she escaped to for retreats all by herself. She went about four times a year and planned them way in advance. It wasn't fair to take her away this weekend. Helen couldn't go because they all had a deal that they leave her to her family as much as possible on weekends.

"Damn! Just Japanese businessmen, my kids, and me. It doesn't get any better than that."

Helen looked up from her salad.

"Hey, why don't you invite Andrew? Go on Saturday morning, take the kids to Dreamworld on Saturday, see the Tomakashi Group on Sunday morning, then come home late Sunday. Make it a bit of a holiday seeing as you have to take the kids."

"That's a good idea," Mae said. "And it may give you a chance to check this thing out with Andrew. See what it's like. Is he playful or a little serious? If he's playful, it may be an opportunity for some harmless fun. If he's too serious, you may decide it's more advantageous to have him drooling for you on the sidelines."

"Not only that," Helen added, "but it will be the perfect antidote to Ed and the infant and their weekend."

This brought on another chorus of "Ew, gross!"

Linda turned to Helen. "If it wasn't serious, do you think it could work?"

Helen beamed. "Of course! It won't hurt the kids if it's lighthearted and the terms are clear to both of you."

Linda thought about it for a minute. Andrew may even surf and they could go to the beach together. She felt the cleft between her legs starting to get wet again. Man, this guy had a perverse effect on her!

"I know that look!" Mae declared, watching her carefully. "She's so going!"

"Yeah. I think it may be just what the doctor ordered. I will ask him this afternoon and then plan it from there."

Mae's eyes rounded and she jumped as if suddenly remembering something. "Make sure this hotel has babysitters. You want to be able to take some time to try out the sitter for yourself. Without the children."

Linda felt buoyant. This had completely changed direction for her. Andrew in the Gold Coast with her kids? That thought intoxicated her. But would he say yes?

"What if he has plans?"

"Now you sound like you're twenty years old," Helen said.

"Ew, gross!" they chorused.

Back at the office, the day's happenings churned as fast as before they'd left. Staff ran in all directions and delivery people came in to pick up any samples they could get their hands on for the press. Linda spied a different man, a very unpleasant surprise, sitting in her office, waiting, as she neared the glass door.

"Shit" she said a little louder than she intended.

Millie left Jane with a courier who tried to take a garment bag out the door and approached Linda.

"Your two o'clock." Her voice had an ominous tone. "Ten minutes early. He's excited about a new shop!"

She ran off to take a new pair of dress pants out of the arms of a costume designer for a film shoot. Linda went into the office and closed the door behind her.

"Mr. Granta! Sorry that I wasn't here to receive you. What have you got for me?"

The man, small, squat, and ugly, topped this image off well with a foul personality, but he also happened to be the best real estate agent in the country. Linda had long stopped wondering how this could possibly be.

"I don't mind waiting when my client is as pretty as you, miss." He rubbed his hands together and licked his lips as he stared at Linda's ample bosom. "I wish you'd let me show you what I've really got for you."

"Sit down, Mr. Granta. And try, please, not to be disgusting just for ten minutes. Did you find us a Woollahra shop?"

“Not yet, miss, not yet. But I have something very special that’s just come up. As soon as it did, I thought of you. I thought of you and Koan. This is a big gift from me.” He licked his lips again. “Maybe you will have to give me a big bonus?”

Linda held back a giggle as she could hear in her mind Helen and Mae going “Ew, gross!”

“If it’s a financial bonus, that will depend on what you have for me. If it’s any other kind of bonus, I won’t take your gift, Mr. Granta. We’ve been over this a number of times.”

He didn’t look even remotely crestfallen, but he did stop looking at her breasts. For some reason, they went through this ritual every time they spoke about the shops. She wouldn’t bother with it, but for the fact he did his job so extremely well.

“Palazzo Versace.”

“What?”

“You heard. Palazzo Versace. I have a full shop in the lobby.”

Linda couldn’t hide her shock. He was right. This was a massive coup.

“Are you sure? Why is it available for Koan?”

Suddenly he toggled to work mode, switching to total professionalism. He must have known he did them a huge favor, but he dropped no hint of wanting anything in return. For the meantime.

“Because of Friday night. The world has woken up to you. I knew that Versace would watch your show, and I knew that they would like the idea of you being in their hottest hotel. I thought that maybe a good bonus would be sending me to the hotel for the weekend.” And just like that, he returned to sleaze mode. “With a guest that I might want to take with me.”

“Mr. Granta, if this works out, yes, we will give you a weekend to spend at Palazzo Versace. With your wife.”

He looked horrified and then as if realizing something secret, he touched his nose, nodded, and said, “Yes of course. My wife.”

“Mr. Granta, I will be in the Gold Coast this weekend. Can I go and speak to someone up there about getting us in?”

Mr. Granta picked up his hat, briefcase, and coat. He obviously decided the meeting had concluded.

“No need, no need. It is all taken care of. I will get the paperwork and then we will have to talk about getting you set up there right away. The rents are high, you know.”

He turned on his heel and left her office. Linda stared after him, trying to take it all in when she heard Millie shriek and say “Yuck. Get lost, loser!”

Linda looked out of the door to see Mr. Granta pulling his hand back and Millie with one hand raised to slap him. Millie held off, but took a step back and screamed at him to get out.

Slamming the door behind him, she came to Linda’s office.

“Can we make a rule that that little, oily sleazebag isn’t allowed here during office hours?”

“Yes, yes, I’m sorry that you had to see him. He won’t be allowed back here. Actually, he got us a shop in Palazzo Versace.”

Millie shut the door and moved into the office.

“No way, boss! Really? That gross pimple on the face of the Earth, he got you a shop in Palazzo Versace?”

“Yeah. I have to go and tell Mae and Helen.”

Brushing past Millie, Linda rushed to the other end of the large warehouse showroom. Helen’s office sat in the middle, and she tapped on the door as she headed down to Mae’s. Soon Helen ran on Linda’s heels, and they walked into Mae’s office.

Although on the phone, Mae put it down as soon as she saw the two of them step through the door.

“What’s going on here?”

“I don’t know yet,” Helen said.

Linda didn’t wait nor mince words. “Mr. Granta has us a shop front at Palazzo Versace.”

“Oh, wow!” Helen cried.

“No way,” Mae said.

“It’s true, it’s true! We don’t even need to go and speak with anyone. He got us the space on the strength of Friday night.”

“What do we have to give him?” Mae got a worried look on her face.

“He wants a weekend there with *his wife*”.

“It’s worth it. I hate that man with everything inside of me, but this is the biggest coup. Everyone in the world will see the Koan label. It has to be one of the best places to have a store on the planet. Amazing. He is so foul and yet so good at his job.”

“There’s more.”

“What?” Mae wanted to know.

“He tried to feel Millie’s ass on his way out.”

“Ew, gross!” the three women said together.

Chapter 4

Getting a store in the Palazzo Versace hotel placed Koan on the map. If the shop was successful and if Koan kept doing well, they might be able to open up other stores in the boutique hotel chain. But more than the shop itself, Versace wanted them in their hotel, and that meant attached to their name. This very big indicator told her that they weren't in any serious trouble with the new line. In fact, they'd scored on the winning side.

Linda sat back in her chair in the office at about four. She glanced down at her mobile, taking it off silent mode. She noticed a text message she'd missed and her stomach lurched as she guessed it might be from Andrew.

I have the kids. All had good days. Have taken them straight home. Doing homework, organizing food and baths. Stay at work as long as you need. Andrew.

Man! An affair? Linda wanted to marry him.

But still, the day had gone well and taking advantage of the afternoon and going home early to the kids seemed like the right thing to do. Who knew when she would have to work late on another occasion? Better to get home on easier days and save up the later ones for when work needed her desperately.

At least that's what she told herself.

Filled with an urgent need to rush home, Linda started cleaning up her desk. In a way, she used this afternoon ritual to anchor herself. She liked to complete one day and start fresh the next. Even with piles of unfinished work around the place, she preferred the piles to be Zen-like.

Scrolling through unanswered e-mails, she prioritized, checking what could wait for tomorrow. There would be another fifty in their place in the

morning. Better to start the day with as close to an empty inbox as possible. Then she remembered. She had to answer the e-mail from Ed.

Linda felt strangely nervous. What if Andrew said no to the weekend? She'd worked this out with her girlfriends as if the plans were hers to make, but who knew if he was free? Or if he wanted to come?

Well, I'll have to ask Andrew when I get home tonight and I will have to tell Ed that he can have the weekend, because I'm in no humor to refuse and get into one of those things.

At the end of the day, regardless of what happened with Andrew, Linda didn't want to be seen standing in her ex-husband's way. Ed would see that only as a declaration of her continued love for him.

Ew!

Linda fired off a fast e-mail to him.

Of course I will take the kids. Congratulations. Have a nice time.

Done! Ed could fly down that path and never say she got in the way! After closing down her computer, she picked up her briefcase and handbag and waltzed out of her office in a rather satisfied mood.

The warm day outside lifted her spirits. Linda felt rejuvenated. Perhaps the success of the launch still held her high or simply the challenges of the day being successfully conquered stirred her to happiness. Something made her feel good. It all felt so promising. Could it be the prospect of a younger man in her life? Nothing might ever come of that, but Linda saw herself as deliciously naughty, not to mention full of fun. All in all, it had been a surprising and pleasing few days. She quickly made the drive in her Mercedes to her apartment in Woollahra. Pulling into the driveway, she realized she'd not sent any word and that her sudden arrival would be a surprise.

"Oh well, this'll keep 'em on their toes," she said aloud.

Walking through the connected door to the small room off the garage, she could hear Toby's voice in the kitchen.

"The line, the best we've seen from Koan so far, promises wonderful things to come.' Wow! That's the last of them. All Mum's reviews are incredible!"

Linda stopped dead in her tracks. Toby? Reading her reviews? How did that happen?

As if to answer her question, Andrew spoke up.

"I told you how remarkable your mum is. She's very talented. Everyone talks about her. She's famous all over the world."

"No, she's not!" Jemma said with the defense of a general. "She's *our* mum!"

"She can be your mum and good at her job, too," explained Andrew. "She's so clever, she can do lots of things."

Linda felt it inappropriate, no matter how delicious, to eavesdrop any longer and she made her presence known.

"And sometimes, she's even good at coming home *early*!" Linda declared as she made her appearance to a chorus of squeals from the little ones.

"Hey, Mum, are you famous?" Jemma yelled as she fought with Aaron over trying to get closer.

Linda made a direct beeline for Toby. Looking him in the eye, she said, "Not really. I'm just a mum."

Toby smiled up into her eyes and Linda could've cried for the joy of it.

She turned and picked up Aaron, who had started to wail, and looked at Andrew, who stood in the kitchen against the breakfast bar. Lots of newspapers and magazines spread all over the place were opened as if being read, and Linda recognized all her reviews immediately. She smiled at Andrew and without a hint of self-consciousness, he grinned back enthusiastically.

One awkward moment passing with remarkable ease.

"Sorry I'm home early," she said to him. "I should have called you to tell you, but I just forgot. And I got to walk in on that lovely scene. Did you get the reviews for the show today?"

"Some of them they delivered to the house and the rest we bought on the way back from school, didn't we, kids?"

"Yes!" the two younger ones chorused.

“Well, I enjoyed sneaking in and hearing such nice talk. It made me feel so good. And seeing as I’m back early, why don’t we all give Andrew the afternoon off?”

A chorus of “*No*” from the little ones revealed many problems with the suggestion.

Andrew smiled. “How about this for an even better idea. I’m headed straight to the beach to go surfing when I finish. Why don’t we all go down there together and you guys can laugh at me while I try to surf and have a poke around Bondi Beach?”

“Yay!” chorused the little ones and this time, Toby with them.

Linda didn’t want to go to Bondi Beach. All sorts of skin regimes would be ruined by a trip to the beach, let alone the fact that she’d had a long deep bath with a glass of red wine in mind. But the kids seemed so excited, and Andrew so gorgeous, she just had to agree.

“Okay! The beach it is. But we don’t have heaps of time. Toby, run to your room and put swimmers on, love. Andrew, I’ll take Jemma, so you want to do Aaron? We’ll get them geared up for the beach and then off we can all go.”

Toby scampered off and Linda grabbed Jemma’s hand and headed off to her bedroom. It only took five minutes, four fights, three hair pulls, and one reprimand to get Jemma ready, which was the equivalent of a stress-free moment. Linda sent her to the lounge room where she could hear the others talking excitedly about the beach and she flew upstairs to change into a bikini and a sundress.

Seven minutes later, everyone sat in the Mercedes together, except Andrew, who’d gone down in his car. Linda had caught a glimpse of it. His shiny red Volkswagen had a surfboard on the top of it, delicately placed in custom-made racks. She recognized it as a new model, though Linda had no idea how new. These sorts of things weren’t high on the “learn about” priority list. The car surprised her however. She’d thought maybe a broken-down Ford or an old truck. He must have inherited some cash from his folks or something and gotten himself a shiny new car. Still the car he drove

wasn't the sort she'd have seen him in. It seemed a little, well, cool. And surprisingly sensible.

Anyway, he'd flown out of sight right away to cries from Jemma and Toby to "Follow him, follow him, Mum," then, "You're driving too slowly."

"Why don't you go now, Mum?" Toby shouted at her from the passenger seat as he strained to see past the truck in front of them stopped at the red light. Linda smiled to herself and thought about what a peaceful day she'd had at work.

Finally, they made it to the beach, stopping at what seemed like every red light on the way. It wasn't five o'clock yet, so the beach sported a smattering of folk and only a few cars in the car park. Linda pulled in to a space right next to Andrew's car. She looked out on to the beach, straining to see if she could see him down there. Suddenly a tap on the window made Linda jump a mile, and she turned to see Andrew.

"Looking for me?" he smiled a wild, smug smile, looking directly into her eyes, which made her pussy walls clench. He had no shirt on, only his board shorts, and Linda sat mesmerized by the shape of his arms and the bulges in his chest. His incredible body made her squirm.

Her eyes drank in all of him, enjoying the way his presence made her pulse quicken. He wore dark brown shorts and Linda found herself studying the drawstring tie that wrapped around the top. She had an image flash through her mind of what lay under that thin cloth. She remembered his significantly sized member, hard and pulsing in his hands.

"Hey there! Yeah, I guess we were trying to find you." And man, she'd be looking for him or someone like him forever more. She felt mesmerized.

Keep the focus, Linda!

"I'm headed out to the beach. Are you okay with the kids?"

Oh! That's right! She had children.

Suddenly her world centered around them again. The children called out in different ways and Toby had already climbed out and raced around the front of the Mercedes to get to Andrew. Jemma fiddled in the back with her seat belt and Aaron called to Linda to get him out.

“How about I take Toby with me? I have a spare boogie board. I’ll stick between the flags today and I’ll stay with Toby. You set up near the shore with the two little ones and you’ll be able to watch there.” He looked thoughtful for a second. “If you want to take a swim, I can watch them after the surf and you can hop in the water then.”

Linda pretended to look out to the ocean as if deciding to swim or not but really perused the beach to see who may be there to see her in her bikini. It wasn’t that she didn’t have a great body for her age. She had a great body for her age, which wasn’t twenty-six. Andrew had a great body for a twenty-six-year-old.

“Not sure at this point. Can I get back to you on that one? But it is really warm out and I will sit with the little ones while you both swim.”

Linda looked up at Andrew and there it was again! The same deep intimacy she’d felt the other night. Some unnamed creature inside her stirred and woke up. A piece of her, long suppressed but energized through Andrew tried to take her over, usurp her rational authority. Linda clamped down on it.

Hang on Linda, light and easy remember?

“Suit yourself,” Andrew said, looking a little puzzled and perhaps disappointed. “I’m going surfing with Toby, yeah?”

Toby grinned up at him. “Fantastic.”

They both went running into the surf together, playing like old friends. It occurred to Linda that Andrew might be good for Toby. She thought of what Helen had said to her earlier that day, about leaving the kids the sitter that they preferred.

“Mummy! *Out!*” Jemma wanted to move.

Linda got the two younger children out of the car. Through screams and hair pulling and Jemma fighting with Aaron four or five times, Linda wondered why she’d left work early. But finally she got them out of the car and down to the water’s edge. She pulled a small sun-proof tent out of its bag and shook it erect so that the rapidly disappearing sun shielded the two little ones.

We’ll only be here for a few minutes.

Jemma built a sand castle with Aaron, so Linda sat back to look into the ocean. Toby waited alone now at the water's edge with his boogie board, as Andrew, farther out, caught some waves.

"Did Andrew leave you, my darling?"

"He's surfing for a few minutes. He'll come back soon," Toby called from the water's edge.

Linda looked out into the ocean. Andrew paddled on his surfboard out to where the waves loomed larger. Even from the shore she could see the telltale ripple of his back muscles working his body powerfully through the water. His wet, sandy hair hung in temporary salt-induced dreadlocks against his neck. Soon he stopped paddling and turned around. Linda quickly put her sunglasses on so that she could watch without being so easily detected.

She needn't have worried. He wasn't looking toward the shore anyway. He sat astride his board, staring behind himself at the approaching waves. Linda had a small chance to look at the deep curve in his chest from his muscles, before he gripped the side of the board and sprang his feet back and stood up. He looked forward now but with such intense concentration that Linda knew she could watch him freely. Soon the wave curled up behind him. Clearly with his focus completely on the feel of the energy surge beneath him, Andrew allowed the wave to roll him fast into the shore.

Linda turned to see that Jemma, Aaron, and Toby all watched Andrew with impressed looks on their faces. She smiled to herself, thinking that coming down here made for a wonderful end to their day. They each needed a big dose of this sort of fun. Although it was six at night, Linda felt the hot Australian sun still on her skin. She lay back on her elbows watching Andrew turn and paddle out to complete another ride, thinking she may even take her dress off and brave the sun on her bikini-clad body.

Andrew rode one more wave in, just as elegantly as he'd handled the first. Toby had his eyes glued to Andrew again, every inch of the way.

"Wow, dude, you are fantastic," he said to Andrew after the second wave. "How long did it take you to get that good?"

Andrew smiled at Toby and took a swift glance in Linda's direction.

“Aw, a wave like that is a baby. I can teach you how to do that. But the really big ones, well, they take many years to learn to ride well. Maybe I can take you on one of those holidays one day. You have to ride the big ones at other beaches.”

Toby’s eyes rounded, becoming wide and focused.

“Me too!” cried Jemma.

“Me too!” yelled Aaron.

“Maybe your mum will come, and we could all go on a holiday to do this together some time? We’ll have to see after a while.” Andrew avoided her eyes, but Linda was sure she felt some meaningful energy passing between them.

With a dreamy sort of smile on her face, Linda said, “That may be sooner than we all think. I have to go to Surfers Paradise on the weekend, and I’ve asked Dad if I can have you guys to take with me. He said yes.”

There were cheers and much jumping about in response to this idea.

“And, seeing as I have to do some work,” Linda turned to Andrew, “I wonder if you’re free to come up with us? You’d be on full pay, of course, and with all your expenses taken care of.”

Andrew looked at Linda meaningfully this time. His beautiful eyes searched her eyes, as if he couldn’t make out what she asked of him.

“I have no plans. I’d love to come,” he said, looking directly at her.

Despite her forty years, Linda blushed.

The children cheered and celebrated. Jemma and Aaron ran down to the water’s edge with Toby and played at chasing waves together. They looked so happy. Linda stared at them, mesmerized, when she noticed that Andrew had taken a place next to her.

“I’ll just sit for a minute while they’re playing.”

Linda turned to him, feeling pleased.

“I want to thank you for how happy the children look. Toby particularly seems to have blossomed under your presence in just twenty-four hours. You really have a knack with kids.”

“I think there may be trouble between Toby and his dad, but after I’ve been with him for a while, I’ll let you know about that. I need a little more observational time.”

Linda looked over at him, glad she still had her shades on. She felt that he must be able to hear her heart pounding. He wasn’t actually touching her skin, but sitting close enough to look “couple-ish” sent adrenalin shooting through her veins. Could she have an affair with this wonderful young man? Definitely.

“You are great at your job. And I must say you seem to be an excellent surfer. Seeing as I know nothing about that, I can only assume that your impressive look isn’t just due to my ignorance.”

He smiled. “I used to be the world champion.”

Linda started. “Really? You’re a world champion surfer? Do you still compete?”

Andrew turned his face away from her and out to the dusty blue of the ocean waiting for the sun to set on its horizon. “I had a pretty bad injury. I never came back from it. I had to surrender my title. But I was the world’s best three years ago.”

Being a tad clueless, Linda suddenly cried, “That’s why you know so much about fashion. You would have modeled when you surfed.”

“That’s right. Not directly, but I worked for the surfing mags.”

“So, where does the childcare course you completed fit into all of this life?”

“I did that right out of school. I always knew surfing would be the thing for me, so I figured I’d probably end up as a househusband. I’d do anything to be able to keep surfing. I needed to have an edge and to be impressive with children. A woman needs to feel very confident if she is able to go off and be the primary breadwinner and leave the raising of her family in the hands of a man.”

Linda looked at him, amazed.

“I know, I know. It’s not traditionally macho. But I love kids and I want to surf all my life. Why not do the two? And I can work in childcare till I

find the right woman to have children with. These days, having a male caregiver is very fashionable, so I seem to have no trouble getting work.”

Just as Linda started to answer, she saw Toby calling to Andrew from the edge of the ocean, and, true to form, Andrew jumped to his sexy feet and ran to the children. He swung Aaron in the air as Jemma and Toby played around his knees.

He looked genuinely happy. No, not just happy. He looked blissful.

He's got a depth to him. He's complicated and deceptively simple at the same time.

Linda allowed herself to get heady and relaxed on the beach, contemplating taking her dress off to show her “body of hard work” to Andrew, dreaming of how it would be to touch that skin, run her hands over those hard muscles. Watching him, she got more flashes of the other night’s images of his long, thick cock in his hand being stroked and pulled to his satisfaction. Somehow, the selfishness of his masturbation contrasted wildly with the unselfishness of his behavior with the children. In Linda’s observation, this guy became more and more special as she got to know him better.

Linda shook her head. She couldn’t think like this. Keeping this fling light and breezy proved difficult even in her own mind. She knew he was flirting with her. Somehow she’d have to indicate there was no chance of a relationship. As if repeating a mantra, she reminded herself: *No good for the kids, no good for me.*

But as if her body and her mind were mortal enemies, the exquisite idea of him naked and kissing her toyed within, preventing her from keeping her libido and her romantic notions separate. Before she realized it, her mantra had changed.

Andrew, she thought to herself. Andrew, Andrew.

And then she heard someone say out loud, “Andrew! Andrew!”

Linda jumped as if someone had been hearing her thoughts, and for half a second, Linda imagined the voice to be her own.

Shaken out of her reverie, Linda watched as a tall, tanned young woman in a deliciously sexy white bikini streaked past her into the water and threw herself on Andrew's back, distracting him as he splashed with the children.

"Who are you?" Linda heard a very jealous sounding Jemma yell out.

Linda stood up as she could see Andrew embracing the girl in the white bikini. Soon, four more people walked past Linda, heading toward Andrew and her children at the edge of the ocean. Two more women and two men reached the shore, the women each in stylish bikinis and sporting twenty-two-year-old bodies. The men wore boardies and carried surfboards.

Linda walked toward the crowd in order to grab her kids. They stood back, made shy by the amount of people. Andrew talked to everyone at once and couldn't concentrate entirely on the children anymore. All the women looked beautiful, but Linda had to confess, the girl in the white bikini took her breath away. She had long, dark brown hair that lay across her back in a perfect line as if her hairdresser cut her hair across a slide rule. She had placed her arm around Andrew, and hadn't yet taken it back.

Linda got a pang of jealousy in her belly. As she walked toward the ocean, she could hear the conversation going on.

"So you got to catch the waves, dude?"

"Yeah. I taught the kids for a while and then I caught a couple. Not much. I'm off to *Surfers* this weekend though, so I'm going to grab a little R and R and get some sun then."

"Andrew, are you *still* at work? No time to come and play with the rest of us?" The brunette stepped in to grab Andrew's attention. Getting closer, Linda noticed her breasts matched her voice. High and firm.

"I'm off work now so we can catch some fun. Let me just introduce you to Linda and her family."

Andrew turned to see Linda picking up Aaron and taking Jemma and Toby's hands.

"Hey, Linda! Come and meet my friends."

Something in Linda switched over and she suddenly felt irritated. The little family had such a nice time and now gods and goddesses that Linda's sexy bikini could never match interrupted the party. She didn't want to meet

these supermodels and be confronted with the reality of the kinds of women Andrew had in his world. She preferred to have him all to herself. At least the possibility of her fantasy coming true existed without this competition. These women, almost half her age, turned her into nightmares.

“Um, no, I think we’d better go.”

Andrew’s face darkened slightly.

“No, please. It’s important to me. I want you to meet them.”

On her march toward the small shade tent, Linda diverted slightly and moved toward the crowd of young people. Even though she wore a baggy sundress and had three children hanging off her body, the two young men eyed her appreciatively. The two women with them smiled at the children. But the woman in the white bikini did not seem at all impressed with the figure that Linda cut.

“Linda, this is Karen, Jane, John, Paul and,” he paused to turn, significantly, Linda felt, toward the woman in white, “Kerry.”

They said cheery hellos all around, and Karen and Jane began immediately to chat with Jemma and Aaron. John threw a fake punch at Toby, who retreated behind Linda’s skirt. Andrew saw this right away and bent to tell Toby that everything was okay, that John meant it as a joke. As he lowered to deal with Toby, Linda looked straight into Kerry’s eyes. The two women searched each other out, immediately understanding a rivalry existed between them. In the split second that it took for Linda to lock eyes with the young woman, Kerry drew a slow, triumphant smile across her face. Linda looked away, but not before she’d gotten the message loud and clear that Kerry wanted Andrew and felt unthreatened by Linda as competition for those affections.

For God’s sake! I’m forty years old. Can’t I give these games up?

So give the game up she did.

Avoiding Kerry’s eyes, she announced to Andrew that the time had come to get the children home and for them to leave. Coolly, she informed him that he would be paid till six, seeing as he’d spent so much time with the children at the beach.

“But, hey. I didn’t do that because of work. I wanted you guys here.” Andrew looked at her with puzzled, hurt eyes.

“Nevertheless, I would hate for any resentment to sneak in later on,” Linda retorted with more cruelty than efficiency. “After all, you work for me. I don’t want you to feel that you have to do any of that for free.”

Linda waved her hand in a vague good-bye to the small sea of faces in front of her and marched her children back to their towels and gear. The kids complained. They didn’t want to go home yet, but Linda couldn’t wait to get out of there.

More than anything, she wanted to get home and away from that white bikini and away from Andrew.

Let her have him! I am not going to play silly games over a man at my age.

Walking a little too fast to the car with too much beach luggage, and three children who complained of being cold, hungry, and tired, was chore enough, so Linda didn’t look behind to see what she’d left. She just packed them all up into the car. She kept thinking about the look on that woman’s face when she made it clear she didn’t fear Linda and she felt like a foolish victim of her own mid life crisis. What an idiot to think that she could get something going with a man fifteen years younger than her who modeled for God’s sake. What sort of fantasy had she inflicted on herself?

Toby climbed into the car in sullen silence. He’d complained all the way back that he wasn’t done yet, asking why Andrew wasn’t coming with them. Linda couldn’t take too much more of it. “Get into the car, Toby!” she snapped. “It’s just time to go home. Andrew doesn’t live with us, you know.”

Toby sat in the front seat with his arms folded across his chest, staring out the passenger window. Linda sat heavily into the front seat, when she looked up and saw the whole troop of young people walking up the beach toward the car. Out the front, Andrew waved, trying to get her attention and calling out for her to stop and wait for them.

But Linda didn't wait. She flung the car into reverse and backed out of the parking spot so fast that she almost ran into a pedestrian who had skillfully managed to duck out of the way of the car at the last minute.

Chapter 5

Shock over her own behavior hit Linda on the way home.

I'm not going to be able to do this.

It had been years since she'd flirted this hopefully with a guy and this hazardously. She had to admit to falling into perilous terrain. God, so little time passed since she'd seen him naked, masturbating, and now she'd gotten territorial.

She'd forgotten the humiliation associated with this sort of game.

At home, she swiftly prepared dinners for the children and ran baths. In her head, she replayed the scenes where she'd made such a fool of herself on the beach, reprimands tangling with shame.

How did a young girl recognize my interest in Andrew? Am I that transparent to everyone? Do I come across like a desperate forty-year-old woman, unable to accept the stage I'm at in life? Even if none of the others saw it in me, isn't that who I really am?

Her head pounded and she turned off the taps and left the steaming bath ready for the kids. Running the entire scene over and over in her head, she grabbed Aaron first, stripped him down, and popped him in the bath. Jemma ran in following them, so Linda took the opportunity to bathe them together. The little ones played quietly and contentedly with the boats in the water, and luckily they spared Linda one of those bath times when more water ends up dripping down the walls and her little tiny angels tell her they hate her.

As the kids played easily, Linda sat on the closed toilet, watching them.

What am I thinking? At forty, I need a nice stable man who would be able to help me raise the kids and run a successful house. This is the time to get strong support for my career and get my global reputation established. Distractions like younger men, with incredible bodies and divine eyes, are

only going to throw me off my game. Lordy! For proof, see what happened already.

As these thoughts ran through her mind, she heard her cell ring. With a patter of feet, Toby came running in, ever the vigilant son when it came to phone calls and e-mails. “Thanks, love.” Linda routinely answered without looking at who it might be.

“Hello. Linda speaking.”

“Linda! It’s Andrew!” His voice came through the phone and reverberated around the tiled room.

“Andrew?” Taken by surprise, Linda faltered and called the name out a little too loud.

Right away the smaller children started up with “Andrew, Andrew, let me talk to him. When is he coming over? Is he still at the beach?” Toby wouldn’t go away, either. He hung around, looking interested in the conversation.

“I can hear you must be in the bathroom.”

“Yes. The littlies are on their way to bed.”

This comment brought on howls and cries of “No we’re not! We hate you, Mummy!”

Linda sighed. “Andrew, this isn’t a good time. Can I talk to you later?”

“Yes. If it’s okay with you, can I come over? I want to speak with you face to face. Maybe at nine-thirty when the kids are in bed?”

In revolt, Jemma stood up in the bath and tried to get out, clamoring for the phone as if to tell Andrew an important secret she’d suddenly remembered. This led to kicking Aaron in the face, who then started up with a howl. Toby tugged at her arm, asking, “Is everything okay? Andrew’s still coming tomorrow, isn’t he?”

“Yes, yes, fine. See you then.”

And she hung up, taking control of the situation.

“Toby, everything is fine. I want you to hop in the shower and get all the sand off you so you’re all ready for bed. Then you can watch a little tellie.”

She leaned in and picked the yelling Jemma up, wrapping her in a soft, fluffy towel and then picked up Aaron and did the same. The two little children were sent straight to their room, tumbled into pajamas, and popped into bed. Linda left Jemma in bed with a book and a promise of five minutes of reading and Aaron, already almost asleep in his bed, received a light kiss on his forehead. Returning minutes later, she found Jemma asleep, the book folded over her chest. Linda kissed her softly on the forehead and took her book, *The Naughtiest Girl in School*, and turned off the lamp next to her bed. Jemma slept happily in the dark. Nothing frightened her.

The hardest work complete, she went out to find Toby watching a bit of tellie in his pajamas. Linda nestled in next to him.

“You’re a good boy. The little ones take so much of my time and you always have to look after yourself.”

Toby stiffened but he didn’t pull away. His eyes focused on the television.

“I think I’ll go to bed, too, Mum. I want to read for a while.” He turned his face to her, looking into her eyes, searching from one to the other. “You won’t make Andrew cross, will you, Mum? I really like him, and I don’t want him to get angry and go away.”

A pang of guilt bit into Linda’s belly. She filled her brain with resolve in that second. “I promise you, darling, that I won’t. I can’t promise you Andrew will always be here. He is his own person. But I do promise you I won’t be the cause of his leaving.”

Toby smiled. He truly smiled. “Well, I want to read *Harry Potter*, so I’m off to bed.”

He leaned in and gave Linda a cool kiss on the cheek, moving the closest Linda had seen him do in months. Then he stood up, stepped easily over her, and walked off to his room.

Linda stared into the television set with empty eyes, exhausted from the combination of the challenges of an ordinary night and her self-induced emotional trauma by acting like an idiot.

That solved that. She wouldn’t ruin this for Toby and get involved with a younger man who couldn’t be good for her in any conceivable way.

Competing with women almost half her age, hanging at the beach like a twenty-year-old, and screwing up her children's opportunities didn't make for a productive afternoon.

Linda felt weary, tired and sort of over the whole thing. The last few days had been huge to say the least. Everything looked harder than before. Tomorrow she had another huge day at work and the weekend loomed large as well.

Might be time to go back to yoga. I'm never going to be able to get through all of this without my yoga.

She dragged herself up and off the floor and walked to the bathroom, glancing into the bath. The milky water had what looked like half a beach's worth of sand in the bottom. She leaned in and pulled out the plug, swirling her hand around the water, collecting as much of the sand in the momentum as possible. God, there were times she felt too selfish to be a mother.

Was that bad?

When the bath and its solid contents poured down the drain, Linda put the plug in and started a new bath. This time she poured in oils and soaps so she could feel beautiful. She didn't care if Andrew was expected in two hours. She needed time to herself.

With a bath smelling of sandalwood and some soft, slow jazz in the bathroom player, Linda sank her tired body into the warm liquid. To her weary body and tormented mind, this proved to be just the ticket. Now she had some *real* time to focus on what a jerk she'd been.

Had she learned nothing in forty years? Or did this attraction reduce her to schoolgirl status instantaneously? No. She'd never been this stupid in school.

You don't fall for a guy, any guy at all, and then give away your power as fast as you can.

Literally. It'd taken Linda a couple of days to forget everything she knew about being a free woman.

Good one!

Linda sank deeper into her bath, cradled in her sanctuary. She'd always gotten herself together in a nice bath. Maturity seeped into her again like a warm, familiar friend.

Don't be too hard-on yourself. You're approaching forty, a difficult age for women. It makes them feel like they're losing their appeal. It's the first time you've not been able to rely on your body to attract people and, let's be honest here, other good things into your life.

Linda coached herself into some reality.

Being attracted to a much younger man is normal and typical of strong women moving into this phase of their life. Look at Demi Moore! If you can get him, have him. Give your self esteem a detox!

"Perhaps."

Linda thought of the younger woman at the beach and how imprudently she'd behaved. She'd been so territorial over Andrew so swiftly and that it embarrassed her. This newfound insecurity about her age was only exacerbated by a younger man. She would dissolve into a jealous mess and never be able to let him out of her house. Eventually they'd fall apart. Both of them would be disgusted with her.

Linda lifted a flawlessly polished toe out of the water and let the dripping tap tickle it. Could she lighten up about all of this? Just take it as it came? Enjoy him sexually when she wanted and let it slide if it all got too hard?

Linda thought of Toby, his sweet face and his willingness to accept some affection, albeit a small amount. He'd also changed a lot in the last few days. This troubled little boy needed a role model like Andrew. What sort of consequences approached if she let all of this go too far? Why couldn't she accept the answer and get on?

So she could get laid? At the end of the day, that is what spun her into this ball of confusion. Sex. Could it be worth all this angst? As soon as she thought of sex and Andrew, her body started to respond.

"Shit. I'm going to have to keep ideas about Andrew at bay. This is never going to work if I have sex on my mind."

The warmth of the water seemed to be licking at her slightly parted vaginal lips and she realized that if she didn't get out of the bath, she'd be masturbating again. And Andrew would be in the house soon. She'd better make herself presentable.

Linda hauled herself out of the luxury of her bath, realizing she hadn't eaten as she did. Her stomach growled, and she thought of a large salad she'd make from stuff in her fridge. With her hair still up in its casual bun, Linda strolled past Toby's room to check if his book still kept him up. With the light on and the last *Harry Potter* book sitting over his chest, he snored softly up to the ceiling. Linda tenderly took the book out from under his arm, marked it, closed it, and laid it next to his bed. She tucked him in a little and through all this, he didn't even stir. The beach took everything out of them all. Nothing like it to get a person really exhausted.

Turning off the light as she tiptoed out of the room, Linda's gaze caught the hallway clock and she noticed it was already nine o' clock. She went into the kitchen, feeling exhausted again, and put some more jazz on the stereo and made herself a large salad. As she ate and flicked through the latest *Vogue Australia*, she received a text on her phone. She picked it up languidly and saw Andrew contacted her. The text read, *I'm at the front door. Don't want to knock to wake up the kids.*

Damn, he's thoughtful.

Linda plunked down her fork and walked to the front door. She opened it to find him looking directly at her. Her pussy ached the second she opened the door.

Damn, what's wrong with me? She felt like a bitch in heat.

All of this ran through her mind in the quarter of a second that she gazed at Andrew in his black T-shirt, which stretched across his muscled chest, and his tight, dark blue jeans that she recognized from a *City Road* men's line about three years ago. He made her clothes look more exceptional than she remembered.

"Come in." She smiled.

Somehow she'd moved from responsible mother to predatory sex siren in the time it took to look at him. He walked through the door she held open

for him. The weight of the situation sat on her heavily. “*Welcome to my home,*” said the spider to the fly rocketed around in her head. She felt a dangerous kind of power, but not one that would be liberating. It seemed hard to get control. His round, jeans-clad ass invited her, begging to be handled.

She felt so sexually drawn to him. Control slipped from her grasp, even as she clawed to hold on to it.

She motioned to him to follow her to the kitchen so that they could speak quietly there. He shut the door behind him, locking the sound into the room. He sat at the breakfast bench opposite Linda’s salad.

Lucky chair, Linda thought as she saw it cradling his ass. “Would you like a glass of wine? I’m just pouring one for myself.”

“Okay.” He seemed relaxed, but, being so highly-strung herself, Linda felt unable to trust her own observations about him.

She went to the fridge and poured them both a half-glass of chilled white wine. Bringing it back to him, she sat at the stool opposite him and started back on her salad. She thought she caught a slight hint of him eyeing her, but she could be wrong. Instincts failed her. They told her one thing and she didn’t want to listen to that.

She plunged the fork into the remains of the salad.

“Have you eaten? Did you want anything to eat?”

God, I could be his mother with that sort of talk.

“No, no, it’s okay. I had Chinese with my friends.”

Daggers plunged into Linda’s belly and she took another gulp of wine. Her head filled with reprimands about her foolish behavior again. She had to act as cool as possible. She tried not to be silly.

She smiled a warm smile at him. “Good, good. So what did you want to come and talk to me about tonight?”

Andrew looked into her eyes in a way that made her feel exposed. She thought he could see her insecurities, her indecision, and the drama she had created out of nothing. This, combined with the potent sexual attraction for him whenever he was within a ten-mile radius, left her confused about what she should do with each second she was with him. She worked hard at

keeping all these feelings at bay, but it still seemed he read each in its turn. As the intensity flooded through the revealing gestures of her body, she could sense him taking mental note.

“I wanted to talk about what is going on between us. And I also wanted to tell you,” he stopped and inspected his hands as he fumbled with his keys, “I am aware that Kerry has a crush on me, but I have no interest in her. I want you to know as clear as I can tell you. She is no competition for my affections.”

Linda almost dropped her fork.

What the hell was wrong with young people these days? Didn't they know how to be evasive? Why be so honest and open with her? And more to the point, how the hell should she respond to all of this? She hadn't even made her own mind up yet. Her pussy might be clear about the whole thing, but her head contained no clarity at all.

“Um, I'm not sure what to say. I admire you for your forthrightness.”

“I know you're attracted to me, as well. I did watch you last night, through the crack of your door. The same way you watched me. I haven't been able to get those images out of my head, the noises you made. I am more attracted to you than I've ever been to anyone and I want to get to know you better. There. I've laid myself bare because you're a woman, not a little girl. I've been rehearsing that speech for the last two hours. I thought you'd appreciate the honesty. I thought maybe I'd look mature to you.”

Actually, he came across as the most mature person Linda had ever dealt with. Far more mature than she was.

“Oh, please, don't get the wrong message. I am attracted to you. To tell you the truth, my brain is a mess over this.” She wasn't quite as ready as he to be vulnerable, so she left the topic of Kerry, her white bikini, and the beach.

“I have reservations, Andrew. None of them are about you. They have to do with the role you play with my children and our age difference.”

Andrew scrutinized her. She kept her eyes dancing about, hoping it didn't make her look shifty or disinterested. But his intensity and downright honesty confronted her. He wasn't hiding anything. It was hard to look at

someone comfortable enough to make himself this vulnerable. She decided she'd add a little of her own honesty. To get them started on the right foot.

"Andrew, to tell you the truth, I think I may be scared."

His gaze deepened as she spoke those words. He seemed to be impressed by them, but Linda didn't trust her ability to read him. The swelling, pulsing ache around the entrance to her sex distracted her from lucidity and the more he examined her, the stronger it got.

Andrew didn't say anything else. He stood up and walked over to her side of the kitchen table. He pushed her plate away and, turning her toward him on her chair, he pulled her thighs apart, standing between them. He leaned down and kissed her softly on her mouth. He pulled back to look into her eyes again, revealing his honesty and his desire. He leaned in to kiss her harder this time, with more passion, as though he were taking something that belonged to him.

He moved his hands to the back of her head, stroking her hair. His lips pressed in on hers and parted them, meeting her tongue with his, searching her mouth, making their first kiss memorable, seductive, and erotic. Lust rushed its way through Linda, making her want to do anything and everything. He kissed with expertise, playing her, arousing her, and claiming her. He worked at enticing her. He took control of the situation and made her meet his masculinity with her femininity. She opened her mouth in a passive response, but soon engaged her tongue with his, stroking and caressing it, meeting mouth to mouth as equals, equals in desire, fever, and passion.

Andrew moaned into her mouth and pulled her head back. He moved his mouth down to her neck below her ear and licked, tickled, and kissed her, until the wetness pooled between her legs, dampening her jeans. She had no underwear on and she suddenly hoped that would be exciting for him when he found out.

Andrew moved deftly now, with more intensity. He ran his left hand down her body, feeling for her breast. Her nipple pebbled under his touch and he moaned into her neck again when he caressed it. Linda tilted her head back to give him better access, letting out her own small sigh as she

did. His fingers brushing over her hard flesh excited her courageous sexual nature, and she reached her hands forward to caress him over his jeans.

He was like iron beneath the thick denim. Linda's heart lurched, driven by lust for this divine creature. He'd moved his head to the other side of her neck now, licking and sucking, creating a contrast to the hard package she massaged between his legs. Linda used both her hands and began to fumble with his belt, trying to set the glorious monster free.

Andrew let out a deep, throaty growl and pulled back. "Not yet. I'm a young man. I have insecurities. Please let me bring you satisfaction before I let myself enjoy."

Linda panted and stared up at him. "Um...okay," she stammered. He'd thrown a curve ball. Who knew what to do with a man who wanted so much to pleasure her? This was definitively a new experience.

Andrew helped her stand up and knelt before her. He undid the button fly of her jeans, with his face a little higher than her crotch height. Linda became self-conscious and for a moment insecurities flooded her mind. Fortunately, she had regular waxes. Could her sex be too old? She felt almost like a virgin, foolishly embarrassed because she had genitals.

Andrew pulled her jeans down only part way. He let out a gasp when he saw she wore no underwear. He slid his hands around to the fullness of her ass, massaging and kneading her buttocks, sliding a finger between her two butt cheeks, lightly caressing down to her liquid-filled opening.

Her sex cried out for attention now. It dripped on to her thigh. When he dipped his long middle finger toward her opening, the slippery wetness clung to him, leaving a light slippery trail across her heated skin.

"God, you're beautiful," he gasped.

He slid his hands down and took the jeans with them, slipping them off her. Still on his knees before her, she gazed down at him as he kissed her lower belly, making his way toward the apex of her thighs.

Suddenly he stood up and lifted her to the kitchen table. He lay her on her back, parting her thighs, and stood before her, looking at her naked, exposed body. A deep, dull ache between Linda's legs screamed for attention. He took his time looking at her, as if he'd been waiting for this

moment. He slid her T-shirt up and gazed lustfully at her exposed breasts. Her nipples hardened more under his watch, and he leaned forward to take one in his mouth.

Linda lurched upward, clasping the back of his head with both hands, pressing him into her chest. He sucked hard-on her nipple, pulling at it with his teeth. She moaned as his tongue flicked its way back and forth over the hard, aching nub. He pulled back off her again and stared at her, panting, his eyes darting all over her naked body. Linda went wild. She wanted to spread her legs as far apart as possible and take all of him into her.

“Oh, God. You’re even more beautiful than I imagined,” he panted.

He lifted her legs and bent her knees. Her sex lay open, wet and inviting in front of him. Andrew ran his hands up and down her inner thighs. Every caress brushed toward her pussy, sending her heartbeat into overdrive, forcing her to arch her back, attempting to maneuver him toward the hunger writhing between her legs. But he brushed his fingertips back toward her knees each time, driving her mad with lust, forcing her body to want him more with each stroke. He kissed her right knee. He kissed it like a mouth, licking and sucking at soft, vulnerable flesh. Sort of ticklish, the sensuality eroticized her, making her feel untamed. His other hand stroked her left inner thigh. He moved his head down. His tongue swirled hot and wet over her flesh, making its way licking and sliding all over her skin.

Linda never experienced lust like the heat burning through her body now. Her pussy, like a volcano, was hot, smoldering, and ready to explode. Andrew continued to tease her, increasing her pleasure through anticipation. Part of Linda never wanted him to arrive and part of her couldn’t wait another second. He nibbled, licked, and sucked his way down till he sat at the crease between her thigh and the hot, wet opening to her sex.

He moved his tongue to the skin where her leg met her pelvis and he put everything into kissing her. He licked and sucked again as if he kissed her mouth, rolling his tongue up and down her flesh. A fire burned between her legs as his tongue ran its way up and down the skin of her inner thigh, one of the most secret and sensitive spots on her body. His fingers made their

way to the puffy flesh of her sex and stroked on the outer lips as they fell open with uninhibited desire.

Linda moaned and thrust into the air now. So turned on, she thought the pleasure might kill her. He remained so slow, the wait drew out with excruciating sweetness, but his prolonging of her torture made her undomesticated and animalistic.

What she hoped for happened. He licked hard from the base of the crease of her leg to the top and slid his tongue across her body till he found her hard throbbing clit, flicking his tongue across it. The sensation of his tongue now burying itself in her wet slit, searching out her little bud, felt like nothing she'd ever experienced. He moved his hands to the soft part of her flesh, to either side of her outer lips, and he pulled gently so that the lips fell farther apart. Linda knew her clitoris stood up erect, crying for attention, and he would see it there now, so strong and so desperate. All inhibitions and self consciousness disappeared. She wanted his tongue on her bud with nothing getting in the way.

As if reading her thoughts, Andrew slid his tongue to her clit. He began with gentle swirls, moving his tongue around and around it, wiping over it, and moving back to swirling around and around again. Even with his tongue, he teased and tormented her. Andrew gave her what she needed and ached for. Sliding a hard finger deep into her flowing, damp folds, he thrust into her deep, pumping his finger back and forth, wriggling to find her G-spot. As he kept pumping her with his hand, he clasped his lips around her clit and sucked, firmly but gently. As he sucked, he flicked his tongue against the quivering head of her clit. Andrew settled into his rhythm now, thrusting his finger into her, clamping his mouth over her clit. Linda lifted herself off the table, pushing herself hard into his hand, fucking herself onto his mouth and his finger. Linda exploded into a frantic orgasm, rocketing through her body, wave after wave. Even with the intensity of her thrashing, somehow Andrew kept his mouth firmly on her clit and stroked into her G-spot with his finger. He stayed that way, riding her orgasm. None of the sensation of his pleasure-inducing caresses let up as a tsunami of pleasure burst over her.

Chapter 6

Linda never had an orgasm shake her so much in her entire life. She lay panting on the table as Andrew removed his fingers and kissed her on and around her pulsing sex.

“How do you feel?” He smiled as he walked around to the side of the table and reached for her face. Before she answered, he bent down and gave her a kiss on her mouth. She tasted the cum of her own orgasm, and it caused another ripple to run between her legs.

“I’m amazed,” she whispered as he pulled slightly away.

“I want to go to your bedroom, Linda. My cock is swollen fit to burst and I’m not done with you yet.”

The greatest drug she’d ever experienced coursed through Linda’s veins. Now all she wanted was to bring him some pleasure.

“Certainly, dear sir.” she said, quite tongue-in-cheek.

He helped her up. Linda stood, realizing she had nothing on the bottom while Andrew remained clothed. She still had that whole experience of touching him yet to go. The best part of the night lay ahead.

She grabbed for her jeans and dragged them on. She didn’t bother with buttoning them up, but instead flopped her T-shirt over the top. Each of them now covered, they walked through the kitchen toward her bedroom. Linda opened the heavy door of the kitchen and peered out into the darkness of the apartment, the unmistakable sound of total silence met her through the door. She turned her head back toward Andrew.

“Coast is clear.” She walked toward her bedroom, Andrew hot on her heels after he turned off the kitchen light.

This is so weird. I’m the one sneaking around behind my kids back.

She stifled a giggle and made her way into her bedroom. Andrew followed close behind, turning off lights. He closed Linda's bedroom door as she put on the small bedside lamp. He stood at the foot of her bed as she walked around, grabbing for her as she walked past him.

He leaned in and kissed her on the mouth. "Why don't you take off those jeans and shirt? I'd love to get a good look at the rest of your body."

Without any self-consciousness, Linda slid her unbuttoned jeans down her legs. She stepped out of them and kicked them off to the side. She lifted the T-shirt over her head to reveal medium-sized breasts. They used to be bigger, but with all the weight loss and exercise, they'd lost a little of their size. When she tossed her T-shirt to the side, she noticed Andrew stared at her body with an expression only interpreted as lust.

Moving slowly, she climbed into bed, feeling his eyes burning into her every step of the way. Once she got there, she climbed under the covers. "You know, I haven't seen you properly naked yet. Why don't you undress and let my eyes have a feast?"

Andrew obliged with enthusiasm. He lifted his T-shirt over his head and Linda watched his muscles moving beneath his skin. He shook his long blond hair free of the T-shirt and let the fabric fall from his forearms. His tanned skin glowed in the lamplight as she let her eyes flow over the curve of his chest to his muscled belly. He had a surfer's chest, no doubt about it, but Linda recognized hard work when she saw it.

"You can't tell me you get a chest that nice just from surfing," she teased. "You've got to be doing a little gym work."

"You got me! I did have to. Not too much. The magazines didn't want a totally buffed body, but as a measure they want it to be even. When I gave up modeling, I kept up the workouts."

She drank in his gorgeous eyes, his sandy hair, and his squared jaw. No wonder he'd been asked to model. His beautiful body woke her up sexually again. For a brief moment, she examined him critically, from a more professional perspective. Perhaps a little too beautiful, but on the whole, he had an excellent look for a model. But she didn't want to let her mind move to work mode.

“Why don’t you show me that gorgeous thing you worked so hard when you were here the other night?” she purred in her most seductive voice.

Andrew grinned and kicked off his shoes. He undid the buttons on his fly and slid his jeans down to reveal black underwear. He stared up at her, the blue of his eyes still clear in the dim light of the room. Jeans down to his feet, he kicked them off to the side. The black of his underwear stood out against such tanned skin, accenting the bulge Linda gawked at in the half-light. His taught belly over firm thighs, round and powerful, tapering down into smooth calves and those beautiful feet. Linda couldn’t look any farther without spoiling the mood by lifting herself off the bed and accenting her blatant ogling of him. Instead she luxuriated in the sight of the rest of his body, her pussy purring with anticipation.

He slid his fingers into the top of his underwear, dragging it down in one swift movement, stretching his penis down, so it flicked back up again, as though held with a spring. Linda’s body moved into overdrive, the swell between her legs growing in response to the display. Walking toward the opposite side of the bed to her, his erection bobbing as he moved, he lifted the covers and climbed in.

Straight away, he worked his way over to her, lifting his arm to cover her chest. He curled his hand over her, cupping her breasts. He nuzzled into her neck, kissing her, moving the rest of his body so his skin tickled at her side, they were so close. His erection pressed hard into her thigh, warming her body and her soul.

“Can we lie like this for a second? I want to make this moment last,” he whispered into her neck.

“We certainly can” *I’ll do anything you want!* “While you’re lying still and fondling my breasts, you can tell me where you learned to give head like that.”

Andrew nestled into the side of her face. She turned toward him and he kissed her lips. He kissed her again as if he couldn’t get enough of her in the first round of kisses. She turned her body to one side so the two of them faced one another. She felt heat rising from his body, as if each’s temperature couldn’t be contained in the presence of the other. Linda felt

wonderful. They leaned in, nuzzling and kissing each other's lips. He had his right hand lazily fondling her breasts, tugging at her nipples as he spoke.

"When I was a teenager, I had a job as a delivery boy for a woman who ran a bustling art supply company. I was young, only seventeen, still old for a delivery boy. I had a small motorbike and spent as much time as possible at the beach. I had been noticed as good by that time and small sponsorships came in and talk of competing at the world level buzzed around me. So everything I had went into surfing. I made pretty good money at this job without having to think too much and be distracted from surfing.

"One day, the woman who ran the place told me to stick around after work. She was thirty-five and I thought that age was the height of maturity. She had a Marilyn Monroe energy about her. She had children and her body was curved, full and round. Not one of the stick figures of younger women. Her body looked like a woman's body, complete with enormous breasts."

"Ahh. I see where this is going," Linda interrupted.

"Shh, do you want to know or not?"

"I think you're trying to turn me on with some sexy story from your past."

"Do you need a sexy story from my past?"

Linda leaned forward and kissed him sensually on the mouth. "Lord, no! And I want to remind you, you haven't come yet."

"I'm not coming before you have another one and I'm telling you my story anyway," he said, smiling.

"Okay, mister. Go right ahead. Tell me your story." She smiled and settled in the crisp, warm sheets.

"Well, as I said before being rudely interrupted, she asked me to stay back one night. I did some heavy lifting for her."

"Heavy lifting? Are you sure this really happened?"

Andrew pulled his head back, looking into Linda's eyes. "Are you still mocking my story?"

He wore an exaggerated hurt expression.

Linda sighed. "Okay go on with your cliché, er, I mean story."

Andrew smiled and continued. "The place was closed and she locked up the shop. After I'd finished my work, I saw the light in the office still on. When I reached the office, I opened the door to find her up against the desk rubbing her pussy."

"Just like that in the office?"

"Yup. Just like that."

"Actually, this is pretty sexy."

"Yeah, well if you'd let me finish it..."

Linda nuzzled into his neck. "So sorry, so sorry! I'll be good."

"Well, I almost died of embarrassment, but I didn't move from the spot. She saw me, but didn't stop working herself. She asked me if I had a girlfriend and I said no. She asked if I'd ever had a girlfriend and I blushed, but still told her no. Then she said something that changed my life forever. She said, and I remember it word for word—"

Linda lifted her head. "What did she say?"

"I was just going to tell you. Do you always interrupt like this all through stories?"

"Yeah. Is that going to be a problem?"

"Sure is. I'm outta here after your next orgasm."

"Tell me what she said."

"Will you stop interrupting and be good?"

Linda leaned in and kissed him deep, rich, and full on his lips. "I will never, ever be able to be good around you, Andrew. But I will stop interrupting."

He grinned and continued with his story.

"She said, 'Andrew, the world is filled with men who don't know how to be a man or how to please a woman. I'm going to do you a favor and help you to not be one of them.' I swear to God. That's what she said. Those words stayed with me forever and helped me to work out what it is to be a man."

Linda smiled at him, wondering how a creature this perfect made its way into her bed.

“Anyway, she took my virginity that night and over the next few months, she taught me how to make love to a woman. It only lasted those next few months. She got rid of me, said she wanted to send me out into the wild world without her. She did the right thing. I think both of us knew I’d developed feelings for her.

“Since then I’ve been only interested in older women and I’ve pleased quite a few.”

He smiled at her.

“Well, I must send her a fruit basket, because she knew what she was talking about,” Linda mused.

“Now, enough of my past. Let’s get you into the zone for the second orgasm.”

He slid down under the covers and settled himself between her legs again. He moved to her vagina, taking no time to work his way up. He licked her clit and pushed his finger into her the same way he did before. Linda imagined the woman seducing Andrew, the fresh-faced horny young man, excited to the core to be the love object of such a desirable woman. Andrew’s tongue worked its way around her clit again, stroking and teasing her up and down her moist slit. This time, he pushed a second finger deep into her body, taunting her with his thrusts. Linda moaned, pushing hard into his hand as she came for the second time that night.

When Andrew got up onto his knees, Linda took charge. As he kneeled, she moved toward him, using her naked body to seduce him. She bent her elbows down in front of her so he saw her spread legs bent and her ass raised in the air. She dipped her face down to his loins, moving in close without touching his hard cock. She blew soft sweet breath onto its soft outer sheath, hoping the tickle excited him. What a magnificent specimen of the male organ: uncircumcised and strong, standing up tall and as hard as iron. Linda stuck out her tongue and licked all the way up the shaft in one deft movement. Once she got her tongue to the tip, she dragged the skin back with one hand and flicked her tongue fast across the top of his dick’s uncovered head. With wet lips, she rolled the head over and around, swirling her tongue all over, using her teeth and her lips to massage and taste the

heated head of his penis. He moaned and rested one hand at the back of her head, encouraging her and exciting her with his enthusiasm. She pulled back and motioned for him to lie on his back. She straddled him, spreading her legs in front of him, far enough out of reach so he could see and touch, but not eat. She took his dick in her mouth again and started to rotate her pussy in front of him.

Linda's sexual courage rose. She wanted to be on display. Andrew made lust boil through her body, encouraging a wanton, hefty sexual display bursting through any bonds in place to keep her safe.

"Oh, God," he puffed out as he watched her slide first one finger and then another into her wet sex. Soon she felt him toying with her hand, pulling her fingers out, replacing them with his own two thicker, meatier ones. He pumped into her at first as she sucked him, but soon he increased his erotic massage, keeping time with her own increased fever over playing with his dick.

Soon she felt his balls contracting and rising up into his body. She sunk her head hard over him, giving his cock a final deep suck before he exploded into his own orgasm. She lifted back and fisted him below her mouth, running his sheath up and down the full length of his rod. As he was about to come, she felt him thrust his fingers into her so he reached deeper than he'd been in before.

In time, Linda pulled her head away so his cum splashed all over her breasts. She turned to face him. Staring at him, a hint of the seductress he'd unleashed in her eyes, she smeared the cum all over her breasts, belly, and vaginal lips. Andrew watched her, mesmerized.

"God, you're amazing. That was one of the hottest things I've ever seen."

Easily the hottest thing Linda had ever done. She wasn't used to behaving like this at all. The connection with this young man, his wild ways, and his warm, gentle inhibitions made her come out of her shell so much it terrified her. She felt sexually brave and capable of so much more.

Linda glanced down and saw the head of his dick was still engorged. She stared at it, mesmerized.

“It’s not going down until I fuck you tonight, Linda.” She looked back at him, sharply. “Do you have a condom?” Linda reached to one of the bedside drawers and took out a condom. Andrew lifted it out of her hand and knelt up on the bed. “Lie down,” he said, all of his sweetness replaced by a firm command.

Linda’s heart quickened at this firmer side of Andrew. Now a new kind of person took over. She lay down on the bed before him, watching him tear at the package, then slide the condom over his still hard, hungry-looking dick. Andrew leaned down over her body without his shaft touching her. He kissed her hard on her mouth, then pulled back and stared into her eyes. The blue of his eyes darkened and the firmness she saw in there quickened her pulse, but excited her further.

“I’m going to fuck you, Linda.”

Linda swallowed hard, but didn’t say anything.

“I’ve taken a lot from you tonight, but I want you to know it isn’t enough for me. I will demand more. And when the time comes, you will know how much more I want. It will be more than you’ve ever given a man before, but I promise you, it will excite you more than you’ve ever been excited by a man.”

With those words, he moved back and, kneeling between her legs, held his cock to her hot, wet entrance. The unusual nature of his words and the sudden change in his demeanor only served to excite Linda further. Without wondering what he meant, she spread her legs wide, her hot wetness drawing him into her body as he entered her deep with one huge thrust.

Finally she had his large, wide penis inside of her. It seemed to fill her every corner and secret place. He held himself still in her for a minute before he grunted and pulled part way out, thrusting into her hard and fast again. His shaft massaged her G-spot and she writhed and twisted against him, making the most of every thrust as he stretched and churned inside her until she could almost stand no more. He leaned forward and she placed her hands around his neck, drawing him into her deeper. He stared into her eyes, no hint of shyness or self-consciousness. Linda felt him deep inside her, past where his shaft entered and reached her, past where his voice and his stare

could reach. He touched her in the same vulnerable place she kept hidden, the place she was afraid and out of control of. Andrew held her tightly as she began to squirm. It was too much, the intensity, the power, the exposure of the moment. Linda's orgasm approached with each of his powerful thrusts, and she turned her face away as she came. With his hand on her chin, he turned her face back toward his. Gone was the potency and the fearful new Andrew. Instead, he gazed at her with compassion and care, his eyes filled with what appeared to be worry for what might be concerning her.

"Linda, are you all right?" he asked, still maintaining his delicious thrusts into her now soaking wet pussy.

A single tear floated down her face.

"Yes. It's just so good. It's so beautiful. I can't quite handle it."

Andrew bent down to kiss her as he increased his thrusts, his cock twitching and coming inside her. He grunted into her as he came, his arms wrapped protectively about her, his loins lurching into her body.

Andrew kissed her again and moved off her body. He slipped the condom off, lying next to her and holding her tightly.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Yes, yes! God, I've never been happier," Linda replied with an offhandedness she hoped was convincing.

"I don't want you crying in sex if it means something bad."

She smiled and nuzzled into his hard muscled chest.

"I think the problem is I'm a little too happy."

This seemed to satisfy him. He held her closer and kissed her.

"I could do this for hours," he said, smiling into her eyes.

"At some point we're going to have to get some sleep." She laughed.

"You wouldn't be a Capricorn by any chance, would you?"

Linda was shocked. "I am! How did you work that one out?"

He laughed. "You're practical at the worst possible times and I suspect you use it as a defense against intimacy. You've probably been worried about all the realistic consequences of getting involved with me sexually,

have been mulling them over, and right now are acting against your own better judgment.”

This made Linda a little nervous. The analysis sat close to the bone. She decided to ignore it.

“What sign are you?”

He smiled. “I’m a Pisces and yes, we do get along very well. We are very compatible and just so you know, you are safer than you realize. Before you look it up on the Net, I’m not one of the flirtatious ones. My woman is my goddess. I’m the kind that gets hurt over and over because I choose the wrong women.”

Linda didn’t know what to say, so she smiled at him and closed her eyes. She ignored the guilty stab in the back of her conscience telling her *just like you, you’ll break his heart*. Instead, she focused on the warmth of his arms around her. She opened them when she felt his lips on hers. He kissed her with his eyes open.

“You don’t close your eyes?” she whispered.

“No,” he said. “I want to see you. It’s exciting for me. I’ve always had a thing for older women. Like I told you.”

Linda started to drift off. Gone were the troubled feelings. He’d brought her back from the brink of wherever she was and now she fell into deep exhaustion. As if from a long way down a tunnel, she heard Andrew’s fervent whisper.

“Linda, Linda,” he said. “Linda, I have to hop up. I am going to let you sleep in this wonderful post-orgasmic state.”

The words floated over Linda as if a million miles away. He lifted her and placed her down next to him. He pushed her gently onto her back and lifted her legs as he pulled the bed covers around her ears, tucking her in like a tired little girl. He leaned in and kissed her on the lips.

“If you can hear me,” he said, “I am going to go to the spare room, because we have to think of the children. But I will be here in the morning to whisper to you that I wish I’d slept next to you with your body wrapped around mine all night.”

He got dressed at the foot of her bed. In her most beautiful, delicious delirium, she didn't want him to go, but she had no ability to open her eyes or move a limb to stop him. She mumbled some sort of vague protest, but he tiptoed up to the bed beside her and kissed her again, this time on her forehead. "I'll see you in the morning. Sleep well, beautiful princess."

Then he left, and somehow she knew that he'd left, but she also knew that he wasn't far and that gave her more pleasure than she cared to think about. She rolled over in the sheets toward the side of the bed that he had been in and even though she never opened her eyes, she could smell him there on the sheets, a warm and familiar smell.

That night Linda dreamed wonderful dreams. She dreamt one that had Toby happy, free, and playing with his brother and sister in a beautiful green field. They all had fun together. Then in another dream she saw Koan become a global label and a new standard of excellence in couture. In all the dreams, she saw Andrew in the background, laughing and clapping for her, blowing kisses and telling her how wonderful she'd done and that he adored her.

Even in her sleep, Linda could sense that the dreams played to her insecurities. But they also felt so good. She felt so safe, so happy, and so self-expressed. She felt free to expand into her own capabilities and her own possibilities.

When Linda woke, she opened her eyes to the delightful time just before dawn fully exploded onto the world. Even the air in her bedroom smelled fresher and more alive. There wasn't a better place in the world than Sydney for spring and autumn. These were the seasons when the city shone. The late spring air filled the room, waking Linda to the pleasures of a new day. Linda remembered that Andrew slept in the spare room.

She popped on her dressing gown and wandered out into the hall. Then she tiptoed down the hall, checking on the sleeping children as she went and peered into Andrew's room, catching him still asleep. She stared at him for a while. He lay in his bed, his lips curved into a faint smile, his muscled chest rising and falling with each deep slumberous breath.

God damn, he's so sexy, she thought for the thousandth time. Sneaking in, she pulled the door closed and crept to the side of the bed. Andrew lay fast asleep as she slid the sheet down to the tops of his magnificent thighs. The tanned skin pulled taught over hard muscle, covered with a blond, wiry, masculine hair that looked good enough to lick from knee to hip, and Linda's mouth began to water. Leg and a smattering of chest hair, much lighter than the dark of his pubic hair in front of her gave his clear skin a manly appeal. His penis lay hard against his lower belly, strong, proud, and long.

Linda leaned in and took the tip of his penis in her mouth. She sucked and was rewarded with a droplet of the salty pre-cum. In his sleep, Andrew shifted, not far enough to pull his dick out of her mouth, but far enough to flatten his buttocks against the sheets. Linda kept tasting him, wanting him in her mouth if he woke up. When he'd settled, she continued her sucking, moving her lips farther down his shaft to take as much of him in her mouth as possible.

It seemed hard and soft at the same time. The warm skin slid up and down the inner rock-hard core. She swirled her tongue over the tip, letting her lips form a seal, and slid down so the skin traveled in its natural downward motion. She pulled her mouth up the shaft, smoothing it out, removing the small wrinkles of skin. At the tip, her tongue butterflyed around the head, moving to its helmet-shape back to swirl around in small circles against the flat part of the head. She forced the shaft deep into her mouth again, keeping the seal at her lips tight and firm so as to get maximum stretch.

"Mmm." he moaned in his sleep.

Linda felt him twitch in her mouth. He would come soon. His soft, deep voice reached her ear. "I'm not asleep anymore, which means this is a little more ethical for you and a whole lot more pleasurable for me." Ignoring him, Linda kept up. She pulled back to allow his tip to feel her sexy swirl again, dipping her tongue around it, clasp around the head to suck and lick more firmly.

“Oh, God!” he said a little louder. The hot cum burst up into Linda’s mouth, hitting her at the back of her throat. One of his hands crept to the back of her head, resting in her hair.

Gulping it all down, she turned toward him, a small sheepish grin on her face.

“Good morning.” She smiled.

His shining eyes took all of her in, no shame in looking at the curve of her breast above her gown or the swell of her ass pointed at him as she bent over his now distended dick. His look retained some of the earlier lust he’d seemed to feel, but now he had a sleepy, disheveled look in his eyes as well. He smiled lazily at her. “That’s gotta be the best alarm clock in the world.”

She laughed and kissed him. His tongue probed her mouth, sucking at her, using passion and a little force to drink her in. She pulled away with a cheeky grin on her face.

“I’m going to wake up the kids, mister, so you’d better get that look out of your eye and get your best acting mask on. I want everyone surprised to see you this morning, including me!”

She bounced out of his room, pulling the door shut behind her.

God, I feel great!

Her body, alive and charged with the power of deep sexual intimacy, electrified her mind. She’d savor the creative energy of a satisfactory sexual experience. Linda wanted to pour it into creative work that morning.

Walking into Toby’s room, she noticed him lying in his bed, still asleep, with furrowed brows. Sitting next to his bed, Linda’s insides leaped as her heart reached out to her eldest child.

Life’s a little too tough on him.

She gave him a gentle shake. “Wake up, sleepyhead. It’s a lovely morning!”

Chapter 7

Things were good for Linda and it showed. The spring in her step and the glances toward her in the street confirmed the night of unbelievable sex with her babysitter must have been what the proverbial doctor ordered.

Is this why men sleep with the sitter?

The arrival at the office confirmed that her feelings manifested in her image. Jen commented on her outfit, a Koan original of course, and three other staffers mentioned how amazing she looked as she headed for the office. She sat at her desk right at nine a.m.

Millie sat across from her after following her in. “God, you’re hot today, boss!” Millie added to the string of compliment pearls around Linda’s neck.

“Thanks. Hot date last night. About time, don’t you think? Now what’s pressing in on us today?”

Grinning and intuitively asking no questions, Millie glanced down at her ever-present clipboard. “Mah Ling’s confirmed. Finally sorted. Production is going ahead. That hideous creep, Granta, called and wants to meet with you about the Palazzo Versace thing.”

She paused, glancing at Linda.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I sent him straight out to Darren. I know I didn’t run it by you first, but he called after I spoke with Granta, and I thought it would take the task off your plate.”

“You don’t want him in the office.”

“Yeah.”

“It’s a good call, Millie. I don’t care you didn’t go through me. Darren is the one to deal with the guy. Granta is such a creep, so I think you did the right thing.”

Millie relaxed and let out a held breath. Then she continued with the schedule.

“I think the focus today is to get the Tomakashi Group sorted. You’ll need your pitch clear, and we’ll need the background on them organized. I’ll be working on the information and the press for most of the day.”

“Is that all?” Linda almost felt tired just listening to her to do list.

“Oh, and the shoot for the new line. We can shoot from the sample range, but do you want to check on production beforehand? We can’t shoot lines that haven’t been delivered.”

She was right. Linda had to think this one through a little more.

“Who’s working on production? Mae?”

“Yeah. Jen told me this morning. She’s got most of the line sorted but we still aren’t sure of a few pieces. If Mae works some magic, the whole line will be here in a month. If she doesn’t, we’ll have half of it in two weeks, with no idea when the other half will arrive.”

Linda thought for a moment. A tough decision. The invoicing should’ve been out two weeks ago, which would have had them three weeks ahead. They’d had room to be late, but not a month late. Clients had the right to refuse lines when they were that late. That would mean budget cuts and that would mean cost cutting in other areas.

“Let’s see how the accounts department goes with their analysis and we’ll make decisions after we speak to them. I don’t want to delay the line past two weeks. We’ll have to deal with canceled styles, so let’s get as much stock out as we can and get the ball rolling.”

Linda paused, thinking. Her phone let out a ring tone telling her she had a text message. A glance at the clock told her it would be Andrew at nine-fifteen telling her the kids were safely in school. Her brain shot a small bolt of electricity between her legs.

God, what was I talking about?

“We’ll have to arrange the shoot. That’s the priority today. I want the Web site updated ASAP. Get the shoot going and the new lineup ready by the end of the week. Screw availability. We’ll have to deal with the calls and requests.”

Millie's face showed disapproval at this decision. The problem was, if they shot the entire line, stylists would want the entire line available for their shoots. That meant the magazines would have the full Koan range advertised and the possibility that part of the range wouldn't be available to buy. It was a hazard of the job, and Linda knew Millie would be the one handling all the calls from the disappointed customers who couldn't understand why a black and white dress they saw in *Marie Claire* wasn't available anywhere.

"I'll make it up to you another time, love," Linda said kindly. "I'm sticking with this decision."

Millie gave a brave smile. "Well, I'll get the Japanese files to you and I'll set the shoot set-up for this afternoon. The model is on standby this week, so better cash flow-wise to get her working as well as the photographer. Did you decide on *The Intercontinental*?"

"Yeah. Helen has all the details, but if you e-mail her, CC Mae and me on it. Mae should be across from the shoot and she might even want to drop in. Actually we all might."

"Cool, boss! See you in the day!"

Finally alone, Linda could check her text.

As suspected, it was from Andrew.

Kids are all at school and daycare, and all is well on this end. Have a super day. XX!

Linda re-read the message, a discomfort creeping into her gut. Was that two kisses at the end? Yes it was.

Ignore it. It's an impulse, and he wants to establish a little intimacy in the wake of a night of fucking.

Linda replied with *Thanks so much!* She agonized over putting return kisses. Did it seem weird if she didn't?

We had sex all night. What's wrong with being a little warm?

She ended the text with XX the exact same amount of kisses.

Her desk phone rang on the private number.

"Yeah?" It had to be Mae, Helen, or Darren. Darren asked her for time, relieving her from dwelling obsessively over a silly text message.

“Hey, there. I want to have a meeting about the Palazzo Versace thing. You up for one in thirty minutes?”

“Yeah. No worries. I’m doing a shoot this afternoon and the Japanese business group for the weekend. I’m happy to pause.”

“Great. I’ll hook up with Mae and Helen, but if you don’t hear back, be there at ten in the boardroom.”

Linda turned to her computer and began her day.

The rest of the morning was a blur of organizing models; meetings with Dave, Mae, and Helen; and running through major stores in Japan. In a meeting with a consultant, Linda ran through the proposal to discuss with the Tomakashi Group on the weekend. It appeared okay—three of the top four department stores, plus unlimited access to the boutiques. They hoped to set up three Koan stores in Japan—two in Tokyo—so the importance of establishing their client base through this group provided the answer. Plus they offered a five-year contract.

The only fly in the ointment under this plan was that Koan missed the top department store in Japan. The choice lay between saturation and exclusivity. It usually did. Linda hated always having to make this choice. It always came down to this, although exclusivity did not go hand in hand with saturation, so the choice had to be made again.

At midday she noticed hunger pangs coming from some neglected part of her body. She buzzed Mae and Helen on the conference intercom.

“Lunch at one? Phamish? Meet you there?”

“Yes!” the resounding chorus came back.

As she placed the receiver back on the cradle, her phone received another text:

Seeing as I’m not getting the kids today, will you have dinner with me tonight?

Andrew again. Ed had the kids tonight. Linda thought about going to the gym and spending a quiet evening at home with a bottle of wine and a couple of DVDs. The thought of another night with Andrew—possibly starting a little earlier this time—overtaken any ideas of getting an early night. She sent a text back:

Absolutely!

This was already fun! Linda thought. *Years have flown by since I flirted and played like this!*

As she grabbed her bag, the next text arrived:

Pick you up at six-thirty at your place. I promise, tonight will be an earlier night! XX

The two kisses gave Linda a slightly nervous twitch again. *I'll bring this up with the girls at lunch.*

Pacified, she replied, *Can't wait! XX*

Linda grabbed her bag, and headed out the door of her office.

* * * *

“Okay, okay, the minute we order food, I have news!”

Mae and Helen glanced up from their menus while Linda kept her eyes glued to the page in front of her, pretending to ignore them.

“Tell us now!” Mae exclaimed. Gorgeous in a silver Koan suit with the ultra-short skirt, the fire in her eyes made her ravishing. Helen wore the same season, but the more modest suit in the pants style. Sitting at the table in the Thai restaurant, Phamish, the three of them made a picture worth a thousand words.

“No way! What I have to tell you is so amazing you will want to concentrate and not order food. So let's get our order in and I'll tell you the full story after.”

They ordered three Thai green curries and folded away their menus. With the business of ordering lunch out of the way, Mae turned to Linda.

“Can we please hear the good news?”

“Indeed, you can. I slept with the babysitter last night.”

Mae and Helen stared back at her in a state of shock.

“Already?” they chimed. They stared at each other, then looked back at Linda.

“Wow, that lunch we had yesterday had a profound impact!” Mae said. “You don’t muck around once the decision is made.”

Linda, now nervous, wanted more reassurance from her friends. “Um, hello! Good thing I did, yes? Don’t go all shy on me, now. I can’t change my mind.”

Mae grinned from ear to ear. “Change your mind? No way. You *go* girl! Now details. I want full, gory, leave-no-stone-unturned details.”

Linda turned to Helen seeking a kind of reassurance she feared would not be forthcoming. As expected, her friend stared hard at her.

“Sure, sure, details,” Helen said, still looking right at Linda. “Don’t leave out the part where your kids get on well with him.”

Mae turned on Helen.

“Hey, Ms. Perfect-Marriage-I-never-need-to-worry-because-the-sex-my-husband-gives-me-is-so-amazing-I-never-want-anything-else. Let other people get a chance to get a bit of pleasure, even if it screws with their life a little.”

Helen seemed a little sheepish. She stared right at Linda.

“Okay, okay, I know my marriage is a great situation, and for some reason,” she shot a glare Mae’s way, “I’m expected to keep apologizing for this fact. I admit all my advice is biased. But I am interested in how you will handle this. I do think there is a bit of an issue here. There, I said it. Now we can all go back to having fun, so I don’t have to be the party pooper anymore.”

Linda smiled warmly. “Actually, you’re right already. I got a text today; two, actually, and they ended with the kiss kiss Xs. He asked me out to dinner tonight because the kids are with Ed. When I saw those kisses, I immediately worried it might be getting out of hand.”

Helen watched Linda thoughtfully as their food arrived. “I think this needs to be handled carefully. We need to think about your feelings. What exactly are you looking for here? What do you want? Because I sense that will need to be established and set up right from the start.”

“Hold on, hold on a minute!” Mae acted as if she was as full of pent-up steam as an engine. “Can’t she just enjoy this for a little while? And when

are we getting back to the sex part? I have this really bad feeling we just skipped right over the most important bit.”

“Well, I went to the beach with him after work. It turns out he used to be a champion surfer and a model. So at the beach, I felt like we might have more in common. In fact, it felt like things could be really good between us. Then this other really young girl turned up and it became clear that she wants him, too.”

Linda paused, briefly considering leaving the next part of her story out. She wanted her friends’ advice, but she knew their reaction would be the same as her own heavy self judgment. The next part of her story cascaded into a nervous waterfall.

“Furious because the other girl was so young, hot, and wanted him, I caused a fight with Andrew. As he tried to follow me, I sped away in the car, almost hitting him, with the children angry and asking questions. Then we got home, I bathed them, and he phoned and said he would come over at nine after the kids had gone to bed.”

She paused for breath, looking up at Mae and Helen. She ignored the wide eyes and dropped mouths and went on.

“So when he turned up at my place, he told me the other girl meant nothing to him. She wasn’t a rival and he wanted to have a love affair with me. I had no idea how to handle it, so I sort of fumbled my way through a response and before I knew it, we were kissing. Then, we weren’t just kissing, he had me on my back in the kitchen, kissing me between my legs till I came in an orgasm so intense, I kid you not, it made me forget about everything else that happened previously.”

Linda knew she sounded nervous to her friends, but she was. She feared their judgment. She thought Mae would be the best port of call after that tirade, so she glanced toward her beautiful friend, catching her ready to speak.

“That story has so many problems and so many unanswered questions, but it still really turned me on!” Mae declared.

“*Got so many problems* is an understatement,” Helen mumbled into her Thai green curry.

“What unanswered questions?” Linda asked.

“Okay, will you tell her or will I?” Mae conferred with Helen as if the problem was totally obvious to everyone except Linda.

“You tell her. I am sick of being the bad person.” Helen examined her lunch. She returned to eating, gulping her food as if it might save her from something she knew couldn’t be avoided.

“Okay. Here’s the deal, love. What the fuck?” Mae had her hands raised, palms toward the ceiling as if she expected the answer to this problem to descend from a muse. “This is crazy talk. Let me get this straight. You went with him to the beach! Hello! Skin problems, we won’t even go *into* at this lunch. You took the kids, that can be okay, sort of family in a way. You got into a bitch session with a young woman who is hot for Andrew that was *so obvious he came to your house to explain?*”

The emphasis placed on the last half sentence had the penny drop for Linda.

“You’re right. I mean I knew at the time. I was furious with myself. I couldn’t believe I had gotten myself into a situation where I actually got jealous of a younger woman. That part of the anger I directed at me.”

“No! No! You didn’t direct anger at *yourself!*” Mae seemed to be on a roll here. “The anger rose up because this girl appeared to take him for a second. This already isn’t fun for you. Do you understand? What’s happened here is that his youth took away your maturity and apparently, your brain!”

Linda, subdued, thought about defending herself and stopped. “God, have I made a mistake?”

Helen stopped eating and made eye contact with her. “Not at all. A hot guy wants you *and* you haven’t had a decent love affair for months? Darling, of course you’re allowed to be swept away. But comparing yourself to a much younger woman is a dangerous game. You are miles ahead in every department, but the comparison itself is an indicator that you’re in dangerous territory. To think that you wasted any time at all looking at a girl who is much younger and wondering about your own physical appearance is a worry.”

Helen continued, making firm eye contact with Linda. “Let me be perfectly clear. You are infinitely better than *any* younger woman. In every definable way. However, when you are on a beach, comparing yourself, you’ve already lost and you will never ever win. What’s happened is you’ve distorted the competition out of your favor. And that means you’re not handling the fact you have a lover who is—How old is he anyway?”

Linda, looking into her lunch, filled in the gap. “Twenty-six.”

“Right. Twenty-six. Do it for fun if you do it. If you can’t do it and have fun, give it up now, girl.”

Linda dropped her fork and let out a sigh as Mae nodded in agreement. But her hungry heart needed confirmation.

“Are you both telling me to give up the possibility of any real relationship here? There is no chance of a future with this guy?”

Mae stepped in. “Jesus, why you are even asking at this point?”

“Okay! Okay! I get the message! What you’re saying is, if I met any man and started acting this way after a few days within meeting him, you would be horrified enough, but doing this after meeting a twenty-six-year-old and sleeping with a twenty-six-year-old, who is gorgeous beyond belief, you think is bad for my self-esteem.”

“Disastrous for your self-esteem,” Mae cried out, her hands toward heaven as if in holy prayer.

“The other woman thing sent alarm bells off for both of us, honey.” Here, Helen reached out and put a hand on Linda’s arm. “You simply cannot put yourself in that situation again.”

“Okay, cool, so what exactly do I do now?” Linda had a crawling ugliness in the pit of her stomach, which always meant she was being faced with a truth she didn’t want to hear.

They were right. The jealousy at the beach meant one thing and one thing only. She’d allowed her feelings to get carried away and she was too attracted to Andrew, in over her head. This could be a nice thing on the side, but not a serious relationship, and the end would be some sort of disaster. The best Linda could do was to make sure she minimized the damage on her end so she could enjoy this relationship for a while. Always reminding

herself to cut it off gracefully, thank God she had her friends. Thank God she woke up and got her shit together with them like this.

Helen broke the silence first. She'd taken her hand back, but she still watched her friend carefully.

"Okay, so I've already told you I don't think this is a great idea, but it's happened and I think it will keep happening for quite a while, so let's strategize."

Mae nodded, but kept her mouth closed. She probably figured she'd done enough damage already.

Helen continued. "So, you've started a thing and let's face it, you won't be ending the fling anytime soon. So let's work with that. There is no reason why the inevitable breakup will be from his end."

Mae brightened up, as if she'd seen a light for the first time in the entire discussion. "That's right! Let's fix it so you keep your heart safe and this little boy gets to learn some fabulous stuff about women and can walk away with a wonderful experience under his belt!"

Linda ignored the pain in her belly again.

"That's fine. I am having dinner with him tonight. Should I cancel? I'd rather not, but maybe I'd better not spend so much time with him?"

"I think it's okay," Helen mused. "The point of this is to enjoy yourself, while not getting so close it starts to hurt like a real relationship. Dinner sounds like fun."

Mae nodded in agreement. "I think she's right. The whole point of this is some fun. We want to make sure that's what happens here. Try not to wear a bikini and try not to meet with any of his other friends. That will complicate things. The thing to remember here is the young woman is the one who is insecure and jealous of you, not the other way around."

Linda smiled as she glanced around at the other patrons of the restaurant. Idly she wondered if they had these kinds of problems. Suddenly it all seemed so tawdry. This perspective didn't have the passion or the flair of night. Now, desire seemed closely linked with ownership. Did it have to be impossible to be deeply and sensually attracted when she knew there

couldn't be a future? Without creating at that level, she wasn't sure she wanted anything at all.

Looking up, she saw the worry in her friends' eyes.

"Oh, honey, you don't look okay about this. Are you sure that you don't have feelings for this guy?" Helen said.

"I think there are feelings of sorts. I can't describe how strong the connection is. Talking like this steals something from the strength of it all."

Mae stepped in. "Honey, let me put it this way. We think you should have fun. If you can guarantee fun getting involved with your twenty-six-year-old babysitter, I think you should go for it. We are trying to be practical here. It sounded great until we heard you talk about the other woman. No more fun from that point on. We became worried about it all."

"I didn't tell you the fun part. But I know you're right."

The heavy conversation weighed on Linda. She didn't want to get into all of this with them. In an instant she switched from needy friend to being in control of the situation.

"Okay, okay! So none of us think this is a good idea. Well, Helen is right. It's started now and I am going to see it through to the end, so you guys are welcome to watch the train wreck and tell me how foolish I've been. I do need help with the date tonight and the trip to Queensland this weekend. He's coming. So what am I going to do about all of this? What about the kids? How do I minimize the damage there?"

Helen leaped over the top of Mae with her advice. "With the kids, I would talk to him straight up. Tell him you expect a fling that won't affect the situation with the kids. I'd deliver the message right away so maybe when the crunch does come, he will be able to enjoy the kids still and work for you, if not comfortably, at least solidly."

Mae nodded again. "Definitely have the chat. He needs to know ASAP where you stand. And, honey, there's no time like the present. I would get talk out of the way tonight so he can choose about the weekend and about where he stands with you now. Making this clearly about fun will handle everything in the best possible way. Take this little thing back into the world of fun and get out of this horrible serious conversation."

Linda liked this advice much better. Still ignoring the churning in her belly, she said, “Okay, so we’ve handled that one. I will tell him tonight so he has the choice in the matter. By the time we actually get to Queensland, all the ground rules will be set.”

Mae smiled, looking like her old self. “Babe, you gotta get time alone with him in Queensland. Can you?”

“I think so. I can organize suites in the hotel together and I can maybe get the kids into some tennis lessons. Also, I may be able to get the hotel sitter to be with them one afternoon.”

“Sounds great!” Mae smiled again. As if reading Linda’s mind, she said, “Honey, we don’t mean to be party poopers, it’s just that you gave us a real scare there for a minute. We will always be driven toward your protection. You do realize that, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do. I guess I don’t share the same vision you guys do. Maybe I told the story wrong.” This brought disapproving stares from her two friends. “At the end of the day, I agree with your advice and I will talk to him tonight. After all, I want both of us to be safe and to have a good time.”

“You know,” said Mae. “We never quite got to the sex.”

“I think I’ll leave that one for some drunken night in the future.” Linda smiled at her two friends.

Chapter 8

Let down by such a weird lunch, Linda returned to work despondent. Her friends, good friends who had known her for years, caught a frail moment in her, making her nervous. Instinct told her to think of ways to defend against such probing insights, but common sense told her that although her pride hurt she needed these insights from her friends.

Andrew would be only a fun fling. The goal for the sophisticated woman who ran her own couture house was to get this thing over with when the fun stopped, keep her children happy with the nanny of their choice, and keep her public image.

So where did all the inner conflict come from? What part of her psyche was trustworthy?

The large soulless screen of her computer distracted her as she ran through e-mails, trying to forget the advice from lunch. Even so, the conversation played in her mind, running over the same mental pathways. Her friends knew she had become emotionally involved, but in what? Where did the possessiveness and jealousy come from? Their advice sounded rational, but Linda's instincts told her something else might be at stake here. Something else.

Linda turned forty this year. Maybe her body was trying to tell her how necessary a hot stud was even though she'd almost reached her baby-making expiration date. Her genes were on the prowl like a tomcat, wanting a last chance at sowing some wild oats.

That made no sense. Inspecting the e-mail she wrote Mah Lings regarding button choice on the Holly skirt, a vision of Andrew's head between her legs popped into her mind. And what a vision! Sandy, sun-bleached hair resting on broad, tanned shoulders, the muscles working to

support his body as he braced himself against the kitchen table, his tongue lapping at her clit, working overtime.

God.

It seemed tawdry now and yet so wonderful at the same time. With his age in the way, the whole thing became difficult to decipher. Her friends worried, and, rightly so, because she'd gone all territorial over a silly little girl. She had behaved foolishly. No escaping it. No denying it. Perhaps a more primal force had become engaged here, not the logic that she wanted to rule her decision-making process.

In all these years of evolution, do we have no free will? Are we still being controlled by our genes? Is my body simply trying to soak up healthy sperm because my eggs have started to lose potency?

Nothing made sense. Somewhere deep inside her, her scrutiny missed a crucial piece of the puzzle. The theory had problems. For example, she hadn't been this attracted to any man in her past with such emotional depth. And she had children. Her eggs had been used and used well by the first dickhead she had foolishly married.

Blaming her genes certainly made things easier and used her rational mind. Compartmentalizing the connection this way left her with a way to analyze her attraction without making too much of the emotional stuff.

Mah Lings, Mah Lings, Mah Lings. Gotta concentrate.

It still didn't make a whole lot of sense.

If my genes are doing this and not me, then there is no way to stop it. I just have to ride it out. She sent off the Mah Ling e-mail. *If I can remember that this is an instinctive drive and not a rational one, it won't matter if I feel a little jealous. That is my primitive self finding the strength to defend my mate against the potential of the oncoming attack from rival females. Also, my attraction is based on how well he cares for my offspring.*

Linda shook her head. Enough! She'd drive herself to the nut farm for sure with these theories circling her mind like sharks. Now focus on work!

Linda somehow jammed herself into a place where she took Andrew out of her heart and moved him into her genes. She concentrated successfully on her work now, intuitively knowing how to handle the evening.

The rest of the day flowed smoothly. No more distracting texts from Andrew. She confirmed this by checking her phone every twenty minutes, just to make sure he left her alone. No more difficult production problems. Linda started to think she'd gotten her good mood back.

A late meeting with Millie confirmed that everything had gone according to plan. She had the reports from the accounts department and confirmation that production would be in the warehouse by late next week. She could go to the Gold Coast on the weekend and do what needed to be done, take Monday off and be home, and Tuesday she would oversee the first of the shipments arriving. Accounts confirmed they'd covered costs to send the shipments in two lots, so arrivals a week apart would not be a problem. Linda sat back looking at her desk, satisfied but emotionally exhausted.

"Big night planned, boss?" Millie organized her papers, getting ready to pack up for the day and head out to her office to complete other things.

Linda glanced at her watch. Five-thirty. "Actually, I have a date tonight."

Millie beamed. "Good one, boss! I hope this new guy is the reason you glided in here this morning." She stood to go, leaving Linda a little privacy to clean her office at the end of the day.

"He is! And I want to get out of here now so I can be ready for six-thirty. Have a good night, Millie."

Millie smiled and waved her good-night and left the room. Linda began to rush through the process of getting her desk tidy and ready for tomorrow.

Linda said good-bye to all the hard-working staff still at their desks at five-forty-five on the dot. Today she liked to be the boss, but she remembered well the years of hard times she went through and she wasn't afraid to ask it of her staff now.

In her car, knowing production would be okay comforted her and helped Linda lay off the internal mind games long enough to look forward to the evening ahead. Parking the car and racing inside, Linda found that Mona had been over and left the house immaculate. Linda had fresh bed sheets and the children's rooms, dusted to perfection, gave her a little twinge of regret

that their dad had them. Linda paused to send Millie a text asking her to buy tickets to *Miss Saigon*, two excellent seats, so Linda could leave them in a card for Mona at the end of the week. She gave her Friday off this week at full pay while they were at the Gold Coast. She did such a good job.

Linda slung her purse on her bed and stripped down, leaving her clothes on the love seat at the end of her bed as she walked to her bathroom. She jumped in for a fast shower, still thinking of the latest Koan line and what she might need to do first thing in the morning. As she hopped out, she heard her phone beep a text message. Drying off, she wrapped her hair in a towel and padded naked to her room to collect the message. She found three messages.

Millie. *No worries re: tickets. Consider it done.*

Toby. *We are having a fun time at daddies, except Aaron spilled his dinner and Toby is cranky. Love you.* Clearly, a Jemma message made from Toby's mobile.

Mae. *Think hard tonight, have a great time, get hot sex, and remember we both love you!*

God! Managing tonight! She hadn't gotten into the zone of it at all.

What had she planned to tell Andrew? Oh, that's right. The genes are in control. Let's not make this a serious thing. That would provide clarity. At least it made it all clear to her. For a brief moment, Linda thought perhaps she should run this one past her girlfriends. Her stomach lurched instantly at the thought, helping her decide against it.

Surely this young man would appreciate and accept her maturity and be grateful for the wisdom. After all, she would in his place.

Grabbing a pair of designer jeans out of the closet and slipping on a sexy lace bra with an almost-but-not-quite-see-through clingy tee, Linda raced to the bathroom to blow-dry her hair and add a little makeup to her natural look. She knew she cut a fine image. She felt confident and in control.

Right at six-thirty the door bell rang.

Through the peep hole, despite the distortion of the small round glass, Andrew looked good enough to eat in dressy jeans and a tight white T-shirt. God he's hot, she thought for the hundredth time.

Man, am I really fucking this gorgeous guy?

She opened the door, almost matching him in height with her tall wedges on. Andrew stared at her, the admiration glowing from his eyes. "Wow. You're so hot."

Linda smiled. "That's funny! I was thinking exactly the same way about you."

"I have a booking for six-thirty. I told them we will be a little late, but we should get going." Andrew leaned in to whisper in her ear. "I want to take you back to my place later, get you out of this safe environment, and tease you mercilessly."

Linda felt the hot, breathy tickle in her ear and almost passed out from the pleasure. Combined with the scent of his body and the heat of him leaning in so close to her, her anticipation skyrocketed. She turned her head softly, meeting his lips with hers, engaging in a gentle kiss. Facing him, she put her arms around his neck. She kissed him deeply, and the hot wetness of his tongue explored her lips, leaving her breathless.

Stepping back from him, panting slightly with the pleasure of those kisses, Linda added, "Oh, that sounds good. Maybe I can stay the night?" She thought for a moment. "And I want to give the kids a fast call before we go. Do you mind being quiet? I don't want them to hear your voice, or they will each want fifteen minutes on the phone with you."

Andrew grinned, closed the front door, and moved to the couch. Linda floated into the bedroom and dialed Toby's cell.

Jemma answered. "Mummy!"

"Hello, darling. I have to go out tonight so this is a quick call to say hello and good-night because I may not hear the phone if you call later. Is everything okay at Daddy's?"

"Yes, Mummy. Karen is here playing with us."

Linda grappled with a moment of irritation. Karen babysat for Ed. He must be out. Sometimes he acted like he'd rather die than spend time with

his children. They weren't going to see him this weekend, but it never occurred to him to be home tonight. Linda took a deep breath. "Okay, darling. Put Toby on please."

"Hello?"

"Hey, sweetheart. Is everything okay? Are you happy?"

"Dad's gone out with what's her name. Did you know they are getting married this weekend?"

"Yes, darling, I did. Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Who cares what he does. I don't."

"Oh, honey, do you need to talk about this?"

"Nah. No way. I don't care, Mum. I just want to get back to the game. Karen is being cool and I'm beating everyone."

Followed with a yell from Jemma that it wasn't true, Toby shouted back telling her to shut up. Linda could hear Karen encouraging Jemma to accept that Toby was winning because he beat them all fair and square. Linda tried to get Karen to sit for her before, but Ed didn't want to share.

Without warning, Aaron hopped on the phone telling her about the fact that he had his own room at Dad's now and he's not sleeping in Jemma's room anymore. Linda praised him for being such a big boy, promised she'd look into a room of his own at the apartment, said goodnight to him, and hung up.

She walked into the lounge area. Andrew saw her face and jumped up. "Anything wrong?"

"Everything is exactly as it always is. Ed's out when he's supposed to be with his children. I will tell you all the family gossip you can handle over dinner. Let's get going."

He smiled a warm smile with a hint of worry in his beautiful eyes, but moved directly for the front door. He strode right through, Linda staring absently at his firm behind. As she pulled the door closed and set the alarm, her mind filled with thoughts of Toby, who obviously wanted more attention from his dad.

Linda half expected to be taken to the local pizza joint by this handsome twenty-six-year-old hunk. So it took her by surprise when she noticed they

took the road toward Cliff Tops, a very casual but sophisticated restaurant run by master chef Cliff Jones. With gorgeous outdoor dining, crisp white table linen, low candlelight everywhere, a beautiful wine list, and reasonable prices, the local pizza joint it wasn't.

In the car, as they drove the winding road to the restaurant, Linda told Andrew about the phone call she'd had with the children and about their father going out tonight when he wouldn't be seeing them tomorrow night and then wouldn't be with them on the weekend. Andrew listened patiently, making no judgment calls, just small comments in agreement or sympathy.

"Linda, it's hard to be a good man," he said as he drove up the small incline toward the restaurant. "Believe it or not, your ex-husband is doing his best. He may be scared of the kids. It sounds strange, but men can be like that. As for your kids, we'll try some things and hopefully make a difference. I have some ideas to share with you in a few weeks about the kids as well. Leave it for tonight. Have a good time." Andrew pulled into the restaurant's parking lot as Linda stared at him, wondering where so much maturity came from. He found a parking spot, turned off the engine, and pulled up the hand break.

Linda thought for a moment. "Okay, so this is not going to work. You have got to find a way to stop being so perfect, or I am not going to be able to give you up when the time comes."

Andrew smiled his warm deep smile directly into her eyes. "What makes you think you're going to give me up?"

Linda shook herself awake from the dream his delicious eyes inspired, fearful of falling into him forever. "Good Lord, every common sense rule in the book. Let's get some food!"

Andrew grinned and chuckled. "I'm going to make that hard for you by being perfect all the time, you know. Maybe we're the right thing, Linda. Did it ever occur to you the real thing can come in all sorts of packages? Maybe you have to relax and take it as it comes."

"No way! I am in control here, not you with your gorgeous eyes, your evolved brain, and your hot ass." They laughed out loud together.

Andrew leaned over and kissed her softly on the lips.

“I’m taking you in for good food, a little too much excellent wine, and then I’m taking you home to take advantage of the weakness you have for my gorgeous eyes, my evolved brain and my...What did you say? Hot ass?”

He kissed her again and, grinning, opened the door to hop out into the warm Sydney summer air.

The restaurant wasn’t packed, though a decent crowd had gathered to take advantage of the view over Bondi Beach at sunset in the fine open-air restaurant. Linda let go of the worries about the children and focused on the menu before her.

With a view out over the ocean and down to Bondi starting to light up below, Linda had the experience of a perfect moment. The sea breeze licked at her skin enough to keep her cool but not so much she felt cold. If possible, Andrew looked even sexier in the fading sunlight, his hair moving gently about his face, his eyes focused deeply on her, and the muscles of his arms stretching his T-shirt tight. He appeared casually sophisticated, very surfer, and very Bondi. Linda sighed and went back to her menu.

Linda kept her meal to a light salad. She couldn’t help worrying about his money, even though he’d chosen the restaurant. He didn’t need to impress her this way. Eventually the right moment would arise and she would tell him that. Reprimanding herself, she stopped calculating how much he spent on the dinner and concentrated on enjoying herself.

As they waited for their food, the conversation being light and easy after the heaviness of the car, turned to the City Road days and the long, hard climb to international success for Koan. Andrew asked when a men’s line would be considered. He said he’d wear the Koan line any time and everywhere if he could. In detail, he described the clothes he wore in the old City Road days and Linda had to admit he’d focused in on all her designs.

Their meals arrived and the banter continued easily between them. Andrew told her anecdotes about his days as a surfer and Linda filled him in on the gossip from her days at City Road. Linda became so engrossed that she didn’t have a moment to wonder at how easily the conversation went back and forth between them. They laughed easily, moving from their separate experiences to the place where their worlds collided.

“Did you like being a model?” she asked, arching an eyebrow.

Andrew laughed. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

Linda blushed slightly. “Well, I know about the modeling world. It’s all drugs and sleeping around among the young models.”

Andrew took a sip of wine, shaking his head. “No sleeping around with models for me. I preferred the photographers or the designers. They usually filled out their jeans better and, of course, they were usually older.” He smiled suggestively.

“You really prefer older women? That wasn’t just to get into my bed?”

Andrew almost choked on his wine he laughed so hard. Having recovered properly, he set her straight.

“Number one, I was already in your bed when I told you, Madam. Number two, I would never use such a corny line to get you into bed. And number three, the answer is yes.” Andrew gazed up at her, the cheeky hint in his eye liquefying the entrance to her body between her legs.

Linda gazed at him in wonder. All the good intentions, the plans, the strategies she’d carefully worked out flew out the window, down the cliff face, and crashed to smithereens on the jagged rocks at the mouth of the ocean. Nothing stole the pleasure of this from her. She was too far sunk into his erotic energy.

Wanting to hear him talk about himself some more, she asked a tactless question. “Did you make a lot of money modeling?” Linda then shook her head, recovering from her imposition right away. “I’m sorry, Andrew. Don’t answer that. I’m a businesswoman, and talking about money is what I do all day. I don’t mean to speak to you like that on, well, I guess this is a first date really, isn’t it?”

Andrew smiled, a sparkle in his eye telling her she hadn’t overstepped the mark.

“Yes. I did make a lot of money from modeling and surfing, and I invested wisely and still have most of it today. Anything else on the checklist to be examined before I pass?”

Linda blushed heavily.

“Andrew, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean that.”

He cut her off. "It's fine Linda. I wouldn't tell you if I didn't want to. It's okay. I have my own money." A warm smile spread from his eyes to his delectable lips. "You'll have to find the chink in my armor some other way."

"I'm not looking for problems."

"You're not trying to find out what's wrong with me so you can justify running away?"

Linda's mouth dropped open, but she was too stunned to do anything about it. This habit he had of second-guessing her perfectly unnerved her. Recovering, she looked out to the ocean. "I hate the way you do that!"

"What?"

"I hate the way you assume you know what's going on with me."

Before she saw him, she felt him. His hand clasped hers from across the table, stroking her warmly. She turned and saw concern in his eyes.

"I'm sorry Linda. I want this to work, and I want to deal with any fears or problems you may have fast, so we can get on in our relationship. I overstepped the mark there, and I apologize again."

She wasn't sure what to say. In Andrew's presence her problems and issues seemed trivial. But with her girlfriends, work, and children, her lust for Andrew seemed trivial. All she could be sure of now was his sincerity.

And her own happiness.

Linda knew this was the perfect moment to talk to him about boundaries in their relationship, her fear of them hurting her children, and her well-devised exit strategies. But she could not. The way he looked at her, the combination of care, erotic fever, and the irrepressible conviction of the inevitability of their relationship was simply too hard to fight on this balmy spring evening. The fine wine floated through her body and as she unashamedly inspected him from across the table, all she could think of was being alone with him. She didn't notice that some time had passed while she took time to stare at him longingly.

"Linda, is everything okay? Have I offended you?"

She jumped out of her reverie slightly. "No! Sorry, I floated off for a second there. I think the wine may be getting to my head a little. I'm just so

happy, so relaxed, and so comfortable. I can't remember the last time I felt like this."

She watched as a darker mood drifted into his eyes, reflecting his thoughts out to her. "I want to take you out for an aperitif before we hit my place. You're good enough to eat, Linda, and tonight I'm starting at the toes and working my way up."

Linda's pussy convulsed, clutching against its emptiness at the words and the look in his eye. Her nipples pebbled under her shirt and she watched his eyes dropping to them, staring unselfconsciously, taking in her arousal without hesitation or restraint. She could have gone home with him right then and there, if he weren't so keen to stick to their planned date.

After he paid, they strolled out to the parking lot, making their way to the car. The fresh dusk air helped wake Linda up from her intoxication. Not the wine induced one, but the heady, lost sensation Andrew's gaze encouraged in her. Gone was any idea of dealing with the logistics of their relationship. Any conversations and decisions about that were lost amid the complications of the day, floating away on an ocean that swallowed the sun.

Almost at the car, they passed a large tree to the side of the car park. As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Andrew pulled her by the hand, guiding her around the other side, so they were largely out of sight of any diners moving to and from their cars.

Without a word passing between them, Andrew pressed her against the tree and bent to kiss her. His kisses held none of the gentleness he'd shown toward her in the restaurant. Instead he pressed hard against her, fever gripping him, his lips kissing her mouth, her cheeks, and her neck passionately. Linda, mouth falling open, closed her eyes, enjoying the sensation of his tongue tasting her, his teeth nipping her burning skin and his hands gripping the sides of her head hard.

She moaned and he kissed her lips hard.

He ran his hands down the side of her body and around to her full backside, pulling her into his loins, using his hands on her ass to massage her pussy into his cock with their clothes between them.

Linda's body leaked her lust into her panties as she lifted one leg and hooked it around his thigh, trying to press her aching sex into his hard dick. He bent and thrust upward, massaging his stiffness into her heated moist cleft, still working his hands on her ass. His tongue danced around her mouth, sucking on her lips and her tongue as he growled into her open willing mouth.

As fast as it began, he pulled his head away, grabbing her hair and dragging her head back. He leaned in for one more heated bite to the side of her throat then pulled his body back, leaving her to adjust her balance and straighten her clothes.

"Shall we go?" he asked.

Linda smiled. "Do we have to go out? I'd love to go home now."

He didn't smile, but even in the departing sunlight she could see the ardent heated passion in his eyes.

"Let me show you off in public a little more before I take your body." He said. His tone was not one that invited her opinion. His voice commanded her, telling her how it was going to be, that tonight wasn't open to votes. The intense seriousness of his tone sent sexual shock waves through her, exciting her without preamble or warning. He turned back toward the car, holding her hand, encouraging her into the rest of the night.

They drove in near silence toward the lights of Bondi, both panting through the sexual heat that consumed them. Linda's mind fluttered from idea to idea, basking in the sexual scene they'd just played out, one minute, panicked and out of control the next. Andrew said little and she couldn't read him. Whatever was happening between them took her over so that she had no lucid recognition of her thoughts and desires.

He drove up into a small street behind a local licensed café Linda recognized in the heart of Bondi. He parked the car, turning to her just before he stepped out. "Are you okay? That was intense."

"Yes. I'm fine." Linda didn't know exactly how to answer the question so she responded by rote.

He placed his fingers on her chin and turned her face toward him. When she made eye contact, she saw the same gentle lover she'd had dinner with. Gone was the commanding man of passion who'd kissed her under the tree.

Linda couldn't tell if she was relieved or disappointed.

Andrew smiled a warm gentle smile with a cheeky spark in his eye.

"Let's go in for a light drink. I want to feed you coffee so I can keep you awake for a few hours yet." He lifted his eyebrows suggestively, making Linda laugh.

"Jesus. I can't work you out at all." She gasped.

Andrew leaned in and kissed her softly on the cheek. "Isn't it more fun that way?"

He hopped out of the car before she had a chance to answer, making his way to her side to open her door.

The café was busy for a weeknight, though Linda didn't spot anyone she recognized. Andrew gave his name at the door and they were escorted to a small table on a balcony overlooking the beach.

Linda looked out over the water as Andrew went to the bar and placed an order for the both of them. When he returned, she smiled over at him. "What did you order for us?"

Andrew shook his head, smiling. "This is one of the most perfect nights of my life. I am in control now to make sure nothing messes it up! I ordered us cocktails. I want you to try each, and a coffee each because, as I promised you earlier, I want you awake for a while yet."

She grinned back, thinking nothing in the world would make her go to sleep when she got back to his house. The passion she'd seen in him, coupled with his tenderness, inspired courage in her.

Perhaps this could work. Maybe there is a way through any obstacle.

Linda decided to broach the subject. "It's just that it is so beautiful, and I feel so relaxed."

But she was suddenly interrupted.

"Andrew! Dog! Didn't know you'd be here tonight, dude."

Linda halted, stopped in mid sentence by a gorgeous surfer guy with a shock of long black hair and dark brown eyes. He brought with him six

people, all relaxed and happy and all extremely beautiful. Linda noticed all the women and men were paired up, which stilled the twisting in her belly that she tried to ignore. She felt like a bucket of cold water tipped over her head.

“Hey, man.” Andrew seemed to find it hard to hide the disappointment in his voice as they saw his friends pull up chairs to their table. “Hey, it’s no accident you didn’t know I was gonna be here, man. I’m not sure if you noticed, but I am on a date.”

Two of the men had noticed and stared at Linda despite being prodded by their girlfriends. The man who had spoken first turned to look at her, his eyes showing instant admiration. “So introduce us. How were we supposed to know?”

Andrew sighed as two macchiatos and two orange Negroni cocktails turned up. Linda eyed her cocktail suspiciously, worried about drinking too much. Now the table filled with six new friends, each ordering coffees and grinning at Andrew. Maybe she’d be glad for the cocktail.

After ordering the coffees, Andrew’s friend repeated his request and Andrew seemed to prepare himself for an introduction. “Linda, allow me to introduce to you. Dan and Jane, Robbo and Susan, and Jake and Anna.”

They all smiled and nodded each in their turn, everyone looking Linda in the eye as if in order to make her feel comfortable.

“And guys meet Linda. My hot, new girlfriend.”

Chapter 9

“Hey, Linda!” Each of Andrew’s friends said in their turn.

Linda’s smile froze on her face and she stared into her coffee. She reached for her cocktail and gulped half in one go. If Andrew caught on to her nervous response he didn’t show it as he talked with his friends. Dan and tales of the surf at Manly occupied his focus.

“Dude, the waves rolled. The child-care gig steals your days buddy. The surf rocked today.”

“Yeah, well the child-care gig is one I want to do man. We’ve been through this. Doesn’t mean you can’t talk to me about the day, but...”

Linda watched as they talked about the surf. All the women surfed as well and each had their own version of the day’s events. Linda smiled at them, not minding being left out. Her head still spun from the “girlfriend” comment. She eyed the remainder of her enticing cocktail, but downing the lot and getting another would draw unwanted attention.

Andrew moved his chair around to her side of the table as the other guys squeezed in. He slid his hand onto her thigh as he spoke to his friends. Despite her nervousness, the cocktail worked its magic and she started to relax.

Soon their coffees arrived. Andrew, seeing a natural break in the conversation, changed to a more Linda-friendly topic.

“How did the meeting with Surf Gear go this morning, Dan? You gonna be a star?”

Dan almost blushed and became deeply interested in his coffee. Jane piped up and said, “Sure is. He got the contract!”

Andrew turned to Linda. "You're looking at the newest male model for Surf Gear International! Nice work, dude. You betta watch out Jane, all the chicks'll want him now."

Dan put a protective arm around the grinning Jane, then turned back to Andrew. "Dude, she's so safe. You know what I mean. You've had your own turn at this gig."

Andrew turned to Linda. "None of us guys here are into the scene. We just like the work. We all want to make a buck. Have you noticed all of these 'dudes and dudettes' are hot? They're all modeling."

"What do you do, Linda?" Jane asked, her arm resting on Dan's thigh.

"I'm the owner and designer at Koan."

Jane, Kerry, and Anna couldn't hide their deep admiration. Anna leaped forward. "No way! You're Linda Adams? My God, you're huge! I'd love to work for you guys! God, I've been trying to get a gig with you for months!"

Linda switched to work mode for a second. "We keep in house models, but we are looking for another one at the moment." Linda took a business card out of her handbag. She glanced up at the blonde, willowy Anna. Perhaps a little old, but the right type of girl for Koan. The young girl image was on its way out, anyway. Linda wrote *Millie, code red. I met her last night. Get her to wardrobe. Let's check her out.* on the back of the card and handed it to the amazed Anna.

"Here you go. Come to the office tomorrow and talk to Millie. She's my personal assistant. The writing on the card is our private code to tell her the message is legit. She'll take the preliminary shots and we'll see if we can use you."

Anna's hand shook as she took the card from Linda. "Oh wow, oh gosh, Ms. Adams. Thanks so much. You won't regret this. I will do my best."

Linda shot a glance at Andrew as he grinned with what must have been pride at the astounded Anna. He beamed as the energy on the table moved toward Linda. Not hiding his pleasure at showing off in front of his friends, Linda decided they'd deal with the girlfriend remark later. Right now they could have a little fun with his friends.

As they each emptied their cocktails, Linda's head lightened. Andrew behaved in a jovial way with his friends, jostling them, joking around, and Linda wondered if he'd be okay to drive. Excusing herself to go to the ladies' room, she stood up, feeling a little stronger for doing so. Jane stood with her, saying she'd go as well.

As if they'd been friends for years, Jane started up conversation with Linda in the bathroom.

"Thanks so much for what you did with Anna. The rest of us are contracted but she's been freelancing for over a year now and needs an opportunity like this. It may be her big break."

"It's no problem. She's got the right look and I am glad we met." Linda smiled into the mirror, looking at Jane. "It might make me that little more successful at work tomorrow, as well."

Jane blushed and examined her hands under running water. "I don't think success is ever your problem." She made eye contact with Linda in the mirror. "Where did you meet Andrew?"

"He nannies for my kids. I only met him this week."

Jane's gaze remained steady. "We're all a little protective of Andrew. He's special. He's not like other men. He is gentle and yet...well...I know how he looks, but even with a body like that, the nicest thing about him is his heart."

Linda turned toward Jane, away from the mirror. "Are you worried he'll get hurt?"

"I saw the way you stiffened when he called you his girlfriend. I understand. You've only been seeing him for a week. But you should know Andrew hasn't called a woman his girlfriend for many years. He's fussy and he tends to go for older women." She paused and averted her eyes to the mirror. "I think he may have fallen for you already. If you are not sure, or don't think you can have anything serious with him, please tell him right away. He's sensitive."

Linda watched as Jane struggled with what must have been a difficult conversation. Despite being possibly intimidated by Linda, she reached out on behalf of a beloved friend.

But Andrew was a big boy and this wasn't Jane's business, no matter how good or right her intentions.

Linda smiled. "I can't promise this will work, Jane, but I will do my best to be good to him. I'm not here under duress. I like him."

Jane smiled back at her and moved toward the door. Linda followed. For a moment she felt like she belonged in this little group of friends looking out for each other and the connection warmed her. Back at the table, Andrew looked at her, leaned over, and kissed her cheek. He whispered in her ear. "Why don't we get out of here. It's only nine, but I want to get back to my agenda."

Linda's pussy throbbed at the thought of being alone again with this delicious young man.

Despite her reservations about Jane's advice, it did throw her a curve ball. What she'd said brought back to Earth the unresolved business of the evening. Linda's heart sank a little.

Young people are so dramatic. They can't just go with the flow.

They said their good-byes, promising to catch up soon, as if they'd been friends forever. Linda headed toward the car. Andrew grabbed her hand, and redirected her toward the large apartment building across the road from where he parked.

"This is my place!" He smiled. "I came to this café for our last drink before we go in so I don't have to drive. I didn't plan on my friends all being there. I hope you don't mind. Not quite the first date you hoped for."

The large apartment building, well known to any resident of the area, remained the biggest surprise in this young man yet. He owned a piece of prime real estate buying into this building. As he held her hand and crossed the road, she wondered how she got this lucky.

His five o' clock shadow had grown out more over the last few hours and he had the sexy rugged look that moved straight to her loins. His muscles still bulging beneath the white T-shirt moved with every action, making the slightest gesture a seductive ritual. As he dashed across the road a little in front of her, she admired his muscular legs and the casual sexiness of the lower half of his body. Despite his sensitivity, he looked all man, all

commanding muscle with the innate power of a stallion or a god. Linda found herself wondering again if she could make this work.

Don't let his jeans fire up your genes, Linda! A tight ass does not mean he needs to move in and take care of the kids.

"I don't mind at all. They seemed nice." She continued on with conversation, hoping she wasn't too transparent.

Across the road, he slipped an arm around her waist and walked her into the foyer of his building. He nuzzled and softly kissed the side of her head as they walked toward the elevator.

As soon as they were in the lift, Andrew turned her face toward his and kissed her tenderly.

"Now the real part of the evening starts."

The doors opened to a long sophisticated, white-painted corridor. Andrew moved past her to lead the way to the farthest apartment at the end of the corridor. Linda saw his hands shaking as he fumbled with the keys.

That's sweet.

He took a deep breath and turned the key in the lock. "Don't turn on any of the lights," he said once they stood in the dark apartment. "I want to show off to you first."

With that, he pulled a switch on the wall to his left and heavy curtains moved to the sides to reveal a view of Bondi Beach and the city stretched out beyond it. Linda could see all the way back to the city and on to dim lights in the background. Bondi stretched out below them in its splendor, the jeweled foreshore looking like a diamond necklace in the dark, the familiar crash of the waves reaching up to them through the glass. Linda thought immediately of the genuine warmth of the ever-present ocean.

"My home," he said. "From here I always have the sea."

He moved behind Linda as she stood still, drinking in the beauty of the scene before her. She couldn't take her eyes off the ocean and the striking vision of the lights. His apartment swept around to their left and to their right so they stood on a kind of precipice, away from the world and also yet immersed in it.

A now familiar, intoxicating drive swept through her. Wild and alive, as if swept away by a force beyond her, Linda's body responded to his dazzling closeness. His body heat caressed her, despite his distance. He stood close, not touching her, relishing the intimacy created by the mingling of their energies, the mutual ache of their desire. Wetness gathered deep inside her sex, preparing her body for him as she sensed his need to reach out for her.

Linda found it impossible to resist the tension as he leaned forward and she felt the brush of his lips against her neck. She tilted her head to her left to better let him work his magic on her. His lips pressed harder into her invitation and he kissed her neck lightly, letting his tongue brush over the coolness of her skin.

With her eyes on the waves crashing below them, his tongue and lips working over her neck, up to the curl behind her ears, and down to the skin drawn tightly over her jaw, Linda floated away into erotic fever. His mouth slid back to her ear. "Let me take you here, in front of the window, with the ocean sending us its secrets," he whispered.

He reached around her and flicked the switch of a small lamp so that low, sensuous light filled the apartment. He moved behind her again, stroking and caressing as he felt his way around her body.

He lifted his hands to find her breasts, his fingers fondling them over the top of her clothes. She looked out to sea, her breasts hot and heavy in their lace cups, as Andrew grazed across them, held them, squeezed them, and ran fluttering fingertips over her nipples, jutting tent-like under her clothes.

"Mmm." She let out a moan and arched her way back into him.

He pulled at her T-shirt, crunching the material up in his hands to get to her bare skin. The tingly sensation of his masculine, rough skin on her smooth-as-silk flesh as he ran his hands freely up her belly to the base of her bra line, goose-pimpled her skin and sent more moisture between her legs. He slid his hands under the wire of her underwear as her breasts fell back into place in the palms of his hands.

"Oh, yeah," he whispered breathlessly into her ears. "Fuck, you're hot."

Nuzzling her neck again, he let his hands roam around her breasts, weighing them in his cupped hands, flicking fingers and thumb over each nipple. Linda's pussy ached at the entrance. The wetness gathered, tide-like at the swollen opening between her labias, her jeans holding them closed like a dam. It wouldn't be long and her pussy would break open and all the lovely, slippery wetness would seep into her jeans.

Of course, she wasn't wearing panties.

A fact Andrew would find out any second now.

Lifting his hands from her breasts, he turned her around to face him, sliding the T-shirt off her, forcing her to lift her hands. Linda imagined the scenario, she with arms raised, T-shirt covering her face, breasts free, him watching, ogling her without the scrutiny of her gaze. She knew he examined her breasts, as he'd hesitated when lifting the shirt over her head. She dragged it off the rest of the way, pulling it over her head to find him staring at her. Naked from the waist up in her designer jeans and high heels, Linda relished the shared moment with him. Like a little boy, he gulped, blinked, and drew his breath in. As if they had magnets, his hands lifted to find her breasts again and he gripped, rubbed, and toyed with them.

An incredible surge of sexual power rose in Linda. She hadn't had a man so filled with desire for her before. Intuitively, Linda understood any sexual desire would be happily fulfilled by this man, her perfect playmate.

Andrew moved into the space between them and planted a hot, hard kiss on her mouth. The rising heat of his passion built into the kiss, the tension between them becoming red hot. Linda sensed the potent Andrew coming to the surface. The man who took her earlier at the tree, the man who designed and choreographed an evening to seduce and beguile her. She pulled back far enough so he could see her body again. He kept his eyes on her face this time.

"Move closer to the window, Linda," he said to her, watching her face. She smiled at him and backed away, moving toward the large glass wall behind her. Soon she felt its smooth surface on her bare back.

Andrew approached her and turned her around to face the window. He stood behind her, the heat from his clothed body throbbing between them.

He reached around her body and lifted her right hand, stretching it across the window, pressing it to the glass. Linda left it there when he did the same to her other hand.

“Good, Linda. I want you to leave your hands there.”

The cold, hard glass chilled Linda’s skin as she goose-bumped over the way he spoke to her. The commanding Andrew she’d met earlier seduced her now. Here the same voice and the same turn of phrase told her a darker Andrew toyed with her now.

He lifted his hands to hers and pressed his body in behind her, pushing her against the glass. Her breasts mashed into the cold, her nipples aching even more with the cooled window against them. He slid his hands up and down her arms, teasing and tickling her as he spoke softly into her ear. “Look down at the street, Linda. We’re a long way up here, but people can still see you because of the light in the background. How does it make you feel to know that anyone who cared to look up would see your cold, naked tits pressed against this glass?”

Linda’s heart upped its tempo. She didn’t think of people looking at her. Andrew continued. “Look at the apartment complex across the way. All someone needs to do is come out to their balcony and they will see you.”

He slid his hands down her arms to her waist. Linda started to move her own hands but he stopped her, abruptly placing his hands over hers again, holding them in place. He gave her further instruction. “Don’t move your hands. If you do, I will know you don’t want to have sex with me tonight.”

Linda knew she wanted to have sex with him. Her body cried out for release. She’d never commit the deep injustice of denying herself access to him tonight. She kept her hands where they were.

Andrew ran his hands over her breasts. He pulled her back slightly, off the cold glass, adding to the room available for his hands to roam over her torso while her hands remained firm against the glass.

One hand continued to manipulate her nipple, flicking and pulling on it so it stood out firm and his other hand moved down over her jeans, to the heavy stitching between her legs. She moaned and curved her spine, giving

him better access as he pressed on the thick seam, making it push against her aroused clit. While he rubbed back and forth, he whispered in her ear.

“All anyone has to do is look up or come out to their balcony and they will see you. They will see your breasts and your hard nipples. They will see my hand pressed between your legs and your arms willingly spread wide to accommodate me.”

These lewd words coupled with the stroke of his hand caused her pussy to gush.

Andrew slid both hands to the button on her jeans. It took him seconds to undo it and slide the zipper down, pulling the denim apart so he could slide a hand into the front of her jeans. His fingers found her hard clit right away and used the flooding wetness to slide easily in small circles over the erect little nub.

“You’re so aroused aren’t you? Maybe you want someone to see. Take off your jeans.”

Andrew stepped back so Linda could pull her own jeans down her legs, discarding them to the floor. He moved in behind her again, replacing her hands to their place on the glass.

Now Linda stood naked, her waxed pussy with the thin strip of trimmed hair running up its centre, revealed to anyone who cared to look. The entrance to her body between her legs ached, desperate for his hot, hard muscle to enter her and massage against her opening.

Andrew moved in behind her again, this time with one hand between her legs at the front of her body and one hand caressing her buttocks. He groaned his approval as he felt the hot thick wetness gathered at the apex of her thighs, clinging to his masculine fingers as he massaged and caressed her outer folds. She felt his other hand smoothing over her firm ass cheeks, occasionally dipping into the cleft between. She arched her back again, giving him greater access to her heated, ever dampening body.

She felt Andrew kissing and nuzzling the erogenous zone around her neck and her ears. He whispered to her as his hands continued feeling their way.

“I wonder if someone can see you over there, perhaps through a window. Someone staying out of your sight, but stroking themselves looking at you.”

Electricity shot through Linda. She looked at the building that couldn't be more than one hundred meters away. No one was out on their balcony, but many apartments had lights on. Someone could come out at any time, or, as he said, someone could be watching her right now through a window, undetected by her.

Andrew's delightful hand now massaged the outer folds of her pussy, smearing her juice all over her. His other hand ran lightly down the crack of her ass, meeting between her legs, collecting liquid heat and smearing it around her backside. The two hands working her together while her hands lay cold against the unforgiving glass sent deep shivers over her. Her mouth dropped open, her lips feeling full with the blood rushing to them. As Andrew pressed his finger into her body, finally giving her what she wanted. Her mouth watered and the ache in her nipples from their excruciating hardness intensified.

“Spread your legs and fuck yourself on my hand, Linda,” Andrew whispered hoarsely.

With a salacious force driving her, Linda spread her legs wider to accommodate his finger and lustfully bounced her body up and down on his stiff, willing finger.

“Oh, my God,” Andrew said.

She could feel an orgasm taking hold of her body. She moved herself up and down on his hand faster, hoping to coax her orgasm out sooner.

Andrew pulled his hands away.

“Not yet. You'll come when I tell you.”

Linda went rigid. She ached to have his fingers back in her again.

Probably sensing this, Andrew asked her, “What's wrong Linda? What do you want?”

Linda looked out to the building opposite and blushed. A man stood on his balcony, leaning forward, looking directly into the window of Andrew's apartment.

“There’s someone there,” she said, panicked, not moving her hands. Some deep hidden carnality told her to wait for permission to move.

“Stay where you are,” Andrew spoke in a commanding tone. “I want you to tell me what you want.”

The man across from her stared now. He hadn’t averted his eyes at all. He must be able to see her. Linda wanted to run, but what she couldn’t escape was the arousal between her thighs. She needed Andrew’s hands back there or, better yet, his no-doubt-hard cock sliding up into her ready sheath.

“I want your...hands,” she stammered, nervous and exposed to the man across the way.

“Really? Just my hands?” Andrew had a hint of a laugh in his voice. “I can see him, Linda. He is looking at you. I think he likes what he sees.”

Linda groaned out loud. She couldn’t stand another minute of the delicious ache between her legs. She needed him inside her more than she’d ever needed anything like this.

“No! Not your hands!” she cried out. The man across the way was now rubbing his crotch over his jeans. “I want your cock. I need it, Andrew. Please fuck me with your beautiful, hard cock.”

Immediately Andrew stood behind her again, a hand on her breasts and one between her legs. He fondled her. “And my cock you shall have. Go to the couch and lie on your back.”

Linda did as she was told, relishing the sexual thrill of having commands directed at her. She lay on her back, one leg draped over the front of the couch and the other bent against the back of it. She watched Andrew as he undressed in front of her. His eyes met hers with a cool dominance that sent sexual thrills through her quivering body. He let his gaze sweep her naked form as if he were taking possession.

He stood in front of her, naked, his erection like a sexual divining rod pointed upward, firm and ready. He walked to the couch, standing over her, stroking himself, staring into her eyes.

“Is this what you want?”

Linda felt more moisture seep out of her body as it hungrily anticipated his entrance. “Yes! Yes! Oh, yes, that is what I want.” She whimpered. Exposed under his gaze, she still dared not look away. Some deep magic between them took over and she was both fearful of breaking it and fearful of it remaining strong.

Kneeling on the couch between her legs, Andrew positioned himself between her legs. Without gentle preliminaries, he plunged into her to the hilt so she felt his balls rubbing against her. The stretching of her pussy to accommodate his cock sent waves of ecstasy through her as he pulled back a little and thrust into her again. He increased the pounding, every stroke only serving to engorge her hungry cunt again so that it throbbed and swelled around him.

“Oh, Jesus, baby, that’s so good. You need this from me, don’t you? You need it all the time. You’re pussy is so hungry and so wet.”

Thrusting back into him now, the last guardians of Linda’s self control put down their weapon. Letting her pussy take control, she pushed hard back into him, straining and grunting to push her body to its limit.

“Yes, I need it,” she panted. “I need it so bad. Fuck me faster, damn you. Fuck that thing into me harder.”

As the words flew out of her mouth, Andrew fell to her body, pistoning in and out of her. He managed to increase the pace of his thrusts. Linda caved to her own excess, arched her back, and felt the waves of tumultuous orgasm flood through her.

Her pussy clutched and sucked at his dick. Andrew grunted a hard, throaty cry as she felt his body convulse into orgasm. His tool twitched as he froze, letting the magic of the moment flood through him.

He collapsed over her, the two of them gelled for a moment in peaceful unity.

Andrew lifted himself back, making eye contact with his cheeky grin in place. Leaning down, he kissed her hard, then pulled up and off her, sitting at the end of the couch, taking her feet into his lap.

Linda felt locked in a post-orgasmic haze. She couldn’t make it out, but something inside of her soul found something inside of his. He reached in

and grabbed her in a place far more than sexual. First, the firmness of his approach got her more ready for any man than she'd ever been, then his shameless taking, devouring her, excited her to an abandon she didn't know she was capable of. The potency of the connection welled up inside her, ready to flood through her body and into her mind. It was too much, too strong.

Linda had the overwhelming feeling that if she stayed there any longer, she could fall in love with him.

She turned her face toward the back of the couch as she felt tears well in the corners of her eyes.

Andrew stiffened in response. If he couldn't see her face, he knew there was something wrong. "Linda, are you okay?" He sounded concerned.

The noise of his voice in the air helped to remind her that she was here and this was just a place and just time and he was just a man. Nothing magical or special was going on and this sexual encounter was like all her previous sexual connections, all about release and relaxation. Nothing more. As her mind became her friend again, carefully crafted defenses rose to their natural place.

She turned back and smiled. "I'm fine. That was a little intense. But I'm okay."

She pulled her legs off his lap and sat up on the couch. Andrew reached out for her, but she pulled away.

"What are you doing?" He looked puzzled.

"Just sitting here, on the couch with you." She knew the answer was evasive. Her mind scrambled for clarity. She would need to say this, and she couldn't think of a worse time, but any time in the future would be even worse than this one. It had to be now.

"No, I mean, why are you pulling away from me?"

She grabbed a throw pillow for some semblance of modesty and sat on the edge of the couch. Andrew looked at her intently. He didn't show much emotion, just the steady stare that she now knew he always used when something seemed to puzzle him.

God, this has been so wonderful and now he won't want to see me anymore.

Linda looked at him wistfully, one last time.

Oh well. Here we go. Might as well get it out in the open.

"Andrew, I am having a really good time with you, but I am worried that you think this might go somewhere. Oh dear, let me be clearer. I'm worried that we're building a relationship, when really this can never be more than fun, don't you think?"

Andrew kept looking at her. A faint flush came to his cheeks, but his stare remained steady.

Shit. He's not going to help.

She'd have to struggle on with this conversation on her own. "It's just that, I don't see a future. Well, because of the age difference, mostly. I talked it over with my friends and we all agree that it is too large a gap to be able to do anything with. I can't see us turning this into a relationship. And I thought it would be more honest to make that clear at the start."

Andrew looked down and shifted his legs so that he sat properly on the couch. Without raising his gaze back again he said, "You call this the start?"

"Well, okay, I should have said something sooner, but we haven't been seeing each other for a week yet." Linda felt resolve growing, her own words sounding more and more convincing. "Yes, I guess I do think we're still at the start."

"You might have mentioned something at dinner."

That was true of course. She didn't have a good defense for that argument. *Sorry, I was so swept up in your eyes and the perfection of the two of us together* probably wouldn't add strength to her argument.

"I'm sorry. I know the timing is bad or weird or something. I don't know. But I needed to say it and I said it."

She felt relieved when he paused for a while so she could collect her thoughts. Thinking for a moment and studying his hands, he finally spoke. "I am not ready to stop seeing you Linda. I am really enjoying this." He looked up at her. "But I won't lie. I do have feelings for you. Can I ask why you think there is no chance for us?"

Linda figured she'd better be honest with him, as well. His honesty and vulnerability brought out her own.

"Frankly, it never occurred to me that we could have anything serious. Then when I got foolishly jealous of that gorgeous young woman the other day, it sent alarm bells off in my head. I had no business behaving like that and to be honest, it worried me. Just because you're twenty-six doesn't mean I have any desire to be twenty-six again and I especially don't want to act like a twenty-six-year-old. The only word for the way I behaved is immature."

Andrew watched her again and seemed deep in thought. Linda took this as a good sign and continued on. "The truth is, I didn't intend to do anything with you at all, because you are such a great manny to the kids and they love you so much. Knowing it couldn't go anywhere, I figured it was selfish of me to steal you from the kids."

"But you did anyway," he said quietly.

Linda suddenly felt sheepish. "Well, yes. I guess I did anyway." In her own defense she added, "Can't you take that as a compliment? The truth is I couldn't resist you."

"Even though you never intended to take me seriously?"

Linda felt sick.

Oh great, here it comes. Best sex of my life and I had to go and ruin it. Why can't I just play games like other people?

"I don't know what to say to you. It's not that I don't take you seriously, it's just that I can't see this going anywhere." She thought she'd give it one last ditch effort. "Of course, it doesn't mean that we have to stop seeing each other."

Andrew looked up at her. Something unfamiliar lay in his eyes, something Linda didn't like seeing.

"I'm good to fuck, you mean, but not to think of having a relationship with."

"Oh, now don't be like that." *God, I sound WAY too much like a man!*

Andrew leaned in close to Linda. She couldn't avoid being up close to his disconcerting, determined look. Linda swallowed hard and felt her pulse start to race.

"You know what?" he said. "I'm going to do this to you. Just to get back at you for this moment and how thoughtless and cruel you're being."

Linda stared, wide-eyed.

He continued. "That's what you think makes this so special? The way we fuck? Well let's do it. You think I can't have you, when you belong to me already. This is called rational to you. Well, honey, let's try it your way. You want sex with no feeling? Well, I'm gonna give it to you until you can't stand it anymore."

Linda suddenly felt very uncomfortable. That wasn't the answer she expected at all. What was he talking about? How could she belong to him already? He'd suddenly gotten very possessive. She grinned nervously trying to show him she'd relaxed, hoping it was convincing. Somehow she had to get back into his good books again and get herself out of this deeply awkward moment. She wasn't completely sure where she stood or what just happened. His words were clear, but the delivery changed the meaning significantly. Was he willing to just have sex with her or not?

Standing up, he offered her his hand and answered all her questions in just one sentence. "Come on, Linda. Let's go have some meaningless sex."

Chapter 10

Andrew smiled warmly and for the briefest of moments, Linda thought she had him back. “So, Lady just wants games, huh? Not the real thing?”

Linda smiled back at him, hoping she didn’t appear stupid.

“Well, Lady will get what she wants...Lots of nice sexy games.”

He walked over to her and without saying a word, pushed his cock toward her mouth. Her pussy aching, Linda opened her mouth, letting it glide in. “Oh, yeah, baby, suck my hard dick. See how hard you can get it.”

Relieved the moment was over and they could get on with their wonderful night, Linda allowed her tongue to slide up and down the full length of his shaft. She bobbed her head back and forth as she sucked as much of the hot, thick flesh as her mouth would hold. Andrew threw his head back, enjoying her hot, wet mouth on his hard shaft.

With her hand, Linda pulled him out of her mouth and sunk off the couch to the floor below. On her knees, spread wide apart, sticking her ass out, she fisted his shaft up and down as she licked the fleshy knob at the top. Joyful tremors rippled through her body as she let herself sink into the naughty bad girl play of the moment.

This works for now. It dispels the awkwardness.

Andrew placed his hands on the back of her head and started to thrust into her face. His actions, though sexy, had none of the power of his earlier sexual contact. Linda started to understand what he meant. It turned her on to be used in this way, but she preferred what went on between them before.

With her lips tight around his knob and her hand pumping the base and middle of his cock, Linda let her other hand fall between her legs and started to stroke her wet pussy. Determined to show him they could have meaningless sex and still get a great deal out of it, she worked her body,

hoping to milk another orgasm. The smell of female arousal filled the room as she pumped his shaft up and down, allowing her fingers to strum casually against her clit, sending little tickles through her entire nether region.

Come on Linda, get it together.

“Fuck, you look so hot.” Andrew growled, bringing her back to Earth.

His voice sounded distant, cruel. Linda fought off her desire to cry out that she’d made a mistake and she was so very sorry.

Andrew pulled his dick out of her mouth and pushed her gently back. “Keep playing with that pretty pussy, baby. I’ll be right back.”

He left the room and Linda lay back on the carpeted floor. Playing with herself served only to excite him. She wasn’t getting much pleasure out of it anymore.

This wasn’t the kind of sex she wanted to encourage between them at all. Linda lay on her back, feeling like curling up into a ball and sobbing. This wasn’t right. She didn’t want to be treated like a whore. Her suggestion was sensible. Why couldn’t he see that? Linda rolled over to her side and looked out toward the glittering lights of the city.

Get a grip, Linda! If you’re not careful you will be crying your eyes out like a baby and you’ll lose control!

She took a deep breath. She had to do as he said, play with herself in order to show him this could work. No inspiration came. Her heart empty and cold, she couldn’t find a way to connect with her body or with the spirit of what she’d suggested to Andrew.

What’s wrong with me.?

As if answering her questions, the room flooded with music. Linda recognized it immediately. Led Zeppelin. She laughed to herself. Talk about lightening the mood. Somehow, Andrew seemed to have gone through the same metamorphosis and knew they needed something to brighten them up again. This music was perfect. As soon as she heard it she felt young again, alive and aware of something outside of her own psyche.

Linda pressed her skin into the carpet, spreading her legs and bending her knees. Images of Robert Plant and her teen masturbatory fantasies flooded her mind. She writhed around on the carpet to the music, letting the

ideas float over her. This was the perfect antidote to the disaster she'd made of the evening. Closing her eyes, Linda ran her fingers through the light fuzz of her pubic hair. Lust powered through her as she felt the small fibrous threads of the carpet caressing and teasing her back. The opening to her pussy ached as she ran her hands around the surface of her skin. Gently, she rubbed her fingers around the opening to her body, getting lost in the feeling of relief as well as the pent up frustration inherent in masturbation. Feeling alive and brave, Linda slid one long, thin finger into her body, relishing the thrill of her muscles closing in around it immediately.

"God, that's the hottest thing I have ever seen."

Linda's eyes flew open to see Andrew standing by the couch, naked, the hardness between his legs stretched fit to burst. She lewdly spread her legs, loving the interplay between them, feeling the power of it connecting them again.

No doubt about it, something mighty strong traveled between them. But Linda used the power of the moment to convince herself it wasn't connected to their hearts. Or rather, the connection could be channeled anywhere. Linda could control the connection and take them on the head-trip the music suggested.

The music floated all around them. The sultry depth and the surreal lyrics almost materialized into images that rubbed themselves against Linda. She played with herself, eyes closed, letting the album work its magic. Occasionally she looked at Andrew to see his eyes fixed on her, his hand working his cock. She twisted herself around on the carpet so that between her spread legs she faced Andrew directly. Again, she slid her hands through her thin stripe of pubic hair, hoping to seduce him, needing him over her again.

"Oh, God. Yeah, babe. Rub that pussy for me. Get yourself ready for me." She didn't quite have him back the way he had been, but the creature she heard now was one she recognized, at least. Linda spread her legs wider and lifted her backside so that her hot, aching pussy faced him, willing him, begging him to enter her. Andrew sunk to his knees in front of her, working his cock with long, slow, rhythmic strokes. The music crescendoed and ran

into a guitar riff. Linda tore her eyes off her young lover, closing them to be closer to the music. She breathed slowly and let it begin, working on her, the notes caressing her, reaching up into her body and eating her insides with their twisted, black letter-like tongues. She imagined a guitar stretching its neck out to the base of her belly, while the strings strummed hard against her clit, letting her fingers work herself as if she were one of the instruments.

A smoke-like daze crept over Linda as she reconnected with the lost lust inside her. She opened her eyes to see Andrew and her own longing reflected his gaze toward her. Her breathing slowed and Linda gave it up, falling into the pit of desire all women resist. Intense, mind-numbing ecstasy.

The feeling of surrender engulfed her body as Linda willingly gave up her self control.

Soon, a slick wetness sliding around between her legs drove her to a deeper level of pleasure. Andrew slipped forward to the ground before her and, holding her ass with both hands, lapped and sucked at her exposed sex, kissing it as if it were a mouth. As his tongue slipped deeper into her, she gasped and pulled his face deeper into her by placing her hand at the back of his head. He moaned over her clit, sending vibrations of pleasure shooting through her sensitive sexual folds. She arched her back and tried to spread her legs farther to invite his hot muscle into her very depths.

Drunk on her willingness to make herself completely vulnerable, Linda felt herself starting to come deep in her body, a rumbling of pleasure making its way to the edges of her sex.

She lay dazed on the carpet, panting. Sounds of the ocean crashed through her consciousness as she drifted off, safe and secure now that her emotional vulnerability was gone.

“You wouldn’t let this side of you out before, Linda,” she heard Andrew say in the background. She ignored the comment, languishing instead in the post-orgasmic fever thrashing through her body.

“This would be so much better if would you let your mind go, as well.” The sad note of regret in Andrew’s voice almost brought Linda back from

the delicious ocean she swam in, but she chose to ignore that comment as well.

Andrew's hands under her, lifting her up, seemed strange when he picked her up off the floor to take her to his bedroom. Her back felt cool as the wet air rushed in to cloak her, waking her just a little. Consumed by the ache in her vagina and how much she wanted her fingers or that tongue back in there again, she allowed him to carry her anywhere he wanted.

Soon she felt the cool cotton of linen on her back and the surface giving way as she sunk into it. Andrew had put her into his bed. The cool comfort of the soft surface and the sweet-smelling sheets acted like an aphrodisiac on her already highly stimulated senses. A breeze filled the room, and the smell of salt spray reached Linda's nose. Somewhere a window was open, letting in the sounds and smells of the beach at night. The now bright moon offset the darkness of the room, filling it with a muted glow, sending everything into a surreal space. The effect made a ghostly kind of warmth. Combined with Linda's psychedelic mood, she drifted back without having to fear where she may be going. She rolled to her back and spread her legs.

The lapping at her pussy started up again, animal like, searching deep within her. The tongue working her licked with abandon, the way it remained flat, grinding all over without the focus on specific areas of her sweet wet femaleness. With heightened senses, the smell of her own arousal, mixed with the salty night sea spray air, added to the intensity of her lusty delirium.

Linda sank into the flat of the tongue slurping all over her as she succumbed to the desire to spread her legs even more. Putting her hands under her legs to spread her thighs farther apart, she welcomed Andrew's throaty growl from a distance.

Andrew moved his tongue to work on her clit. He lapped his way up to the top of her pussy, circling the little nub that had become hard with the attention it received. Andrew let his tongue flick over it and then moved to the folds around it and circled it, every so often flicking over it again. Linda cried out in wave after wave of ecstasy as she arched her back, trying to reach up to get him into all of her.

Soon, Andrew closed his lips over the top of her erect clit and sucked, very gently creating a vacuum. Linda cried out as she could feel her orgasm approaching. The opening to her pussy ached and throbbed with delight.

Andrew pulled back, prolonging the desperate nature of her pleasure. He moved his tongue down to her opening and pointing it, thrust it into her hole, circling it around and around the entrance to her vagina, rubbing himself against the ache that enticed everything at this point to enter her.

Her vagina sent aching signals through her mind, desperate for recognition, throbbing with desire. Hunger between her legs dominated all her sensations. The walls of her pussy clutched tighter with anticipatory lust, the more Andrew paid attention then took his attention away. Andrew pushed two fingers into her aching hole and sucked on her clit. He pressed the two fingers down, rubbing her opening, intending to meet the endless needs of her body's demands.

With such careful attention to her needs, Linda exploded into orgasm all over Andrew's hand. Linda, however, wanted more, registering a deep disappointment when Andrew took his lips off her clit and slid himself up behind her, moving into position to hold her and love her from behind.

He kissed her neck, asking her nothing about her change in mood, accepting the enormous gift of herself that she offered. He nuzzled into the back of her, kissing at her ears, brushing the hair away from her neck, and kissing into the curve of her back. She felt him with every expansive breath and absorbed him in the same way she absorbed her own lust.

Andrew ran his hand down her spine, to the small of her back. The touch sent shivers through her as his hands caressed her skin. Reaching farther, he ran his hands to the top of the divide slicing her ass in two. Linda let herself be touched, languishing in the thrill of his hands exploring the most secret parts of her body. She arched back, more awake now as his rock hard dick pressed into the cleft of her behind. Linda remembered that he hadn't come yet. She wriggled closer, inviting his hardness into her body.

"Mmm," she moaned as he slid his hand between her separating legs. His thick arm rested against her vulva and sweaty opening as his fingers tickled her damp outer lips

He started to stroke her pubic hair. The hard part of his wrist resting against her clit trembled as he stroked and played with her hair. He leaned into her hair from behind and inhaled the scent of her as his fingers kept up their joyous ministrations. Linda felt the heat emanating from her open slit. The ache at the opening of her tunnel started up again. He knew where to touch her and for how long.

Nuzzling into her hair, he started to kiss and nibble at her skin though the luscious strands. He slid his hand back so the fingertips of his right hand rested against the opening of her soaking wet pussy. He breathed heavily into her neck and placed long, slow, wet kisses on the goose-bumped skin. He nibbled on the backs of her ears and sucked on the lobes, making Linda weak with desire once more.

Andrew moaned a gentle incoherent, muffled sound into her hair as he slid his fingers back to her dripping opening. The thick fluid of her orgasms pooled and she could feel Andrew's fingers prodding, exploring, playing, as he kissed and licked at her neck, ears, and hair.

"God, you're so sexy and responsive," he murmured into her hair. A heady, lost tone in his voice revealed to Linda that he languished in the same erotic fever as her. They seemed to be one in the moment and nothing could take that away from them.

This time she thought she'd ride it out and enjoy it. No thinking. The fingers exploring her seemed to be doing something down there, but she couldn't work out what. It didn't matter. Whatever he did worked and made her wetter than she'd ever been before. The ache in her hole throbbed now. His fingers were manipulating her in a way that caused her juices to run out of her. They must have been oozing their way into his hand.

Andrew smeared her lubrication up the full length of her exposed crack. She had that delicious juice all over the most private part of her body. His penis dug hard into her now. Andrew slid his hand between her legs and massaged her wetness over her outer pussy lips, all the way up to her other entrance. He lingered playfully around her hole then let his fingers slide back to her lips again.

When he'd smeared her juice all over her, his fingers tickled their way back to her opening again. They danced around in that clever way, dipping in and out of her aching hole. Linda wanted them inside her. She wanted him to plunge two, three, maybe even four of those fingers deep into her pussy. But he wouldn't. He continued to tease the juice out of her, tugging and pulling at her so that she leaked sexual lubricant all over his adoring fingers.

Suddenly, Linda knew what he intended. She stiffened very slightly, then immediately relaxed in an attempt to encourage him to keep going. Andrew read her perfectly and pressed just one slippery finger into the opening of her ass. Twirling about at the entrance, he made her feel more and more comfortable.

"Have you had anal sex before?" Andrew placed the breathy whisper into her ear so that it tickled at her and added to her arousal.

"Once," she whispered back. "It was awful."

"Shall we repair the bed reputation?"

Linda, more aroused than she'd ever been in her life, and keen to try anything, nodded. An image of Andrew's enormous penis flashed into her mind and for a brief second she wondered how her tiny bottom would take that huge monster.

But Linda felt perfectly safe. She knew that if she said no to Andrew, he'd stop right away. And now the perfect time to try it properly had arrived. "Will you look after me every step of the way?"

"You know it, princess." He whispered back

She snuggled into his back, rubbing herself against his stiff, erect penis.

"Mmm. Then you be the teacher and I'll be the student."

Andrew kissed his appreciation over her neck and Linda got more and more excited about what would come next.

Andrew rolled to his right a little, which took him from her back, but he moved into position again fast. Linda heard him squeezing something from a tube into his hand and guessed it would be lube for her tight ass. As soon as he ran his fingers, laced with the warm lube over the small button of her ass, she realized he'd warmed it up before applying it to her body. Andrew

rubbed his slick fingers over her ass and very gently pressed his thick middle finger into her tight hole at the back. Linda relaxed her muscles, the signal he needed to press in a little farther. Soon Linda could feel him in very deep. She lay still as he slowly pumped his finger in and out.

“Does that feel good?” he asked, kissing the back of her neck.

It did feel good. It felt deeply erotic, sensual, and wild. Nothing like the horrible time Linda had before. This time she felt excited and sexually borderless. Linda seductively pumped her ass against the finger impaling her.

“Oh yes, it feels so good,” she cooed.

“Mmm. Ready for the real thing?”

Andrew pulled his finger out gently. Linda could hear him slicking his dick with lube as she lay back thinking of her throbbing pussy and the feel of her ass filled with lubrication. Soon, she could feel the tip of his penis nudging at the door.

Andrew eased his hard cock so the head slid forward, engulfed with Linda’s sphincter. Then he moved his hand around to the front and found her clit. He started to strum it again, and Linda spread her legs to allow his fingers to find their way and to work their magic with more strength.

The sensation worked well. Linda felt the stretching in her behind along with a moment of slight pain. At these moments Andrew gently played with her clit. He must have been able to feel when her resistance set in on his dick. It didn’t take long, however, and he’d pushed in her all the way, his fingers working her pussy overtime.

“Do you think you’ll come again?” he asked her.

“Oh, God, yes.” Linda felt an orgasm welling in her already.

“Because I am going to come fast, and I want to make sure you come again.”

This set Linda off and she started to move herself, controlling the pumping of his dick in her. She rocked back and forth at first, enjoying the feel of his hard, thick cock sliding up and down in her passage. Linda thrust hard back on him, allowing the oiled cock to push hard into her as his fingers worked on her clit.

Linda reached a hand behind Andrew and pushed hard-on his ass in order to press him deeper into her. Andrew cried out, “Oh, God!” starting to come deep into her bowels. At the same time, he thrust two fingers into her pussy, something she didn’t expect. Her orgasm exploded, bursting through her nerve endings, tingling every muscle while drug-feeding her mind. Andrew pushed hard as he came and came into her. However, he never moved his hands away from pumping deep into her pussy. Linda came all over the thickness of his hands. When the two orgasms had subsided, they lay together for a few minutes. She felt sublime restfulness ease over her, and inwardly decided that she couldn’t do anymore. She would have to rest now. She simply couldn’t come again.

She felt herself drifting off.

“Linda?” Andrew asked tentatively.

“Mmm, yes?” she answered lazily.

“Do you want to talk about what happened to you tonight? You let down your inhibitions after our talk. I think we should discuss that.”

Linda rolled toward him and looked at his beautiful face. Concern laced his eyes and she wished she could make him feel better. She wanted to reach out, tell him she was scared, and that the self protection helped make her free. Instead she said, “I think I’m too tired. I need to go to sleep.”

He rolled to his side again, leaned over, and kissed her on the mouth with so much tenderness that she almost burst into tears.

“Me too, princess. See you in the morning.”

And with that, she moved into his arms and they fell asleep together.

Chapter 11

Linda woke in the morning to hear the sound of gentle snoring next to her. The morning's half-light crept in to whisper the dawn of a new day and Andrew lay next to her. She thought over the previous night and hoped things might be clearer and not more complicated. She surprised herself with how relieved she was to wake and see him there.

She glanced across to see his masculine surfer's face turned toward her. His tousled hair fell across his forehead, resting in soft waves over his unshaven cheek. The curve of his mouth gave a small taste of the delicious dreams he dreamed and Linda imagined she intruded on a secret moment not to be shared. Ego driven, she wondered if he dreamed of her, waves, or something else entirely.

As if he felt her soul awake, Andrew lifted his lids, revealing blue sleepy pools, recognizing her in a delightful little moment. A flash across them made her feel safe, invited, and warm.

"Glad I'm still here, sleepyhead?" she asked.

The softening in his eyes gave her all the answer she needed but he also said, "More than you realize."

A twist in her belly thrilled her. But reality reminded her she had to get going. She could feel the gym calling her after all that alcohol last night.

"It's five in the morning according to your clock radio. I have to get up and head to the gym. Why don't you stay here and enjoy the lazy warmth of this bed?"

He hunched himself closer to her, the closeness of their faces increasing the intimacy. Pursing his lips a little allowed him to plant a small, light kiss on her pouty morning lips and the thrill in her belly woke her up again.

"Do you have to go to the gym?"

“Oh, God, I so do. The last thing I want to give up now that I have a hot young lover is the gym.” She smiled into the small space between them, wondering if calling him her lover followed the new rules.

His eyes traveled down and settled on her breasts. “I think you’re hot. You don’t need the gym.”

“That’s because I go all the time.” She smiled into his eyes with a hint of a cheeky grin. “And I’m glad you think I look hot.”

Linda leaned forward and kissed him. He played with her lips, nibbling and toying with her for the smallest minute before she pulled away, rolling to the side of the bed and out onto her feet.

He eyed her wistfully, his eyes shamelessly traveling down to her full breasts, scaling into her pussy hair, and moving back to her face. For a moment she considered getting back into bed, but a flash reminder of the white bikini pierced her mind and she resolved to make it to the gym. A minute’s scrambling had her in her clothes, and she turned back to wave a kiss off her hand to the delectable tidbit in the bed.

“Ugh, you’re going?” He lifted the cover back to reveal a huge morning erection. Linda looked at it longingly. God, she could skip this one time.

But, how many future times would there be if she skipped the gym too often? No! The way to keep a young man is to have a hot young body.

“Babe, I’m hoping this isn’t our last chance and I’d like to leave you wanting more.”

He smiled but said nothing and Linda hoped it wasn’t a glimmer of sadness she caught creeping into his eyes.

After dressing quickly she jumped on the bed and leaned over him. She spread her legs and let her jean-covered pussy dip down to stroke his cock as she kissed his lips. He lay back onto the bed to get comfortable. Linda let the seam on her jeans massage into his cock a little more.

“Wait until tonight,” she said using her sexiest voice. “I’ll have you again and I promise I’ll make everything better for you.” She dipped her lips down to plant another kiss, letting her hair fall around them like a cage.

“Oh, God,” he mumbled.

Linda leaned back and gave his hard cock a squeeze, then jumped off onto the floor. “Why don’t you pull on that yummy cock of yours so I can think of you doing that while I’m at the gym? It’ll help me get that blood flowing and I’ll have a great workout.”

Andrew looked at Linda.

“You know, I’d rather have the real thing.”

“I know you would, but I have to go to work. Now be a good boy, and play with that nice hard dick while I’m gone.”

“I’ll close my eyes and think of your sweet ass. That’ll bring me off.”

He lay on his back, his erection hard and glistening at the tip. If it weren’t for the images floating around her head of that damned white bikini she could have been talked into staying. She needed to get out now. She picked up her bag and waved good-bye.

As she reached the front door, she heard him call out. “Running for now is okay, Linda, but you’ll have to confront this sooner or later.”

Linda closed the door behind her.

* * * *

Today the bike acted like part of her body. A Zen warrior couldn’t compete with her in her workout this day. Completing her twenty minutes on the bike, she’d already done twenty minutes on the running machine and twenty minutes on the rowing machine.

God, fucking a hot guy all night is so good for me!

Eyes watched her reach new personal bests. Mileage on the bike clicked over higher than ever before. Steam poured off her sweating body as she fought to keep images of Andrew lying in bed, naked, spread legs before him, jacking off, thinking of her. In her mind’s eye the flexing upper arm muscles got her heart racing more than the bike, the run, or the stairs. She could see his lips clench as his legs stiffened and his toes curled.

I’ll have to come in the showers here. Ew! Never done that before. They’ll tease me at lunch.

Linda eased off on the pace and started her ten-minute cool down. The damp in her clothes clung to her body as the steamy, heated smell of her own sweat mixed with the unwashed scents of their lovemaking floated up and around her nostrils. Primitive and alive, Linda replayed the previous night in her mind. Thinking of them as a couple fell naturally into place when she saw them making love and being together as they were in his bed this morning. Suddenly she saw him in her apartment and visions of breakfasts together with the kids fell to mind. Without warning, she found her mind wandering to how the relationship could work.

He's got his own money. He's independent of me. But he also loves the kids. He wants to take care of them. We'd work out some sort of arrangement if we were together full time. He can look after them still and perhaps go back to modeling. I can ask John Paul at Davis if Andrew can model the next collection.

The MTV channel caught Linda's eye. The screen throbbed with a bevy of gorgeous young women in white bikinis.

Oh! It's a sign from God!

Linda looked up onto the long, tanned legs of younger women. Their naturally flat stomachs showed none of the tell-tale signs of the hardened exercise mom. Their breasts bounced gently and suggestively in their small bikinis, fat orbs of warm flesh bulging out on either side. Who was she kidding? Where did she get the idea she could compete with that?

And Andrew can get that. Anytime he wants.

The older woman thing is a fetish. It's common knowledge. You get a taste for it as a young man, you find yourself an older woman, and you go through the motions. You have a year or so with her, and one day you see a twenty-two-year-old girl (in a white bikini) and it's like you've never actually seen that before. Life with mummy seems tired and now you're ready to "settle down" and take it all seriously.

Linda hopped off the bike as the small alarm sounded to tell her she'd managed well past her quota for the day.

As she walked toward the weight room, she glanced over at a group of younger women working out in synch with an instructor on the Pilates mats.

No tell-tale sign of over-definition there, no lines in the neck, no heavy body oil. They didn't need those things.

They are young. And I am not. And that's okay, but nothing is going to make me able to be that again.

Linda made her way to the weights area and settled in to a hip and thigh workout. In her mind's eye she saw herself going out with Andrew. Out with his friends? Didn't she catch the eyes of a couple of the guys glancing at each other in response to something she'd said? She must have said something stupid or old. She'd been uncool for sure. And who would she be now? Spend all her time at burger joints and on the beach as a surfer chick? The thought triggered a weight drop and her thighs crashed back into each other.

Enough of this! Stop torturing yourself! This only happens when you think of taking this "relationship" seriously. This is a fun thing for both of us. He's inexperienced and that's why he wants to take it seriously, but he will be glad when he meets the woman of his dreams that he didn't throw it all away for me.

With renewed resolve, Linda tackled the remainder of her workout. As she worked her muscles, she used the release of endorphins to remind herself of the temporary pleasures offered to her. With each squeeze, she commanded herself to act her age and not get carried away like a schoolgirl on the back of some hot, sexual nights with a cute guy. The ripples in her muscles reminded her of the strength of character it took to stay intellectually commanding in these kinds of moments.

Look who I am! Am I going to give that up or share it with some young man I barely know? Be an adult, Linda. Recognize what you have and enjoy it for what it is.

Showering at the gym did not end up having the sexual appeal she'd thought earlier. Now her mantras had worked their negative magic. A kind of strength pulsed through her, drowning out the little voice at the back of her mind telling her that Andrew wasn't like that and he knew what he wanted.

Linda attacked her absolutions with the same rigor she'd attacked her workout. She applied her makeup in the same way. Clockwork precision. By the time she left the gym she looked a picture of paper perfection, straight out of *Vogue* or *Marie Claire*, all the natural splendor of a woman glowing in the aftermath of delicious sex was gone without a trace.

Grabbing her card at the door, she could tell the several good-bye waves were filled with admiration. Always best to think and lose damaging fat at the gym. And not just body fat. That foolish mental flab that has a girl give up everything she worked so hard for just so she gets to be with the cutest guy on the block.

The sun shone high in the Sydney sky, but Linda didn't want to notice the splendid day. For her it was a day like any other day.

Keeping the top up, she played Vivaldi on the player in the car, refusing to indulge with the led Zeppelin CD she had stashed away in the back of the rack. Four seasons lulled her into a safe comfort zone and her mind fell naturally to work as she drove closer and closer to her office building.

Walking in through the front door, a chorus of "Wow! You look so good today" and similar accolades met Linda.

Seems sleeping with a young hunk is good for the image, but not so good for the brain.

Linda made a beeline for her office, keen to get the day's work underway.

Koan still buzzed after the weekend launch. The line, finally invoiced and sent, spurred most of the calls to do with short-shipped orders, and miraculously, re-orders already.

"Your shawls are off the shelves, Linda!" Millie shouted from across the room as Linda fitted on a model. "Re-orders are in already! We're going to need more stock."

Linda paused to glance at the lace pinned on the thin silk top the model wore for her. The weave hung seductively down her slim back, the thin straps sitting perfectly over her shoulder blades. The model looked beautiful, to be sure, but Linda knew the woman's beauty shone because of the perfection of the cut and line of the cloth draped over her. This moment

of creation Linda strived for. These times she could stand back and say “Wow, I made this.”

That’s how she identified a ready piece. And all of the Koan pieces went out perfectly every time. It was the Koan way.

Before she knew it, lunchtime had arrived and Mae was buzzing her from her office. Linda raced in to grab the phone.

“Lunch’s up. I haven’t even seen you today, and I want to find out how the date went,” Mae blustered into the phone.

“No probs, love. Grab Helen, and I will meet you out front. Chinese on the corner today?”

“Sounds perfect.”

Linda dismissed the model, realizing she’d lost herself in design all morning. There would be more work to be done before this day could be called over, especially with the trip to the Gold Coast so close.

Grabbing her bag, Linda shouted to Millie that she’d be gone for an hour, and she ran out the door.

Helen and Mae stood in the door at the front of the building, blocking it for everyone trying to get in.

“Girls, girls, girls, let’s get us some white wine. I have a tale to tell!”

With a squeal they clamored into a cab and headed the four blocks to the restaurant.

Sitting in a fairly quiet end of a busy restaurant, food ordered, Linda raised her glass. “To my two dearest friends, without whom I’d never make it past the end of a day!”

“Here, here,” said Mae and Helen together.

But Mae seemed to have other things on her mind. “Now! To business. Tell us every detail of the date!”

The two women settled in, leaning forward so as not to miss a word.

“Well, he took me to Cliff Tops first.”

“Mmm! Very nice.” Helen approved, with a nod toward Mae. “And pretty pricey. Did he save up his manny money all week to pay for dinner?”

Mae shot Helen a disapproving glance and turned to Linda, encouraging her to continue.

“No, actually. Turns out he’s cashed up. He also owns one of those white apartments right on the beach. You know, the funky ’60s-style ones? He’s got one on the top with stunning views of the water.”

“Where’d he get his cash?” Helen asked.

“Lordy! I know!” Mae shouted. “I can’t believe I didn’t put this together before. He was a model! Huge, too! When he used to surf. I forgot to tell you that! Wow, so he’s been smart with his cash and didn’t buy blondes and marijuana?”

Linda’s stomach clenched at the “blondes” joke, simultaneously reprimanding herself to get a life and stop being a baby.

“No, apparently he didn’t. He likes women over forty! Always has.”

“Oooooohhhhhh!” Mae and Helen chorused.

“He’s a mummy’s boy?” Mae asked, sounding a little shocked. “But that’s just perfect.”

“I wouldn’t call him a mummy’s boy...” Linda couldn’t help noticing herself getting defensive. “He likes older women. You know, it’s his thing.”

“You mean his fetish until he’s grown up?” clarified Mae. “Well, he’s just fucking perfect. Was the sex good?”

“We had anal.”

The words were out of Linda’s mouth just as the food arrived.

The young waitress dropped the food down so hard little meat formations, assumed to be the ordered salt and pepper squid, went bouncing across the table. The waitress practically threw the plain rice bucket at Mae before she ran for the kitchen again.

“I think she speaks English,” Mae said. She started to scoop out spoonfuls of fluffy white rice into the bowls and then went on. “But back to the important issue at hand. How was it?”

Linda glanced from Mae to Helen, whose wide eyes filled with a horror-like fascination. She glanced back to Mae’s educated smile for courage to continue.

“Fantastic. I mean, I’ve done it before, but this time, he was slow and rhythmical.”

“Oh, Jesus, I so know what you mean. God, it’s good when it’s done well.”

Helen glanced quickly over to Mae, then back to Linda.

“Well, I haven’t. You know we do lots of things but the idea of that, well, it hasn’t...you know! It just never took between us.”

“It’s not mandatory,” said Mae in a tired voice. “You don’t have to. There’re no laws.”

“I know. I just feel a little provincial.”

Linda smiled at her friend. “It’s worth having a go at once. You never know. It may be something you both really enjoy.”

A large plate of Sichuan beef arrived.

“But isn’t it...you know...dirty?”

“Can we have the ‘how to have anal sex’ conversation another time please?” asked Mae, eyeing the food in front of her. “I want to eat, for God’s sake.”

“Okay. Well, there’s another problem.”

“You talk. I’ll serve your food!”

“I am still getting carried away. Well, not really. It’s just that the intimacy is so high and we are so strong and it’s going so well. I feel a sort of insecurity and I am battling the desire to make it serious.”

“Women!” announced Helen, back in control of herself again. “We do this. We are conditioned to want to attach. Simone de Beauvoir says all it takes is the smallest push and we are ready to give up everything.”

“She’s right,” agreed Mae.

“Do we have to give up everything, though? Can’t the rules be re-written?”

Helen and Mae glanced at each other. “You go ahead,” Mae said.

Helen continued. “You have to ask yourself why you’re doing it. It will be hard. Geoff and I rewrite the rules but kids, work, and the business of life have you fall into old habits and old routines. It’s a big commitment to have a relationship at all, let alone an unusual one that society will glance at sideways. And you are talking about setting this up with a young man who is barely able to understand these concepts.”

“Do you know if he feels the same?” Mae added.

“Well, he tries to tell me, but I cut him off. Then in the café last night, one of his surfing mate’s girlfriends—”

“His surfing mate’s girlfriend? Please don’t tell me you had a heart to heart in the ladies’?”

Linda swallowed. “We had a heart to heart in the ladies’.”

“Oooooohhhhhh!” Chorused Mae and Helen together.

“He’s not growing up, you’re growing down! That’s why you are having these teenage girl thoughts! You are turning into a kid around him, when he should be growing up around you,” Mae continued, “Love like this is early days. I’m not saying there is no chance for it, but you have to at least realize you’re not looking at it rationally. Common sense is missing here.”

Linda looked down at the squid and beef. “Surf and turf. Just like us. I think I’ve been doing a good job of staying rational.”

“There isn’t an ‘us,’ and there isn’t going to be. Why do I feel like I am repeating myself here? You’ve already made this decision.”

“Here, here,” Helen toasted. “Did you try to talk to him, at least?”

“I did tell him. I had the chat. I laid it all out.”

Helen looked at her. “Well, go on. What did he say?”

“That was when we had anal.”

Both women stared at her, eyes wide, saying nothing.

* * * *

The lunch continued for a little longer than an hour. They knew they’d have to stay extra time at the end of the day to get everything done. They spent the cab ride back whispering anal sex details into Helen’s ear and watching her get excited and grimace each after the other. The cab driver couldn’t hear them, but the sight of three beautiful women whispering in each other’s ears and giggling almost had him ride up over the footpath. He turned sharply at the last minute, a pedestrian springing out of the way just in time.

The kids were supposed to stay with their dad for the last night before they went to the Gold Coast. Linda enjoyed the space for a while to get to know Andrew a little better. They had no further conversation about the little “deal” between them, and, to Linda, everything looked as though it worked out.

That night, Andrew came over and they ordered pizza and listened to The Beach Boys records. Linda hated The Beach Boys and realized she’d compromised again. But lying naked on the rug on her lounge floor with “Fun, Fun, Fun” ringing in her ears while Andrew lapped on her clit, somehow didn’t make it feel like a compromise any longer. Maybe simply give and take.

By the time Andrew took her, the CD rack switched to Led Zeppelin again and Linda allowed herself to be transported to that other place.

They talked after sex, made jokes, and drank red wine together. Andrew asked Linda about Koan and she told him about the process of design.

“It starts with a small idea. You get it from a magazine or a woman wearing a shirt a certain way. It’s a barely-there seed. You roll it around the dry part of your mind, till it gets stronger with the activity. Soon you realize it will be something and that it needs to be nurtured and planted. Depending on the vibration in your soul, you place it in the type of soil you know it needs, so to speak. Jeans need different soil from silk cami tops for example.”

Andrew poured more wine into her glass and watched her intently, candlelight flickering across his face. “Go on,” he whispered.

“The planting stage is the hardest. That’s when I have to design a line. All the seeds are in the right soil and the business side of cultivation has to begin. I water the ground with the search for materials and fabrics the entire world over and get them purchased and sent to my makers. Italian cashmere, fine Australian merino, Egyptian cotton, Thai silk, they all come together to water and sunshine down on my seeds.”

She took a sip of her wine.

“Soon I can see the tips of the plants poking through my fertile mind. They’re coming together with the careful attention placed to the vision of

the final product. Eventually they have formed into rudimentary shapes with the sample materials that I want them to be in at the end.”

“And now starts the final proofs. The part you like the best?”

Linda smiled at his understanding. “Yes. That is the part I like the best. The plants are cropped and carefully measured. This is the part when I get the live models and bring my hands and my mind into line with that vibration in my soul. I work with the piece until I feel it in perfect sync. In harmony, each part of myself pulling its own weight toward making my little creation the piece of perfection. The wearable art that it is.”

Andrew stared at her across the candlelight, stars in his deep blue eyes.

“And that’s how it’s all done.” She looked down, suddenly self-conscious.

He smiled, taking her wine from her. He rested both their glasses on the wood floor, and leaned across her for a kiss. Without pulling back, he slid to where she lay and began the third round of lovemaking for the night.

Warmth and sex blurred the rest of the night and Linda felt safe and richly rewarded for who she was. Andrew reached out for her in places and ways that she didn’t know were available for such connection. And for just a brief time, she allowed herself to be swept away again.

* * * *

Friday was a haze of preparation meetings and getting ready for the weekend of work and family fun. Andrew booked tickets to Dreamworld and Movieworld and kept in touch for most of the day. Millie organized airline tickets, paid for by Koan, of course, and by the end of the day, Linda realized packing would be all they had to do. The flights left at six p.m., so Linda left work at three in order to get everyone ready.

Mona had packed bags and Andrew picked the children up from school. He arrived home at four with his own bags packed, ready to go. They smiled warmly on their greeting, not wanting to show any deep connection in front of the children.

The kids buzzed with excitement about going on a plane.

“Mummy, can I fly the plane?” Jemma requested.

“No darling, we let the pilot do that,” Linda replied.

“Doesn’t mean you won’t ever be able to fly a plane,” Andrew added in his perfect way. “Maybe one day you will be a pilot. Does that sound like fun?”

“I might, too,” Aaron jumped in.

“I think I should start today,” Jemma affirmed.

Toby sat in sullen silence and couldn’t be reached. He always came back this way from his father’s. Linda looked over at her oldest, still sad through the bustle of getting everyone ready.

“I’ll spend some time with him when we’re there,” whispered Andrew to her at one point in the bathroom. “He’ll be fine, you wait and see.”

Again, Linda felt grateful that she wasn’t alone.

The taxi arrived at four in time to get the rabble into the cab and away to the airport. Linda sat up front with the driver while Andrew had the children bundled around him in the back seat.

“Will there be time to surf?” Toby asked, speaking for the first time since he arrived home.

Andrew smiled at him and ruffled his hair. “Sure will, champ. What about we go catch some waves before the others get up tomorrow morning? That’s the best time to surf the coast, you know.”

Toby managed a weak smile toward Andrew as the smaller children piped up with a chorus of “we’re coming too.”

At the airport, the driver organized the bags while Linda and Andrew tended to the children. Despite screams of “Aaron get back here” and “Jemma, put that lady’s handbag down,” they managed to get to the bag check and get booked in by five.

“God, it’s a miracle we’re even here! I don’t know what I’d do without you.” Linda smiled at Andrew as they pushed the kids in the direction of the food court.

“We’re not there yet!” Famous last words as Andrew sped off in the opposite direction after Aaron, who had seen a balloon across the other side of the airport.

Linda grabbed the other two children's hands, ignoring Toby's attempts to pull out as she headed for McDonald's.

"Would you guys like a snack now or on the plane?"

"Now!" Jemma yelled. Andrew and Aaron made it back and Andrew sat with the children while Linda bought them a round of small fries and orange juice. This distracted the children for a brief few minutes. Andrew bought the two adults coffees and sat across the table from Linda, next to Toby.

Linda lifted her coffee and glanced directly into Andrew's sparkling eyes.

He smiled back, connecting with her in the vibration of her soul.

Chapter 12

Children, always an adventure in themselves, never made for smooth flights.

Aaron received a plastic toothpick with his meal.

“What is it, mummy?”

“It’s to clean food out of teeth, darling. But be very careful with it. It is very sharp.”

On this advice, Aaron seemed to think it best to get rid of the offending object. He did so by throwing it, javelin like, at the food of the passenger in front of him, where it landed at a perfect forty-five degree angle. Aaron then wailed that he’d lost his toothpick, causing the person in front to ask if he could be moved to another seat.

Jemma insisted on being able to fly the plane herself, so loudly the hostess offered to take her up to the cockpit, only to bring her back three minutes later when she’d reached out to touch the thing the pilot told her she couldn’t touch. The flight control stick.

Toby sat in sullen silence even after being given a window seat. When Jemma wasn’t trying to cause a crash, she leaned over him to see through the window. When Linda asked to her to get off of Toby as only clouds and water existed down there, Jemma insisted she saw birds and waves, too, and that it was terribly important to her future career as a biologist that she look through the window.

Toby, in a silent rage, got up to go to the toilet only to find his seat taken when he got back. He then asked the hostess if he could be moved as well. Andrew and Linda swapped seats with Toby and Jemma, only to swap again when Aaron had to be moved.

Linda started to think they should have hired out all of business class.

Arriving at Coolangatta Airport, they made their way out of the plane with as much drama, accusation, and hubbub as they'd caused when they went in.

After grabbing their bags, they bustled outside the airport, trying to find a taxi. Swaying palm trees and a blast of sticky heat told them they'd entered a foreign land. People wore shorts and Hawaiian shirts and the place had a "Disney plastic," clean energy. Perfect for children.

"God, this place is fake! Thank God I'm here with you!" Andrew whispered in Linda's ear, echoing her thoughts.

They bundled into a cab together, sticky, hot, and tired. Linda gave Toby the front seat for some peace and quiet. Still attempting wide-eyed scrutiny, Jemma looked out the window at all she could see tumbling by, eyes drooping then flung open by willpower. However, she soon sunk into the cool leather of the backseat and Linda noticed that Toby was dozing as well. Linda and Andrew had a few moments to whisper to each other in the back of the car.

Andrew pointed to various sites as they drove past. Relieved she didn't have to entertain anymore, she smiled a thank you at him.

"I'm glad you're here. I can't wait for some time alone." She gave a hoarse whisper in his ear and rested her hand gently on his.

"Hey, look at that," Andrew whispered back.

Linda looked past him out the window to see a car wash advertisement. Although on top of a closed building, at eight-thirty at night it had a long line of cars at it.

"Bubbles 'n' Babes!" she read on the sign. "What's that?"

"I've heard about it," Andrew whispered back. "It's a car wash strip club. You come to wash your car and they give you a show."

Linda felt the heat rise between her legs. "Really? Can they do that sort of thing?"

Andrew chuckled. "They can on the Gold Coast. This place is about money, and sex makes money better than anything else."

They sped on toward the hotel. When they arrived, Linda raced in to get the key to their room. Andrew carried Aaron in his arms, with a sleepy Toby and Jemma wandering behind him, and led them to their rooms.

Linda got busy with checking in and making sure everything suited their needs, and then made her way up to her room herself.

Andrew had the boys in one room and Linda bunked in the next room with Jemma. Linda picked her up from Andrew's room, promising to meet him in another fifteen minutes, and settled Jemma into a bed in the second bedroom of her hotel room.

Linda wandered into her room, facing a nice, large, queen-size bed, her two suitcases, and her briefcase lumped on top. She opened the larger of the two bags to inspect the range of clothes she'd brought with her and heaved a sigh of relief to see the range in perfect condition.

Sliding doors opened in the small lounge area of her room. Andrew opened the doors between their suites and walked in. The boys slept in their small bedrooms. Andrew walked directly into Linda's arms and kissed her deeply.

"I know we have to be careful, but I just wanted to sneak one in before we get too deep into family mode." He smiled, his voice slightly above a whisper.

"I know. It's going to be hard. I will get a sitter for the kids tomorrow night and we can have dinner out. Does that sound good?"

Andrew held her for a little longer. "Yes, but it's not what I want. I don't know how easy it's going to be for me to get what I want."

With a mocking tone Linda said, "Men! You're all the same."

"Oh, come on! Like you haven't been thinking the same way since the car wash!"

Linda caught her breath at how well he knew her. "Ohh. Stop knowing so much about me! It's disconcerting."

"Like the way we connect? Does this grab you in the same way?"

Before she had time to pull away, his lips found hers, joining with the incredibly romantic words coming from his lips. Linda allowed herself to

fall deeper into his mouth as she cut off the warning bells coming from her brain.

Stepping back, she said, "Enough of that, cheeky!"

They smiled at each other for a moment. Linda wondered what to do next. Should they spend some time together? She wanted to sleep after such a full day, but Andrew standing there made her pulse race, waking her up. It seemed right to want to include something between them.

Suddenly Jemma said, from behind her, "Mummy, what are you and Andrew doing?"

Andrew whispered in Linda's ear, "I guess that answers my next question." He turned to Jemma. "Nothing, sweetie. We are talking about how you children are all settled in your beds and it's time for us to go to sleep, too."

He added a soft "goodnight" to Linda and went through the open doors into the other suite, leaving the doors open behind him.

Linda turned and picked up Jemma. "You need to be in bed, little lady!"

Jemma, too tired to protest, let Linda carry her to her little bed and lay her down on the sheets. She turned immediately into sleep, and Linda took a delicious few moments to smile down at her child, serene, peaceful, and calm.

* * * *

Linda woke to a huge thud on the tops of her thighs the next morning. Her eyes flew open when she realized Jemma and Aaron had landed themselves on her bed, on top of her.

"Ouch! Good morning, monsters! How did you both sleep?"

"Toby and Andrew are gone, and I am cranky!" Jemma folded her small arms in front of her for emphasis.

Watching her, wide-eyed, Aaron tried the same thing with his arms. "Me too."

"They must have gone for a surf," Linda said, absentmindedly. Forcing herself properly awake, she focused on the problem at hand.

“Toby needs a little grown-up time and space and that means a little private time with Andrew.”

“I hate him and I want to go now!” Jemma shouted.

“Me, too,” Aaron said.

“Oh, what a pity,” Linda thought fast, “because I need help choosing the breakfast we’ll have in our rooms and I thought you two could decide what we all eat.”

“I’m having pancakes!” Jemma yelled.

“Me too!” Aaron yelled.

Linda climbed out of bed, donned a robe, and padded to the sitting room area of her suite. She pulled out the breakfast menu to show the little ones. As she did, the door opened and in walked Toby and Andrew, wet and sandy from the surf. Toby grinned from ear to ear.

Linda pretended not to notice Toby’s grin, nor Andrew’s muscled chest. “The little ones are about to choose breakfast. What would you two like? Have you been for a surf?”

“Yeah,” said Toby nonchalantly, as if he did it all the time. “We wanted to catch some waves before you guys got up.”

Linda thrilled at the glow of pride emanating from him. Linda mouthed “good work” at Andrew as the little ones started to make a fuss about finding pancakes on the menu.

After they’d ordered breakfast, Andrew and Linda occupied themselves with getting the children dressed properly and ready for a day out.

Linda disappeared into the bathroom to change for her meeting, organized in her clients’ hotel. They stayed at the biggest casino in town and Linda had a drive on her hands. She could hear Andrew fussing in the other room with details of the beach at Dreamworld and fun in the afternoon at the hotel. Wolfing down a quick breakfast, Linda kissed her good-byes to everyone, except Andrew, and made her way to the lobby where she knew a car waited for her.

The drive to the casino didn’t take as long as she’d anticipated. Linda used it to go over her presentation. The Tomakashi Group wanted exclusivity, as everyone did, and Linda intended to negotiate a few extra

boutique stores if they promised a couple of exclusive pieces for their department stores. This solid strategy would be a fine negotiating point. She had the pieces with her, pressed and ready, and her confidence gave her the strength to get her point strongly across.

The casino stood proud, a gaudy monument to out-of-towners, but at least the main entrance ran into the hotel and not directly into the casino. Before alerting them to her presence, she had the clothes hung and steamed on a portable rack. Linda cast a professional eye over them, building her confidence that the meeting would go well. The executives and their buyer booked the penthouse suite for the stay and the showing. Linda alerted the concierge she was ready and they called the suite.

Right on time, Linda thought, looking at her watch.

Within a few minutes, a porter told her he'd escort her to the penthouse. He pushed the cart of clothing behind Linda as she made her way to the elevator. The hotel didn't look too bad. It wasn't as over the top as it used to be.

Linda entered the penthouse suite to find the two executives and the buyer dressed and ready for the meeting. The impeccable suite impressed Linda. She had to hand it to them, they knew how to take care of themselves. The Japanese men bowed and introduced themselves formally, but their buyer stepped forward immediately. A younger woman shook Linda's hand, looking her in the eye the entire time. She introduced herself as Shini Takoma, behaving very Western in her approach to Linda.

Probably why she's here, Linda thought.

Linda knew she had an hour for this meeting to turn things her way.

* * * *

An hour-and-a-half later, Linda walked out of the room with the porter and the clothes, and a large grin on her face. They'd loved the idea. The meeting went meticulously to plan.

Linda felt high.

In one of the side rooms from the lobby, she packed the bag and dialed into a four-way with Darren, Mae, and Helen, to tell them the visit had been an enormous success.

“It went like a charm! They loved the range, they loved the personal touch, and they’ve approved each and every one of the minor boutiques. The meeting is definitely a success. The personal touch made all the difference. The Tomakashi Group is on board.”

After much cheering and talking about the small nuances of the meeting, Linda packed and shuffled herself along. By the time she’d completed her briefing, she’d packed the bag and was sitting in the lobby.

She said her good-byes as she worked her way to where they had her hired car waiting.

Linda drove home, taking no time at all to get back to the suite at the hotel. The beautiful day made her want to celebrate. She threw off her fancy work clothes and donned a beautiful Filippa K bikini and a sarong and headed downstairs for a bite to eat.

A glance at her watch told her Andrew and the kids wouldn’t be back for two hours, so she had time to eat by the pool, maybe getting in a few laps.

The glorious sunshine met her through the windows and doors of the hotel. Reaching out for her, licking and teasing at her skin, thrills coursed through Linda in response. Work had been a huge success. Tomorrow she could check out Palazzo Versace, but for now the agenda held nothing but pleasure in the sunshine. Some rest, some shiny coolness from the water in the pool, an afternoon of fun with Andrew and the kids, and the great pleasures of Andrew on a date.

Linda’s imagination ran away with her as she fantasized about where they might have sex tonight. The room out of bounds made things a little more complicated. Without her realizing, Linda’s thoughts traveled to the car wash. In her mind’s eye she watched naked men rubbing themselves over the windscreen, her eyes glued to their most intimate parts as Andrew nuzzled and fondled her, all under the lust-filled gazes of the attendants.

Linda paused in the foyer of the hotel. The images flashing through her mind distracted her so she lost her bearings. Several arms branched out from the lobby of the hotel. The one she came out of held the rooms on the ground floor and the lifts. Linda couldn't remember which exits led to the pool.

Making her way down one of the arms, she found she had wandered around the small shopping mall in the hotel. Absentmindedly, her thoughts floated to Koan and how one of their stores might look in Palazzo Versace. Her thoughts traced back over the huge success of her meeting and the success of Koan's new line.

A moment of acute, exquisite pleasure flooded through her. The kind of pleasure that can only ever be obtained alone and without planning. Linda knew she could call herself a success. The petty problems of the day fell away and Linda congratulated herself on a splendid life.

And then she saw it.

In one of the swim suit windows it looked out at her from behind the glass, intruding on her perfect moment. A call for her to reach new heights.

A perfect season ahead, pure white bikini.

Linda glanced guiltily over one shoulder, then the other, to confirm no one saw her in the corridor. She looked at the bikini again as if to say "Who, me?" She knew what it wanted. Linda went into the shop.

Exactly thirty minutes later, Linda sat by the pool in the most cutting-edge, "now" bikini, showing off her hard work to perfection, accentuating curves, erasing harsh angles. Most of all, the bikini revealed no imperfections. All the problems Linda always found in her own body disappeared. She became the woman in the white bikini. She'd mastered it.

Linda stood on top of the world.

She lay in the sun and relaxed for a while, until a shadow fell across her face and didn't shift. She opened her eyes, protected from pool-reflective glare by large Gucci sunglasses, to find Andrew staring at her.

"Hi," Linda called to him. She glanced over at Toby, Jemma, and Aaron walking toward her from the other side of the pool. As she glanced back, she

caught the usually cool Andrew letting his eyes trail down her breasts and over the curves of her body with devilish abandon.

“Hi, yourself, and may I say, wow!” Andrew said, as the children pushed past him to clamor toward her. The two little ones climbed onto her lap.

“Mummy, Mummy, we saw Wonder Woman and we went on a Ferris wheel and we ate cotton candy and toffee apples and we saw Batman and I am never going to sleep again!” Jemma shouted in her ear.

“Me, too!” said Aaron.

“We went on a rollercoaster!” Jemma said.

“For babies,” added Toby, who almost seemed relaxed and happy.

“Not for babies!” yelled Jemma indignantly. “For brave people. The sign said ‘For brave’ not ‘babies.’” She turned to Linda. “It was scary and it was for brave people. Aaron and I went on it.”

Linda turned her eyes to the silent Andrew who stared directly back at her, a faint smile on his lips.

“Your bathers are pretty, Mum!” Jemma shouted. “I think you’re like the girls sitting on the beach we passed on the way home. Toby will tell you, he looked at them, too. He looked for a long time.”

Toby went beet red, but Linda came to his rescue.

“Don’t talk about what Toby is looking at. He can tell me what he saw. I just want to hear what you saw. People see things differently, Jemma.”

Toby shot Linda a brief glance of thanks, making Linda’s heart soar.

Andrew pulled another lounge close to the one Linda lay on and the four of them told her all about their trip to Dreamworld.

“Have you guys had lunch?” Linda finally broke in to ask.

“Yes!” Jemma yelled to be heard above the other two children. “We went to the beach where the girls’ boobies are huge and too big for their tops!”

Linda glanced at Andrew. He watched Jemma, ruffling her hair on the top of her head. He looked at Linda and reacted when he saw her arched brow.

“Hey, I’m only human.” He smiled. “Besides, isn’t that what you want?”

Distracting the children, Linda said, “Well, it’s settled. We have an afternoon beside the pool to relax and play.”

“Yay!” chorused all three.

“Let’s leave your mum here and get ourselves dressed for an afternoon at the pool.” Andrew rounded the children up to make their way upstairs.

For a little while, Linda lay alone again. Awake from her reverie and realizing the children and gorgeous Andrew would be back soon, she sat up and began to read an *Australian Vogue* she’d picked up in the lobby. Glancing through it at a nice story that had a few Koan pieces in it, she let her glance slide away from the pages to the folks around the pool.

Linda’s eyes settled on a couple across the way. They had two children, a girl about Toby’s age and a little boy Jemma’s age. Linda couldn’t help watching, fascinated by the daily machinations of another little family playing itself out before her. “Karen! Watch Daniel when you’re out there, please.” The woman gave orders to her children as she relaxed in the warm sun.

“Hi, Mum!” Jemma stood before her, small and loud, casting a long shadow in her water wings and bubble. She almost seemed like something that would crawl out of a swamp, not head into a pool.

Without another word, she ran to the edge and threw herself in. Andrew and Linda shot glances at each other and back toward Jemma. Everyone who knew her had come to expect this sort of thing from Jemma.

Toby moved toward the steps in his bathers and sat in the shallow end for a while, watching. Linda noticed the girl from the other family looking in Toby’s direction.

Aaron sat to their left in a small children’s pool. The water came up to his ankles, but he had his water wings on as well.

“All sun-screened up and keen to relax,” Andrew drew the couch next to Linda, “and I’m at your service ma’am!”

Linda turned to appreciate his hard, tanned body. Coarse hairs graced his legs. His black and gold board shorts long to just below his knee accentuated his deep tan. Linda looked away before she got to his crotch.

“Jesus, don’t tempt me!”

“How’d the meeting go?”

“Perfect. They’re on board. I felt so good when I came back. I had everything just the way I wanted it.”

“Is that why you bought that nothing-short-of-totally-dangerous bikini?”

Linda turned her face back toward the pool, casting a casual eye over all three of the children, instincts alive and ready to leap toward any of them that may need her in the water.

“Yes. Actually, that is why I bought it. You like?”

“I so like. I can only show you how much later on. I hope you haven’t forgotten that you’d promised me a little time?”

“No, I haven’t forgotten.” Linda watched the young girl make her way toward Toby. *No denying that drive to get yourself closer to a man.*

“We’ll get the kids settled and the hotel babysitter engaged and I thought we could eat in this nice restaurant I saw at the beach.”

Linda listened, but also absentmindedly watched the young girl talking to Toby. Toby responded to her and they were engrossed in a private conversation. Jemma swam over to splash them and Toby didn’t push her away as he usually did. He embarrassed her, showing off to the new girl that watched him.

Linda turned to Andrew. “Sorry, honey. Just watching Toby and that girl. Yes, all that sounds great.”

Andrew turned his head away from Aaron’s direction for a moment to look at Toby. Then he turned back toward Aaron.

“He’s scoring. I may have to talk to him a little later on.”

Linda smiled.

A strange voice piped up near her.

“Let’s hope not! We’re not quite ready for our daughter to be having those kinds of chats!”

Startled, Linda turned toward the woman's voice to find that the couple she'd admired earlier by the pool had made their way over and seemed to be keen to introduce themselves.

"Mind if we sit?" the woman asked as she dragged a long deck chair closer to Linda. "We wanted to come over and introduce ourselves. My name's Jane and this is Chris."

"Come and join us," Andrew enthused immediately. "It's great to see your kids getting on so well with our lot."

"These kids are yours? We thought, well, obviously you're a couple, but we couldn't make out the details."

"The kids are mine. Yes, I'm older than Andrew."

"No offence intended. It's just that *younger* women don't usually look this good."

Linda shot him a sideways glance, briefly wondering whether to accept the clumsy compliment. She decided she would and then looked at his wife or partner.

"Are you two together? I mean, are they your kids?"

"Yes" Jane said. "What about you guys? We assumed you to be a couple. Are you?"

At the exact same time as Linda said "No" Andrew said "Yes."

Jane chuckled. "Looks like you to have a little chatting to do yourselves."

"That was a little awkward," Andrew said, looking at Linda.

Linda turned away from him and focused on the couple. "Sorry about that. We're new and working a couple of things out. But yes, we are together."

Andrew smiled at her, but she could see the hurt in his eyes. Linda thought Jane noticed it as well.

"I have to tell you, you look like the perfect couple from across the pool. You got our pick as the choice couple to befriend while we're here for the weekend."

Andrew smiled at Jane in a way Linda interpreted as grateful.

“Looks like our kids are getting on well.” Chris stayed focused toward Jemma and their young boy who jumped off the edge of the pool into the water. Linda glanced over at Toby and the young girl only to see them engrossed in conversation.

“Looks like we may have to keep an eye on our pre-teens,” Linda said.

Chris glanced over at them.

“Tammy’s a good girl. She’ll flirt innocently with him, but she won’t get into any trouble. I don’t mean to be silly, but Andrew, you look familiar to me. Do you surf by any chance?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Andrew Barton?” Chris nearly leapt off his chair.

Andrew laughed, looking relaxed again. “Yeah. That’s me.”

“Dude! I am a fan. I mean, I never got to see you up close, but I watched quite a few of your contests on the water. You’re a legend, man. What made you give the board away?”

“I haven’t. I just stopped competing. Injury. I’m okay, but it took a while to recover and I don’t want to go back now.”

As if they’d known each other all their lives, Chris and Andrew launched into surfer talk while Jane came closer to Linda and started to talk fashion. The women chatted warmly. Conversation came easily for Linda. She liked Jane and found her mind to be intelligent and free. Soon they became firm friends, watching the children and talking easily over margaritas.

“Babe, I gotta ask you. Why are you holding out on Andrew? He’s gorgeous and so mad for you.” Jane paused and looked Linda over. “You’re not worried about the age gap are you? Tell me you’re not the type.”

“I’m worried about the age gap.” Linda confessed, feeling provincial.

Jane didn’t say anything at first. She looked at Linda intently from behind Armani sunglasses.

“You don’t have an image problem, do you? I assume in the fashion industry you must be self-conscious about it, even though you don’t need to be.”

"I do have an image problem. God, I'm embarrassed to tell you. Also, he's my kids' nanny and I ought to be protecting their relationship." Linda paused, not sure if she could say the next thing. She'd never even thought it proper before and this woman was still a total stranger, despite the wonderful alcohol turning her into Linda's long-lost best friend. "The truth is I am only in control of my life at work. At home I'm a mess. Divorced, no time for relationships. Toby is a sad, troubled boy most of the time. Jemma is terribly bright and commands a great deal of attention. And Aaron is too little to be left to himself. I need Andrew to be what he's being."

It felt good to get that out. Linda surprised herself, then added, "Actually, I've never said any of that out loud before and by George, it felt good. I'm not organized enough to screw with what Andrew provides. I think that's at the base of my anxiety."

Her new friend watched her carefully.

"Actually, what's at the bases of your anxiety is fear of losing Andrew because, babe, I can so get it." She paused and looked over at Andrew talking with her husband, muscles flexing on the two men in the sun, Andrew's long, sandy hair salted up in thick sea-salt strands.

"He's a gorgeous guy. I think you have nothing more than the forty-year-old blues."

"Do you think so? Is it that obvious?"

"Have you gone for a younger man before?"

"Never!"

"And now that you've turned forty suddenly you want one."

"Well, sort of. I didn't want one till I laid eyes on him and I confess, from that moment almost exactly, I wanted this particular younger man very much."

"Sounds to me like you're just refusing to be a stereotypical forty-year-old. He'll be the perfect antidote for your worries about age for many years to come. And he'll help with the kids."

"What if he leaves me for a younger woman? And why wouldn't he?"

"Not going to happen. Trust me on this one. The only people in the world who don't know that forty-year-old women have got it all over every

woman younger than them are the forty-year-old women. No one else in the world is fooled! He'll never leave you. Not if you don't want him to."

"I don't want him to," Linda confessed.

"I know. It's that obvious."

Chapter 13

The chat and laughter continued over cocktails as the afternoon sped on. Everyone found a friend, except for Aaron, for whom the excitement of having all the new people around needed nothing added.

By the pool, Jane and Linda fell in friendship love with one another. Jane's wit and sophistication revealed itself to Linda more as they talked. Her new friend ran an art gallery in Melbourne and had staffing issues and production issues along the same vein as Linda's own Koan issues. They also shared the problem of caring for their children and spending quality time with them.

"I think you're lucky," Jane ventured. "I love my kids, but heavens above, I have so much trouble fitting them and work in each day. I wish Craig could be a 'manny.' I'd be a lot more relaxed at work." She paused to take a long sip of cool water they decided to drink between poolside cocktails.

"I feel a little guilty at times, Jane. I mean, he's so good with the kids, I feel like he belongs to them."

"Oh, that's silly. Husbands and wives take years to work this out. You have it organized from the start of this relationship. Plus, he's younger than you. Yum. I can only see good stuff here."

"But Jane, come on. He's twenty-six. I can't expect a relationship to work under these circumstances. Even if it does, what will happen when I'm sixty and he's forty-five? Do you think he's going to want to handle his midlife crisis with a sixty-year-old woman?"

"What on Earth are you talking about? Mid-life crisis? Do people still have those? Isn't that all about unfulfilled dreams and unmet expectations? Haven't we evolved through those sorts of things? Even if you do suffer a

problem in, what are we talking about, twenty years time, so what? So you both move on then? You'll have had the best years of your life with," Jane turned her head to focus on Andrew, shaking it as she continued, "one of the hottest men in the country. You're mad, as far I can see."

"But the differences, the age gap, his friends, the difficulties."

"Stop!" Jane commanded. "Too much thinking. No relationship could stand up to such scrutiny! No more of this. As far as Craig and I are concerned, the two of you are a happily married couple, and that's how we're going to relate to you. Enjoy the idea for the time you spend here and knock it all off when you get home if you must."

"You mean, practice the idea of being with him?"

Jane rolled her eyes. "Good Lord! This isn't an accounting degree! It's love! And frankly, I think the two of you have got it bad. But don't take my word for it. You just enjoy the next twenty-four hours and don't give any of this another thought."

Linda smiled at her new friend. "I think you're good for me."

Jane grinned back and leaned in for a hug. "I certainly hope so."

* * * *

It was Jane, a little while later, who suggested she and Craig take the children for the evening while Linda and Andrew went out.

"You have something planned, don't you? Why don't you both enjoy it, knowing the kids will be with us?"

Andrew and Linda made eye contact. Obviously, Andrew thought this to be a great idea.

Soon Linda found herself back in her room, getting dressed for a night on the town with Andrew.

"You look nice, Mummy. Where are you going?" Jemma stood next to her, opening a bottle of expensive cologne and dabbing it on her wrists and ears as if she did it every day.

“Darling, put that down. It’s not for little girls. Andrew and I thought you might like a night with your new friends. We thought you might have dinner with them.”

Jemma studied her, not buying the story for a minute.

“Why? Where are you going with Andrew?”

“Andrew and I are going to go out so we can talk about you children and his job for a while.”

Jemma picked up a lip liner, thought better of it, and placed it carefully back on the bathroom bench top.

“Is Andrew going to be our new daddy?”

Linda turned toward her daughter in shock.

“Of course not, darling. You have a wonderful daddy and no one can ever replace him. There will never be a new daddy for you, sweetheart. Andrew is just going to work out how to look after you properly when I am at work.”

“Maybe you should marry him, anyway. Just to make sure to keep him here,” she said as if it were the most natural thing in the world. As if thinking further, she said, “You can be his girlfriend, you know. He doesn’t have one and we don’t mind.”

Linda leaned down to give her daughter a kiss on the forehead and Jemma reached around her, squeezing her tight. Suddenly Linda knew what this was all about.

“Darling, Andrew and I are just going to talk about his job. But I want you to know that if I did have a boyfriend, you and your brothers are still the most important thing to me in the world.”

Jemma grinned a smile to rival the curve of the Harbor Bridge and Linda knew she’d read things right. As Jemma scampered off in the direction of her suitcase to decide what to wear, Linda took a deep breath and fixed herself up for the rest of the evening.

Satisfied all was well with the world, she turned to the room ready to make her usual amount of mischief as they all tried to get ready to go out.

Andrew volunteered to get the kids ready, but after a few minutes hubbub, Linda realized the children were so wired it would take both of them to get them ready.

Jemma wanted to wear her pink pajamas, believing them to be the more flattering, but Linda had only packed her blue ones, which Jemma claimed made her look like a boy. Andrew sat her down and tried to explain the philosophy of social conditioning and how the color of one's pajamas don't have to affect her femininity when Aaron ran past and yelled she looked like a boy because she wore blue pajamas.

Linda found her a yellow sundress and told her she could wear that after her bath and it could be her pajamas.

Andrew found Toby after his bath, taking an unusually long time with his hair. Hanging around in the background, Andrew tried to open up a conversation, but Toby would have none of it. If he dressed up for a girl, he didn't want Andrew or Linda guessing and they chose to give him his moment.

Finally the children were bathed and clean and in their robe's. Even Jemma because the yellow sundress served as her pajamas for the evening.

The entourage wandered down the hall across a small faux bay and into the next building, where their new friend's room waited. Opening the door led them all into a much more glamorous suite than the one Koan had booked for Andrew and Linda. Everyone oohed and ahed as they walked in.

"Why didn't we get a room like this one?" demanded Aaron immediately.

Jane jumped in with, "Because we got it especially so that you would visit." This made perfect sense to Aaron who didn't need any information after that.

After much kissing and promises to be good and declarations of "Mummy and Andrew, you go away now," Linda and Andrew found themselves in a taxi heading off toward town for a night on their own.

* * * *

Linda snuggled into Andrew in the back of the taxi.

“Have you made some plans for tonight?” she asked, arching her brow.

He smiled down at her. “A few. I found a little café where we can eat, have a drink, and de-stress for a little while. Then I thought a walk along the beach at night might make you relax even more.”

“You mean let down my guard?”

Andrew leaned in to kiss her. As he did, he slid his hand up her leg, under her dress, till he tickled his way up her inner thigh. He nuzzled her neck and licked around the spot where her earring met her ear, causing her pulse to race as he teased her erogenous zones.

“I am quite convinced, Ms. Adams, that I can’t get under your defenses.”

Linda smiled as her nipples pebbled under her dress. She suppressed a giggle as her flesh goose bumped and wetness pooled between her legs. As Andrew’s fingers, well hidden by the drape of her skirt, found her dampening panties, she wished she hadn’t worn them.

That’s one defense I don’t want in place tonight.

Soon they arrived at the café. Right on the beach in Surfer Paradise, it was small and intimate, despite the raucous carrying on of the holidaying crowd on a Saturday night.

They hopped out and Linda turned toward the beach, the dusky light making it more romantic than ever. Surfers packed away boards and girls wrapped sarongs over luscious curves as the place transitioned from one of the world’s top surfing cities to one of the world’s hottest night spots. The damp, hot air swirled around Linda, easing whatever tension the previous week might have caused her aching muscles.

After paying the driver, Andrew appeared at her side, wrapping his arms around her and looking out over the beach as well. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“This makes me realize how little time I get to relax. You know, deeply relax. Let the day fall away and breathe. I can feel the knots in my shoulders unwinding as I look out on a scene like this one.”

Andrew slung a protective arm over her shoulders.

“You spend all day looking after your business and your friends, all night looking after your kids. You rarely look after yourself.”

Still looking out to sea, Linda grimaced at the thought.

“I feel too guilty to look after myself.” The thought of it brought a small tear to her eye.

Why am I so good at denying myself everything that I want?

Andrew tugged at her arm. “Plenty of time to get stressed in your head later, lady. I want to feed you good things, then do naughty things to you.”

They walked to the café, Andrew getting many appreciating stares from the woman around them. Linda couldn’t help but glance sideways and take his complete lack of notice as a compliment.

They settled in to a pleasant dinner over a bottle of white wine, watching the sun setting over the beach. Linda allowed herself to relax further as Andrew told her jokes and anecdotes from his past. They talked a little about the children and a little about their new friends. Linda realized they had their own stories already. They’d only been together for a week and their lives meshed so comfortably.

With the sun setting spectacularly in front of her, she didn’t have the wherewithal to get distressed about it. She’d take Jane’s advice today and let it all be. Tomorrow and Sydney were miles away. Holidays in tropical paradises were for relaxation and doing those things one would think better of at home.

She sat back in her comfy wicker chair, nursing her third glass of wine. The crowds died down a little now, all the younger folk headed for the other side of town that included nightclubs, bars, and live bands. Couples surrounded them. People who wanted the time to focus on each other, who preferred to engage at the deeper, more sophisticated level. These were people taking time to enjoy the subtleties and nuances of their lover. Glad to be among this crowd, Linda still thought she’d about had enough and wanted to be alone with her delicious lover.

As if reading her mind, Andrew said, “Why don’t we take a little stroll along the beach?”

Linda smiled her agreement. Andrew paid the bill and they wandered out of the restaurant.

Quiet now, the southern end of the beach took on a different life in the dark, dusky shadows of the beach at night. A strong full moon rising in the sky, coupled with various street lights, gave the beach enough light to wander carefree, but the shadows on the sand and the crash of the waves acted more like an aphrodisiac now that darkness took over the city.

They wandered past a rather seedy-looking public toilet block that appeared empty, further indicating the emptiness of the beach. Enjoying the pleasure of the waves and the peace of the beach, they stopped talking, fingers resting in each other hands. Linda's gentle half-smile indicated she thought herself in paradise.

She glanced back toward the city, the night lights and the distant laughter convincing her they entered a new world here on the beach. The heat still coming off the sand and the liquid warmth in the night air sent a sultry message from her mind to her body, telling her they were alone and could do anything.

Andrew, holding her hand lightly, let his fingers trail up her arm, teasing the side of her breast, and down again until he held her fingers. Their walk had almost brought them to a large wooden jetty. They paused a moment, Andrew turning her to kiss her hard. Linda melted her body into his, his hard-on beneath his dress shorts pressing into her. She wanted to moan, but a sudden cry from the jetty prevented her.

Hearing it himself, Andrew froze, alert to listen for another sound.

This time, the woman's cry was a giggle, then the cry called out again. Linda recognized it as lust.

Andrew looked down at her and gently placed his finger to her lips. Collecting her fingers in his, he walked to one of the large pylons under the jetty, pulling Linda behind him.

They looked at each other when they reached the large wood pole. They could hear it clearly now, a woman's voice moaning in the throes of lust and at least one man's voice, possibly two. Still staring at Linda, Andrew took her hand and drew it down between his legs. His raging hard-on lurched at

the touch of her fingers, his powerful lust bursting through his clothes. She took his hand and pulled it up under her skirt so he felt the slick wetness on her panties.

They must have been closer than they realized, because the voices were very clear, almost as if Linda and Andrew were part of the game. Somehow, the little group hadn't heard them. Andrew pulled his hand away and took Linda's hand, helping her turn so that she faced the pylon and her back was to him. She looked gingerly around the pylon, feeling Andrew's weight pressed against her, doing the same thing.

There, only a few meters away, a woman lay on her back in the sand, one man thrusting hard between her legs and another man kneeling by her face as she turned toward him and sucked hard-on his cock. His head thrown back, he looked above at the wooden jetty as the woman used her hand to pump his dick, all the while sucking hard-on the end of it.

"Oh, God," he moaned.

Linda had never seen anything so erotic in her life. All young people, they took willingly from each other, there in the sand. With the shadowy darkness over them, the sexual activities highlighted only by the moonlight and streetlights beaming through the slats in the wood, it took Linda's eyes a little time to adjust so that she could see them properly.

But soon she made them out. The men, well-built, young surfer types, looked lustfully at the brunette beneath them, who had large fleshy mounds for breasts on an otherwise youthful, boyish frame.

Soon both of the men withdrew and encouraged her to get on her knees. She did, curving her spine to raise her delicious curvy ass to the man behind her, who plunged back into her pussy in one heavy thrust. The other man moved quietly to her mouth again so that she was a sexual powerhouse, sucking one and fucking back on the other for all she was worth.

Linda's nipples hardened against the wooden pole Andrew pressed her against. She felt his hands on her, massaging and stroking her thighs over the top of her dress, and the two watched in silence, not wanting to disturb the sensual scene in front of them but not daring to look away either.

Soon the sexual threesome moved again.

This time the man in her mouth lay on the sand. Linda could see his long, thick, meaty cock, hard and desperate, pointing directly up as he placed his hand around the base of it. The young woman pulled away from the man fucking her and stood over the cock of the man on the ground, grinding her hips against him sensuously as he sent a few insistent thrusts up into her body.

Linda felt Andrew's hands ride under her clothes now. He rubbed her bare skin, sliding his large masculine hands between her thighs. He pulled on the flesh of her inner thighs, encouraging her to spread her legs even more as she kept her eyes glued to the scene in front of her. She did spread her legs and immediately she felt his hand pull her thin, dripping G-string away from her pussy, letting it cling into the folds between her torso and the top of her thighs. He moved his hand, massaging the wetness of her pussy into the outer lips of her sex, using its thickness to slide up and over her clit as well.

As he continued to rub her, Linda watched as the young woman leaned forward, kissing the man beneath her, rhythmically bouncing her cunt up and down on the thick, hot tool inside her. Her breasts mashed against his chest and he wrapped his arms around her, assisting her hips in their erotic bounce.

With Andrew's fingers busy working her, Linda wondered how the young people kept from coming, they were so busy erotically stimulating each other. It was then that she noticed the other man slicking his cock with some lube he'd gotten from their possessions.

As he moved to her bouncing ass, the man with his cock embedded in her pussy slid his hands down to the delicious curves of her white ass and held her in place, still. He pulled on her cheeks till her legs spread wider. His friend, his fingers slick with lube, rubbed and massaged her ass as his cock bobbed, lonely and waiting for its nasty action.

Linda knew where he was going and she knew a little of the intense pleasures this woman was about to experience.

The second man stood behind her now, his fingers out and running slickly up and down the full length of his cock. The man beneath held her,

his fingers clutching at her cheeks, spreading them, and for a moment Linda felt sure she could see the girls ass spreading, ready to accommodate what she invited.

The man held his dick at the puckered opening of the woman's ass. As he rubbed his cock up and down her crack, Linda felt Andrew's fingers rubbing up and down hers, as if she were the girl about to receive such pleasure. She watched the hard dick, slicking its way around her most intimate parts, as hot, heavy man fingers ran the full length of her own crack.

Soon the man positioned his cock. Linda could see the other thick, hard dick protruding from her body, already in place. The man above her slid his dick into her in one firm, hard move. The woman slung her head back, automatically thrusting her ass up and back toward this second lover, just as Linda felt a thick hand clamp around her mouth, and two thick, hard fingers plunge into her aching pussy at the same time.

Linda wanted to call out, but the hand clamped firmly over her mouth prevented her, thank God. The woman groaned loudly till the lover underneath her placed his hand hard over her mouth. Andrew's hand moved hot and fast between her legs, slamming his fingers in and out of her hot, wet cunt.

The woman in front of her received the full length of both cocks in her now and she writhed in ecstasy as both men pumped as hard as they could into her body, holding her tight as she cowgirl and bucked between them.

Andrew continued to slam his fingers into her, harder than she'd ever had before. As they pistoned, she watched the two men speed up their thrusts into the woman. The man above had now put his hand over her mouth, using it also to hold her as he thrust into her tight nether hole. The man below held her hips pushing her back hard-onto the two sensational cock's pistoning her. Jane watched the woman's body convulsing and twitching as the two men held her in place, her head thrown back in ecstasy.

As Linda saw her work through her orgasm, a mighty one of her own rose inside and tidal waved through her body. A rush of love fluid poured out of her, no doubt coating Andrew's already dripping hands.

The threesome in front of them continued, but Linda only had eyes for Andrew now. A monumental lust rose up in her, as if her orgasm was never enough to satisfy all that flowed through her. Andrew turned her toward him, kissing her hard, his tongue deeply probing her mouth. It took all her energy not to moan a heavy ecstatic longing into his mouth, but the others were still fucking, oblivious to the two people lewdly spying on them.

Andrew wrapped her long hair about his fist and tugged her away from his face. She met his eyes and her stomach lurched at the wanton desire she saw there. Still holding her by her hair, he pulled her away from the pylon. Immediately he clasped her wrist, letting her hair go, and marched her silently back down the beach, away from the group under the jetty.

The sea salt air now felt like an erotic caress as she took deep breathy gulps, filling her lungs, needing anything to calm her down and prevent her from crying out in lust. Andrew pulled at her wrist almost as if he dragged her along, drawing her toward the seedy toilet block.

“Come here.” He said as soon as they arrived.

He pulled her into the side with a small white male figure on it.

The room was as she imagined.

Sparse and, except for the lust filled heat in the air, it was cold. Two stainless steel urinals were bolted against the wall and two stalls, with no doors, held porcelain bowls, no seat covers, no privacy. The pungent smell of urine stung Linda’s nose. It was an ugly place.

The back wall was bare and Andrew walked close to her body, forcing her back against the wall. Her stomach lurched, a piece of her horrified to be in such an ugly place and another piece of her so filled with lust she wanted his cock in her, to take her anywhere. She felt the brick wall behind her as Andrew’s body pressed up against her. He kissed her then pulled back, making fierce eye contact.

“We’re going to play a game, Linda. Do you want to?”

Linda felt a deep arousal rising up in her that frightened her. In this dank ugly place, with this most desirable of men she was likely to lose control in a way she hadn’t experienced before. She had to get what she wanted while defusing the power of it over her.

Linda smiled a flirtatious cutie-pie smile. “Silly, of course I want to.”

He ignored her attempts to disarm him.

“Here are the rules, Linda. I’m going to do what I want with you. You’re not allowed to touch me unless I tell you. I’m going to take you, exactly as I want, in this ugly, public place. If you want me to stop, you say “enough” at any time. As soon as you say that, I will stop what I am doing, and we will leave. But we will never come back here and you will never have the chance to do this again. Is all of this clear?”

Linda thought her eyes would pop out of her head. She stared at him, not sure what to make of it. “What are you going to do to me?”

“I may want to hurt you. Just a little, and I will be fucking you. Are you up for it?”

A reckless feeling engulfed Linda, filling her throat, clutching to her chest. She started to shake and the wetness between her legs intensified. She never wanted anything as much as she wanted whatever he was going to do to her in that place.

“Yes,” she said, the shake visible in her hand.

And then his hands fell on her. He gripped her wrists and held them behind her back, bending to lick up and down her neck with a savagery she’d only seen a glimmer of before. His cock pushed against her body and her cunt contracted, responding to the feel of it right there. His hand stroked her throat as she tilted her head back to give him better access to its milky moonlight whiteness. He thrust a knee between her legs, tipping her slightly backward so that she was now pressed against the grimy sink. Linda’s heart started to pound. She’d dreamed of moments like this, but never imagined she’d have the courage to go through with them. Yet here she was, in a public place that any person could enter at any time, being taken in a way she’d ached for all her life.

He turned her around, bending her low over the sink so that her ass rose in the air. He pulled her dress up roughly and grabbed at the small string of lace, yanking it and pulling it away from her body in one go.

Linda started to tremble. She wanted him inside of her. Her face was pressed in close to the sink that smelled like bleach. Behind her, she heard

him unzip his fly. Her hands now free and she gripped the sides of the sink, steadying herself against the thrill coursing through her body. The cold hardness of the sink bit into her nipples as they lengthened, hardening so much they ached from the strain. In one deft move his cock was in her, and he thrust without pause, mercy, or gentleness. He grunted in a hefty way as he pumped himself into her hot, slick body.

He was so huge. Huger even than Linda had realized before. Or perhaps her pussy was so tight this time, contracting harder and harder around him. He just kept driving the invasion, intense, demanding, everything she had to give. Linda held her breath, desperate to gain some control, desperate to stave off the rising tide of erotic intensity rising up over her.

Andrew grabbed her hair in his fist again and pulled her back so she saw the dark wildness in his eyes.

“Breathe,” he said as he yanked on her hair.

Linda took a huge gulp of air, feeling as if she were going to pass out. He slammed harder into her, hitting her cervix just right so that she knew she would come in a moment. Terrified someone might hear and come to watch her as she had just watched others, she pressed her fist to her mouth as the orgasm crashed through her, wave after wave taking her on an erotic surf of her own.

As soon as she’d convulsed around his dick, she felt him pull out, still hard and not having come. She felt him dip his fingers into her and smear her juice up her crack, farther to her small, hot hole.

“Andrew... I...”

Andrew kept rubbing the wetness of her body over her ass.

“Yes, Linda. You know what to say. What is it?”

She didn’t understand the tone in his voice, but it excited her. She started to whimper as he slid a finger in. She felt too tight. Fear gripped her as she wondered how she’d take all of him with only her own lubricant to protect her. But it felt so good. Linda felt a tear pool at her eye as she realized how much her body was betraying her.

“Please!”

Linda felt his cock at her entrance, hard, ready, and determined.

“You know what to say, Linda. Do you want me to pull away? Is that what you want here?”

His enormous cock slid forward. Linda’s sphincter contracted, but he pushed forward through it, hurting her, forcing her to relax so she could ease the pain. Linda’s clit pulled. If she’d never been sure of what she wanted before, she knew with great clarity now.

“Don’t stop, Andrew. Please don’t stop fucking my ass.”

He didn’t stop. The words opened a dam up inside of her and, it seemed, inside of him as well. She wanted to beg. She wanted to get on her knees and beg him to never stop fucking her, to always take her this way, to always take what he wanted and leave her sweating in a pool of her own lust. He pulled her hips toward him, spreading her legs farther and pumping harder and harder into her.

Oblivious to where she was, no longer worried about being hurt, Linda called out, “Oh, yes, please don’t stop fucking me. Take my ass, take whatever you want from me.”

He leaned forward, burying himself deep inside of her and teased her nipples through her dress. They were so hard and long that just his initial touch hurt them. Then he pinched them between his fingers, tugging on them and twisting them. Linda felt the pain of it, electric and sharp. It felt so good along with the continual fucking through this long continuous spasm. He started to pinch them harder, twisting them firmly now, causing her to meet his thrusts and push on him, trying to get more and more of him up in to her body.

“Keep fucking me, Andrew. Please, always keep fucking me.” Soon, Linda felt his cock lurch and quiver inside her. He thrust harder now, on the brink of orgasm. He pushed a thick finger into her creaming cunt, and she convulsed, sucking on it, her body desperately trying to suck him into her.

“Oh, God,” he cried out in response. She felt his cock spasm again as his seed flowed out of his body, his thrusts into her now shorter and closer together.

Soon it was all over and she lay face down in the sink, her senses returning to normal. Andrew slipped out of her, his penis now soft, and caressed his hands down her sides. He pulled her to stand and kissed her softly, caressing her hair, the man she'd fallen in love with once more.

Chapter 14

As soon as they arranged themselves, they walked back to the road and hailed a cab in silence. In the back of the taxi, Andrew put his arm around her, holding her tight. He periodically kissed the top of her forehead as she nestled into him, safe and warm, deliriously happy.

When they arrived in their hotel suite, Andrew led Linda to the couch.

“Linda, what you just experienced was very intense and we haven’t properly finished yet. Please sit still for a moment and I will be right back.”

As if in a daze, Linda sat on the couch, not knowing what to think. The sex between them got better and better and what they’d just done now made her think far more exciting things lay ahead for her.

Soon Andrew returned.

“Come here.”

She stood and walked toward him. He led her into the bathroom, which was filled with her favorite sandalwood oil and a foaming bubble bath. He arranged her hair up and clipped it there, then lifted her dress over her head. The wispy remains of her underwear were left on the floor of the men’s toilet and Linda shivered when she thought how sexy seeing them would be for the next man who went in.

She sunk into the hot velvety depths of an exquisite bath.

Andrew stayed by her side, sponging her back. They remained silent for a short while and then he spoke up.

“You enjoyed that game tonight, didn’t you, Linda.”

It was a statement, not a question. Both of them knew what they’d done would change her forever.

“I don’t know what to think. But yes, I did enjoy it very much.”

She took a sip of the peppermint tea he'd prepared for her. Its soothing cleanliness washed through her, making her feel pure again.

As if reading her mind, Andrew asked, "How do you feel? I want you to tell me how you feel right now."

Linda thought hard.

"I feel loved, Andrew. I feel completely understood and I feel loved."

Andrew leaned in to kiss her hair, mumbling, "Oh, Linda." as he did.

* * * *

On Sunday morning Linda woke to a knock at the door of their room. She jumped as she heard Jemma call out. "Mummy! Wake up now!" She turned to find that Andrew no longer lay next to her. She heard him open the door and let Jemma into the suite.

She bounced up onto Linda's bed.

"Hi, Mummy. We had the best night. We played so much and we had breakfast and you have to get up now because we're going to Sea World today."

She ran out of the room and headed out the door, down the corridor to the other room fast.

Andrew took advantage of the moment to come in and give her a good-morning kiss. He was dressed in a dark blue T-shirt and board shorts. He leaned in and kissed her sleepy lips.

"I've been out for a surf this morning. Hope you don't mind, sweetheart. It's been too damn good being with you. I wanted to add to the pleasures."

Linda stretched into his kiss, flexing and letting the blood work its way around her body.

"Oh, honey, of course. But I'd love to get a piece of you now."

Andrew pulled away and stood up next to the bed. "Kids are up, gorgeous. Jemma's right. We do have to get ourselves to Sea World."

Linda smiled. "Then I guess I'm going to hop out of bed without properly checking to see if you're up this morning."

Andrew leaned down and grabbed for Linda's hand, drawing her to his crotch so that she could feel his pulsing thickness standing at attention. "All for you, babe. You bring out hard-ons like I've never had."

He let her hand fall, turned his back, and walked out of the room. As he walked though the doorway, he turned his head, and said, "You'd better really concentrate on getting yourself ready. I think those kids are going to be back in here soon."

Linda watched his ass, so high and curvaceous in those hot shorts.

* * * *

An hour and a half later, Linda found herself queuing up at the entrance to Sea World with the three children and Andrew.

As soon as they were through the gates, Andrew took control of the day.

"We're going to go on the monorail first, gang. I want to make sure we get a good look at the park so that we can be sure to get in everything we want to see."

This received a chorus of "Yay!" and Linda, donning a huge floppy hat and enormous black Dior sunglasses, followed, doing everything in her power not to hold Andrew's hand. Jemma ran ahead of them, Toby on her heels, with Andrew not far behind. Linda held little Aaron's hand, helping him toddle along behind the others.

Soon they all crowded into their own carriage on the monorail, and found themselves moving around the park to the audible commentary.

"Look at that, kids, polar bears." Andrew had the children scrambling for the windows, trying to catch a glimpse of the giant bears. Two had climbed onto a log and one dived off, perfectly timed with the monorail passing. Aaron squealed with delight as Toby and Jemma asked several polar bear questions. To give him some sort of a break, Linda announced they were headed to the shark bay and told them all to be careful not to get bitten. The smaller children pulled their hands away from the door window, but Toby turned to give her a superior smile as if to let her know he was on

to her. He did turn to Andrew though, and included him in the conspiratorial smile. Andrew grinned back.

They're doing well together. I'm playing with the whole situation. How could I be this selfish?

Linda had an immediate sense of sitting outside her life and looking down. How could she reconcile who this man was at times like last night compared with times like now? Andrew looked up at her, smiling a flirtatious smile, and then went back to pointing out images through the thick glass of the monorail.

Like fish in a bowl. Our lives are like fish in a bowl. And I am taking this small piece of perfection for my children and muddying the waters.

Struck with a feeling of revulsion for their behavior the night before, Linda indulged in fantasies of what a bad mother she'd been.

At the water park, Andrew suggested they all get out for a fast dip in the pool before moving on to see some of the shows.

They walked off the monorail together, making their way to the water slides and pools.

Once there, Linda used Aaron as a ruse, claiming she'd take him to the junior pool and let the older children go down a gentle slide with Andrew. The three of them ran off toward the slides and Linda felt glad to be alone with Aaron.

"Mummy! The pool." Aaron tried to get her attention to take him down toward the baby pool.

Linda wandered down and camped with bags and towels under a tree. She undressed Aaron to his little shorts and let him waddle into the ankle-deep water.

Children splashed and played with their mothers and Aaron called out for Linda. She went to the gentle slope that led to the water and sat comfortably on the edge. Watching all the happy families playing and the delighted children feeling safe with their parents, a deep feeling of shame engulfed her.

She'd have to end this thing with Andrew immediately. Toby hadn't smiled in months before Andrew arrived and now he reached out. For Toby, at least, she had to end this thing.

Linda splashed absently with Aaron as he fell in with another little boy, playing and splashing together. Linda's head had become her enemy. Over and over she replayed moments, watching the children getting on with Andrew, Toby asking her not to ruin it for them, and Linda fucking him in a sleazy toilet the night before.

Where was her mind? How could she do all of this?

After twenty minutes of mental torture, Andrew and the older children came bounding back.

"Mummy, Toby wouldn't wait for me when he went down the slide."

"No one can wait for you there, dummy. You just go with the water. I couldn't stop."

"It's okay. I went with you." Andrew smiled down at her.

"We need to see the sharks!" commanded Toby.

"No! I want to see the dolphins first." Jemma wanted to argue with Toby today and she seemed determined to get her way.

"Sharks!" said Aaron.

Linda avoided the look Andrew gave her. She avoided his eyes altogether.

"I think we should go and see the sharks first and then we'll see dolphins."

Jemma stamped her feet as the boys cheered. Linda took the moment to glance up at Andrew. He had an expression of concern as he searched her eyes. She knew he could tell something wasn't right.

Packing up everyone's things, they headed off toward the shark enclosure.

Andrew took the opportunity of the children skipping ahead to slow down and talk to Linda.

"Linda, is everything alright? You seem really upset."

"I'm okay. I am not sure what to do, but I feel uncomfortable about some stuff."

“Do we need to have a talk?”

“Yes, I think we do, but not while we’re out here. Let’s concentrate on the children and make sure that they have a good time.”

“I’m nervous now. What happened while I was away?”

“I guess I just had a brief chance to think some stuff through.”

By this time they’d arrived at the shark enclosure, the children gathered at the front, waiting for them.

Walking into the darkness, Linda had the feeling of walking through a mouth into something that would never spit her out. She’d taken the first steps in letting Andrew know that they needed to talk. The wheels were in motion and now she had to find a way to ask Andrew to stop seeing her, without giving up looking after the children.

Toby called her over, and she moved to the large shark tank.

Sharks circled, the ripples on the surface of the tank making mottled flecks of light against their skin. They lived in this cage, curbing their natural instincts. Like Linda. She’d give up her younger lover for her children. Her ex-husband would never consider making a sacrifice of that nature. Completely trapped, she seemed locked in a kind of cage that prevented her from doing or being what she most wanted.

Linda knew Andrew glanced over at her regularly. He kept the children entertained with shark stories and observations about them, but she knew he watched her closely. Every time he glanced her way, her heart started to beat faster. She’d be able to get rid of that sexual attraction thing. She’d done it before, she could do it again. Just turn it off like a tap.

The rest of the visit was a blur as Linda allowed herself to sink further and further into the idea that she would break it off with Andrew.

When they finally got back to the hotel, she dawdled, stuck in her thoughts. Linda felt exhausted from the difficulty of playing happy family with Andrew, now that she knew it was over. She always expected that she would have to give Andrew up one day. Now that the time had come, the pain swelled in her. Once they arrived, the children saw their friends from the night before playing in the pool. Linda was relieved when they cheered

and ran to their friends. It was surely going to be a pleasant distraction for them while she sorted herself out.

Andrew, clearly still aware that something was going on with Linda, volunteered to take their stuff up to the room, perhaps to give her a moment with her friends. He encouraged Linda to sit with Jane and Craig while he ran up to the room.

The children immediately jumped into the pool with their friends to give them all the details of the trip to Sea World.

Linda plunked herself down next to Jane, longing for a moment of private talk. She hoped the pleading in her eyes gave a clear enough hint.

Jane searched her eyes for a moment then turned away.

“Honey,” Jane said to her husband. “Why don’t you go and find Andrew. You both sit over there and have a beer while you watch the kids. I want some time alone with Linda.” Craig gave his wife a swift glance and then ran off to find Andrew.

“Wow, you sure do have him under control,” Linda noticed.

“I’d do the same for him. We treat each other very well so we are able to take moments like this. But I want to talk about you, not me.”

Linda put her big sunglasses on and watched Andrew come back and sit next to Craig on the other side of the pool.

Jane persisted. “What’s going on? You seem very weird today. Is everything okay with you?”

“I’m going to tell Andrew that we have to break up.”

Chapter 15

“Is this because of that nonsense about your ages?” Jane almost sounded angry to Linda.

Linda sighed. She was glad to talk to her friend, but she felt sure she couldn’t be talked out of this.

“No. Not just that. The children love him very much and because this thing with Andrew isn’t serious, I don’t see how we can continue it in the face of my children’s adoration. I feel as though I am robbing them of their best friend at the moment.”

“Either that or you are making sure you don’t get too close before he leaves.”

Linda turned to her friend, wanting to put the full weight of her argument to her so that this could all be decided once and for all. Linda wanted to present the case to her thinking friend, as well as give herself the chance to speak it all out.

“Jane, this isn’t a real relationship and it’s not going to be. I’m silly to think this is anything other than great sex. And even if it is, even if he is deeper in love with me than he could ever have imagined, what is going to happen later? How will he resist the white bikini then? Because we all know the white bikini will be throwing itself at him until he’s fifty years old. Sixty, if he stays in shape.”

Jane pulled herself out of the sun and move back into the shade. She took out some sunscreen and started to rub it over her body.

“Linda, why did your husband leave you? I mean, besides the neurosis.”

Linda gave her a sideways glance, but decided to ignore the barb.

“He left me for a younger woman.” She thought for a moment. “And then he left that woman for a *much* younger woman.”

“So the problem here is fear.”

“Fear? Of being abandoned by a man for the second time? Yes, I would say that is where my concern might be coming from.”

“But you are shrouding it as common sense when really it’s just fear.”

“It’s not just that. He’s great with my kids and I don’t want to steal him from them.”

“Best way to keep him there for your kids is to form a solid strong relationship with him.”

Linda looked at her. Why was the whole world stupid when it came to this conversation?

“Jane, I am scared of getting hurt. I am scared of letting him in close to me and then paying the price for that. And there is an extremely good chance of this happening. Sometimes I feel that I am the only person in the world with a rational mind.”

“I don’t see rationality here. I see frigid hysteria.”

“What are you talking about? Frigid? Me?”

“I think you fear the depth of the sexual connection between yourself and Andrew because you don’t know how to control it. You can’t keep it at bay. You fear that it will lead to equally intense feelings and so you use your children to justify getting rid of him. You are acting very Freudian here.”

Linda glanced at Andrew from under furrowed brows. The usual thrill that she always felt when she looked at him worked its way through her.

“I don’t know. I think I’m being sensible.”

“Well, you’re not, really. The sensible thing would be to give the relationship a go. He wants to. Your children want him around and would probably love it if you guys hooked up. The only person stopping you is you. And, what’s really sleazy is that you’re blaming your own kids for it.”

“You think I’m using them in a way to rid myself of the worry of all this?”

“That’s exactly what I think you’re doing.”

“There is something you don’t know.”

Jane rolled on to her back again, soaking up the gentle heat of the day.
“Mmm! What would that be, I wonder?”

"I fear I can't compete with younger women and that I would have to."

"I think that may be at the very heart of your problem."

Linda let her eyes stray over to Andrew. She experienced such an intense response to his delicious body. How could hers not be important to him?

"I just can't imagine that the physical thing will be fine forever. I can't believe that he won't want a younger woman later."

"So find other special things to do that he can't get from other women. I saw the way you both looked at each other at breakfast. Don't tell me something very kinky didn't happen last night."

Linda hadn't thought of that.

Jane turned to her side and looked at Linda. "Did you push him away emotionally today?"

"Yes. I have to. He gets too close and I worry that he thinks something is going on between us."

"Jesus, Linda, something is going on for you. That poor guy. He's on an emotional rollercoaster with you. Funny, I never had you worked out as a prick tease. But then it does go with the territory of frigid hysteric."

"I'm not a prick tease. He never misses out."

"What do you think has been going on between you? Why do you think it's always after sex that you have to push him away? Linda, it's not him you're pushing away! It's you. The connection is so strong between you that you have to put him on the other side of the Grand Canyon in order to get close to him."

"Do you think so?"

"Look! Do this now. Craig and I will take the kids this afternoon. I want you to go out with Andrew and, for God's sake, fuck him before you lose him forever."

Linda stood and walked over to where Andrew played by the side of the pool with Toby. Andrew looked happy and relaxed, but he shifted a little when Linda approached.

"Hey guys, whatcha doin'?" Linda tried to make her voice sound casual.

“We’re playing, Mum. Splash game. The guys at school taught me.”

Linda looked with longing at her son. She could try to make some sort of arrangement work, for the sake of her son. He really seemed to love Andrew so much.

“Well, Jane has offered to watch you kids this afternoon. Do you want to play with Cassie while Andrew and I go out?”

Toby looked across at Andrew who looked at Linda hard.

“Yeah. That’d be great, Mum. On one condition.”

“Anything!” Linda said, looking longingly at her son.

“That you make sure you dress up and look nice if you’re going to go on a date with Andrew.”

* * * *

Linda stayed quiet in the car.

“You seem to be on a rollercoaster of emotion today,” Andrew started. “I was afraid you’d say too much in front of the kids earlier. Now I’m not sure I’m going to be able to get you to open up at all.”

Linda turned and looked at him. She gasped at how handsome he looked, with his sandy hair hanging loose and his muscles bulging under his T-shirt.

“I am on a rollercoaster of emotions. Andrew, damn it. I really like you, but I’m scared of a lot of things. And I don’t know if we should talk or not.”

Andrew pulled the car over to the side of the road.

“I think we should definitely talk. What’s on your mind?”

“I am worried that this couldn’t work as a legitimate relationship.”

“So what’s new?”

“I guess, what’s new is that I am worried the children are getting attached to you and that I am messing with their great new sitter.”

Andrew sighed and his fists clenched over the steering wheel.

“Linda, why can’t you just let this be? Why can’t we just enjoy what we have? Why do you have to analyze it with your pop psychology all the time?”

"I just don't know if I'm doing the right thing."

"The way you're going you will wonder us out of any connection at all. It's like you are working hard to make sure we don't have any pleasure ever."

"I have a lot to worry about."

"Actually, you don't. But I can't seem to tell you that. I think Jane has been trying to tell you that, too, but she can't get through, either."

Linda looked over at him again. His jaw line was set and hard. He looked so unhappy.

She melted into him. She felt sorry for him. She couldn't seem to get this straight and it really seemed she was becoming a pain in the ass.

She leaned toward him. "Would you like me to make it up to you somehow?"

Andrew turned to her with a smile on his face right away. "Linda, more than anything. But I don't want to have sex right now if it means you're going to pull away again when it's over. I have agreed to do this casually, and I am happy to, but I can't take you treating me like I don't exist or like I have the plague or something. Is that a deal?"

"It's a deal."

"I wanted to do something a little special while we had Jane's car."

"Yeah? What did you have in mind?"

"Bubbles 'n' Babes."

"The car wash?" Linda started to laugh. "Man, I *have* done everything with you!"

"No you haven't. We have a whole checklist we haven't touched yet."

Linda smiled and thought about that. Perhaps they *could* check off some of that list later in life. Not wanting to confess those thoughts aloud, she said, "I think as an added bonus we can actually get the car washed while we're there."

* * * *

Andrew jumped back into the car.

“It’s done. I’ve paid. We’re getting the deluxe super wash.” He laughed. “It goes for one hour.”

“A car wash that takes a full hour? I have a feeling there will be more going on.”

“Well, I did pay for a little extra.”

“Like, nude women to wash it for us?”

Andrew smiled a secret kind of smile. “Actually...no, you wait. I want you to see what I’ve got in store for you.”

“Mmm, I’m intrigued.”

The large roller door of the structure raised and a green traffic light signaled them to go forward.

Moving into the center of a large shed, Andrew rolled forward softly until a red light indicated they had to stop. Linda watched as he turned off the car and raised the arm rest so he could slide along the seat to be closer to her. Linda felt his warm arm move around her shoulders as she leaned ever so slightly forward to accommodate him. His body smelled of his aftershave and a slight tinge of sea salt was in his hair.

Soon the lights went down to create a dark room. Linda felt Andrew’s hand move toward her breasts as some loud music began to play.

A woman came out from behind a curtain, dressed in the smallest bikini Linda had ever seen. A tiny piece of black cloth lay against her vagina, trimmed pussy hair showing all around it. Her breasts had small triangles perched playfully on each nipple with black strings joining them, looping around her back and neck. It didn’t contain her breasts at all, just sat high on her tits, allowing viewers to see the full round of each fleshy breast beneath. Linda started to breathe a little heavier as the woman sauntered to a large barrel, pulled out a dripping, soapy sponge, and walked toward the car.

She stood in front, smiling at Linda and Andrew inside. She took the sponge and squeezed it over the top of her large breasts, allowing the water to drip down to her belly in large, fat rolls of foam. Linda gulped. She turned and began to dance for Linda and Andrew in the car, rolling her ass from side to side, giving them brief shots between her legs.

Andrew cupped Linda's breasts properly now. He turned to look at her as she watched, mesmerized by the sensual young female flesh being exposed and revealed in front of her. Andrew took her hand and placed it between his legs where she found him hard and ready for her.

Soon the woman turned around again and moved toward the car with a bucket of soapy water. In a practiced move, she threw the entire bucket over the windshield, temporarily concealing the view. Soon, however, they could see her again and watched her crawl up to the windshield.

"What is she doing?" Linda asked, just as the woman kneeled and undid the flimsy bikini top to fully reveal her huge, swelling, real breasts. She began to move her hands around sensuously, all the time staring at Linda through the wall of trickling foam.

Soon she bent forward so that her breasts mashed against the windscreen and she started to wash with them.

The enormous mounds made large soapy circles over the windscreen and Linda could feel Andrew's cock getting harder in her hand. She leaned over toward him. "Maybe one day we could get a girl like that to play with us?"

Andrew turned to look at her. "The turn on is you. I like the way you're responding. I don't need anyone else to play with us."

He moved his hand up her inner thigh. She became aware of her own pussy and the wetness barely contained by her outer lips. Andrew halted at the top of her thigh, not moving his hand up any farther. Linda spread her legs farther apart to encourage him, but Andrew whispered into her ear. "Not just yet, hot woman. I have a little more up my sleeve for you."

Linda turned away from him to see that the stripper had moved herself to her hands and knees and washed the windscreen with her full, round ass. Every few seconds her pussy lips stuck to the sudsy windscreen and they both caught a glimpse of her parted pussy lips around the thin black cloth she still wore. Every now and then Linda would giggle and lean over to kiss Andrew. He whispered lewd things in her ear, encouraging a dark wildness between them. "I want you to enjoy this. Look at that hot slit. It's playing up there for you. I paid her money and she wants to show you her hot stuff."

Linda moaned, trying to work his hand up her thigh again, but Andrew held it firmly in place. Linda knew he wanted to save her for what he'd planned next.

The music changed. The woman moved up to her knees, so that her ass pointed directly into the window. A flash burst through the room and Linda jumped to see two men on either side of the car.

One of them reached out immediately and, lacing his hand around the string underwear of the dancer, ripped it off her so that Andrew and Linda got a look directly into her pussy.

The pouty red lips spread so easily for them so that they could see directly into that delicious snatch. But Linda wanted to take her eyes off that delectable sight. The two men on either side of the car wore nothing but tiny black G-strings, which barely covered their huge erections.

"I bet they had women out back sucking them to get them that huge before they came out here," Andrew whispered, sliding his hand up her inner thigh.

Linda couldn't believe it. On her left, the tall man with huge bulging muscles had black hair that he wore fairly long to his ropy curvaceous shoulders. His broad chest had no hair, but was graced by a deep, dark tan. He had perfect six-pack abs that led to a small smattering of hair where his penis stood out from his swimwear, proud and unable to be contained.

Linda now enjoyed the other man on the right side of the car. These were Schwarzenegger types. This man seemed Nordic, with shorter blond hair. His muscles rippled as he moved, busy getting rid of the extra bits of G-string that had wrapped themselves around his fist when he stripped them off the girl. He had worked his hand over the top of her delicious buttocks, massaging it just one meter and a thick pane of glass away from Linda.

The gorgeous men moved toward the car, carrying buckets of soapy water. In a synchronized move, they both tossed their water over the girl on the bonnet. Still on all fours, she thrust her ass into the air, tossed her long, dark hair back, and circled the large sponge as if she washed the car. Linda and Andrew could still nicely see her pussy, but now Linda didn't care so much and looked more at the men.

“Wow! How did you get this? I’ve never heard of a male car wash before.” She grinned over at Andrew.

“They do this now. It’s how it should be. Why shouldn’t you get to see guys?”

Linda’s pulse raced as she automatically reached for Andrew’s penis. Harder than ever now, she massaged it over the top of his jeans.

The fair man reached down with a fist and ripped the useless underwear from his body, still sporting his enormous erection. He climbed on to the bonnet of the car and started to feel the girl’s ass. She turned, twisting toward the windscreen, and clasped her mouth over his enormously engorged dick.

“Oh, wow!” Linda leaned back to really take in the show. The man feeling the woman’s ass looked into the car and smiled at Linda. At that moment, he sunk a finger easily into the girl’s pussy. Linda thought she might convulse.

“Sit back. Let’s get you enjoying this,” Andrew whispered, careful not to get his head in the way.

Linda sat back and Andrew moved his hand farther up her thigh. She knew she’d become wet. Andrew’s fingers felt like a cool touch on the inflamed arousal of her skin. He slid his hand to cup her mons and then he massaged her clit with his thumb.

As he did this, Linda watched the action on the front of the car. The other guy remained to the side. He’d removed his swimwear at some point that Linda hadn’t realized, and now stroked his enormous cock, watching the action on the car. He moved toward the two of them and climbed on to the car with a huge sponge.

Andrew had two fingers in her now, pumping in and out. Linda could feel the start of an orgasm rising within her.

The newcomer on the car leaned over the naked, thrusting body of the woman and kissed the other man. Linda thought she’d pass out. She’d never seen anything so erotic in her life.

By this time the girl had twisted around so that Linda and Andrew could see her swaying breasts and her mouth clamped firmly around the hot rod of

the first man. The other man put himself into position and pushed his giant cock into her pussy in one thrust. She threw her head back and moaned, then responded to the hand on the back of her head, encouraging her to get back to the work she performed.

The second man slapped her cheeks a couple of times as he thrust hard into her. Then he leaned over her back and kissed the mouth of the other man again.

Linda felt she could come soon. Andrew worked her hard. The people on the bonnet of the car engaged with the couple in the car, teasing and flirting. Andrew saw the two men looking into the car when they weren't kissing each other, so he gently encouraged Linda's panties off her and down her legs. Then he peeled back her skirt, tugging at her legs so they would be spread wide for the strangers to see.

Linda allowed this, feeling very much that she could come any moment. Andrew peeled his jeans and underwear down his legs and freed his enormous cock.

The woman threw back her head again and moaned, as if she just came all over the monster dick inside her. The man fucking her mouth pulled it out and exploded all over her face. Immediately, she pulled away, twisting her face toward the car so that Linda and Andrew could see her dripping with cum. The man who had been fucking her started to pull himself toward her face. The other man moved around and sucked his dick as he leaned down and licked the cum off the woman's face.

He soon twitched and came on the other man's face. Then the woman and man together bent down to lick off all the cum.

At this point, the three on the bonnet turned to look at Andrew and Linda. They spread their legs and started to masturbate.

"Why don't we show them, honey?" Andrew's voice came out as a hoarse whisper. Linda didn't need any extra encouragement. As Andrew slid over toward the middle of the car, Linda raised herself up, crushing her head on the roof of the car.

She spread her legs wide and sat herself firmly on Andrew's cock while she faced away from him and watched the three people sitting on the front of the car.

They all watched as Andrew's cock go into Linda. Andrew undid her dress buttons from behind, reached in, and slipped one breast out of its cup. He held it with his right hand while his left diddled her excited clit to attention. Linda looked at the people masturbating on the bonnet of the car and exploded onto Andrew's cock.

Andrew thrust hard into her and came deep inside her at the same time.

As fast as they had appeared, the three people on the bonnet went, and heavy water jets poured down on the car.

Linda hopped off Andrew and leaned in for a kiss. "I think that was one of the sexiest things I've ever seen. Again, you take me beyond my limits"

Andrew chuckled as he pulled his trousers up. "I love the way it's over when it's over. There's not a lot of romance involved."

They both laughed. "I couldn't believe it." Linda scrounged around for her underwear. "Wow, we need to be ready fast though. Here come the final jets."

The car received the real cleaning now; the cleaning they'd supposedly come for. Linda dragged her panties up her legs, hoping they'd soak up a little of the wetness that seeped out of her vaginal lips.

Soon they both dressed enough to leave. The car moved through a drier and they got a green light to go.

There was a wave from some of the dressed staff as they exited. Linda turned to Andrew. "That was so much fun. Thanks so much. I had the most amazing time!"

Andrew looked at her as he drove off down the street, the tell tale sign of the clean car giving away their naughtiness. "You really loved it, huh?"

"Oh wow, yeah. I've had so much fun in the last twenty-four hours and I have you to thank for that."

Andrew didn't look too happy. He pulled over into a spare car park on the side of the road. The Gold Coast's palms swayed and the sun shone. But

the feeling in Linda's belly told her that she wouldn't like what was coming her way next.

"Linda, I'm not about that kind of thing. I don't mind having a little fun every now and then, like maybe every few years or so, but on the whole I want a special kind of life. More of what we did last night. More of just the two of us together. And I want it with a woman I can love. And Linda, I am sure that I want it with you."

Linda swallowed hard.

Andrew continued. "It's not that I don't love what we just did. I guess it's just that it's getting to me. I'm starting to think you only want to be with me because I am young and that you can't develop real feelings for me."

"Andrew, I was honest with you from the start. I have never pretended that I could turn this into a relationship. I actually do think it is kind of a fling."

Andrew looked down at his hands on the wheel. He moved them to his lap and started to pull at his nails.

Linda continued. "I don't want to upset you, honey. Maybe later in your life you will understand. It's all okay for us now, but what will it be like when you're forty and I'm fifty-five? Do you want to saddle yourself down with an older woman at this point in your life? Do you think it's a good idea?"

Andrew sighed deeply and looked out the window. "I can't believe you're still clinging to that crap, after everything that's gone on between us. I can't believe you still think what we have can be altered by time."

Linda felt stubborn. She knew deep down that she was right about this. "It's not only that. There are the kids. Do you want an instant family? It's one thing to come and care for them. It's another to make them yours."

"Toby would love it. He and I have a strong friendship. And the other two love me, too." He stared absently out to the sea as if he wanted it to swallow him up and spit him out carelessly on some other shore. "This is an excuse. I am the young one. I am supposed to be the immature one and you're acting like you're young. You're being stupid and making everything between us about age, when really the problem is that you're just scared."

Linda felt ire rise in her. “You know what? I am scared. I’ve already been left by a man who wanted a woman half my age when I got older. Why wouldn’t my next partner do the same thing? I have every reason in the world to doubt that I can have a powerful relationship with you. I have children to think about and a life to lead.”

Andrew turned to look her in the eye. Venom sat where there were only looks of love before. “Well, it didn’t bother you to stop thinking about your children long enough to lay me. Now all of a sudden you’re the world’s greatest mother? You use your children, just like you used me.”

“Take me back,” Linda said. “This is over.”

Andrew replied, “Man, is that the truth.”

They both sat in stony silence all the way back to the hotel.

As soon as they arrived, Linda leaped out of the car and raced for the hotel room. She wanted to cry. She needed to make it to her bed so she could get in a cry before they left for the airport. Part of her hoped to hear Andrew’s voice calling her back to him, but she didn’t.

I won’t be hearing that ever again.

Linda ran to the pool to see the children still swimming happily. Just as she was about to enter the swim area, she noticed Andrew across the other side of the pool, talking with the children. She could hear “headache” and “up in her room for a minute.” Jane looked at him strangely.

Linda knew she couldn’t face them all right now. Andrew’s message gave her permission to be in her room for a while.

The run from the pool to the elevator seemed endless as Linda sprinted through the lobby. Finally she dashed into the lift, the doors closing without anyone else getting in. She had a smooth ride to their floor and she sprinted out, making it to their room a few seconds later. As soon as she got through the door, the tears made their way down her cheeks without any of her restraint to hold them back.

How had this become such a mess? It was meant to be fun. This was going to be a weekend of fun and now it had fallen apart. She’d ruined her children’s relationship with the best friend they’d ever had *and* she didn’t have Andrew. None of this had gone according to plan.

But all of it had gone according to fate. This all happened exactly as she knew it would happen. What she'd feared most came true.

No one can tell me now my concerns weren't justified. This has gone exactly as I predicted it would. Fuck men!

* * * *

Linda sat on the plane, dressed in her business suit, flicking through the latest copy of *UK Elle*. Jane's last words to her rang in her ears.

Well, I hope you're proud. You created this. At least you get to be right.

Linda filled herself to overflowing with righteous anger. She hadn't created this. She merely used her maturity and intuition to see it coming. And the alternative? Andrew move in and become the house husband from heaven, caring meticulously for her children all day, children that aren't his, and fucking her into delirium every night? If a woman couldn't pull that life off successfully, a man would never be able to. No, the villain here was reality. The facts of life. Older women with younger men might be a nice dream, but it simply wasn't meant to be.

Of course, the good sex had been taken from her as well. Even the memories of all they had done together now felt tarnished by discomfort. No masturbation fantasies. The way Jane and Craig had looked at her as she packed the children up and walked away made her feel they pitied her, and that was not sexy. Linda took a long heavy drink of her vodka tonic and lay back in the seat. Was she the only grown up in the world?

"Mummy, we're going to see the pilot."

Linda opened her eyes to Jemma standing by her side and a stunning young hostess standing with her, holding her hand. Behind Jemma stood Aaron holding Toby's hand, and behind Toby stood Andrew. Linda looked up toward him. He turned his head as soon as she attempted to meet his gaze. The stewardess smiled warmly at her, then back at Andrew with a deeply flirtatious gaze.

God, she doesn't even know I'm a threat.

Linda sulked. She turned to the kids. "Have a great time, sweeties."

They filed past, Andrew not making eye contact. Linda took care to notice he gave the flight attendant no encouragement either.

Battle that every day of my life? No thank you.

Toby gave Linda a questioning look as he went by. He must have sensed the tension and knew that something shifted between all of them.

Something that is not coming back.

As soon as they landed one hour later, Linda and Andrew packed the children up together. The vodka stirred a delicious numbing inside, and Linda fancied it could become her new friend. She'd get rid of men all together. Or maybe do the cougar thing and just fuck younger men who understood that the older woman thing was a phase.

As soon as they pulled up at the apartment, Andrew kissed Jemma, shook Aaron's hand, hugged Toby, and told them he had to go home. He turned and walked out the sliding double doors.

Chapter 16

“Where’s Andrew? Why is she here?” Toby shouted at Linda in front of the new babysitter.

“Andrew’s busy, darling. He can’t come today and Sharon is going to help us.”

Embarrassed, Linda smiled at the new woman standing on the doorstep. She smiled back warmly, a smile that meant she knew a little too much about the situation for Linda’s comfort. Lord knows what she’d been told.

When Linda had arrived home the night before with bags to unpack and tired, hungry children wanting to know why Andrew left at the front gate, she’d received a call from Andrew almost as she had walked through the door.

“My apologies, Linda. I can’t work for you anymore. I’ve arranged for an excellent sitter to take my place. Her name is Sharon Walker and she’ll be there first thing in the morning. She’ll have references with her, but I can vouch for her completely. She’s the second best sitter in the city.” He hung up.

Second best in the city.

Linda had neither the heart nor the nerve to tell the children that night. She undressed them, bathed them, and got them into bed with home-delivered pizza in their tummies. All this pacified the two younger ones, but Toby’s suspicious eyes watched her all night. He stared at her in a spooky way, far beyond his years. He asked about Andrew several times, but Linda avoided detail with each answer. He gave up asking, but the accusation tortured her from deep in his eyes. Intuitively he understood something had gone wrong. Eventually he would find out Andrew wasn’t coming back. Linda dreaded that moment.

And now the moment had arrived.

“He’s never coming back, is he?”

In front of the new sitter, Linda couldn’t lie her way out of this anymore. She’d have to tell some version of the truth to her children. All three of them looked up at her, waiting for the answer.

“No, my darlings. He’s gotten a little bit too busy, and he can’t help us out anymore. He cares about the three of you and he wants to be sure you all do well. That’s why he helped us to find Sharon. I’m sure she will help us as well as Andrew did.”

Jemma looked up at Sharon. “Good. A girl. I like a girl, Mummy.” Aaron looked at Sharon with some suspicion and clung to his mother’s skirts.

Toby looked furious. Anger poured out of him. Linda felt like the worst mother in the world.

“Andrew wouldn’t leave unless you did something to him. You made him go away. Just like you made Dad go away.”

Sharon tried to step in at this point, clearly sensing an impending crisis.

“Hey, it’s okay. Andrew was fun, but I can do good things, too. I am sure your mum didn’t mean for him to go. He just got very busy.”

Linda felt defensive. She piped up, coming to her own rescue.

“Toby, your father left me. I didn’t make him go anywhere. If you’re going to throw accusations around you’d better get your facts straight.”

“You made Dad leave. Now you made Andrew leave. What do you do to them?”

“I’m not having this discussion in front of the new nanny, Toby. You take the day to calm down and we can talk properly this afternoon.”

Thank God she had a witness, because Linda would have let him have it, and that wouldn’t be the wisest way to handle the situation just at the moment. Unfortunately she felt pinned down by his words. He seemed wise beyond his years, far wiser than her. To Linda right now, he appeared as a spiritual guru with profound romantic insights. Guilt surged through her. Why *did* she scare them all away? Why was her home life such a huge mess? Suddenly she wanted the office.

The two young children stared in a shy way at Sharon while Toby defiantly ignored her. Linda tried to move on gracefully. “Well, Sharon, they’ve had their breakfast and they are ready to go to school. Aaron is in preschool today. If you could get them to where they need to be and pick them up this afternoon that would be great. If you drop Aaron first, Toby can give directions. Tonight everyone needs to do homework before I get home.”

Toby had venom pouring out of his eyes. Linda avoided looking at him. It hurt too much. Aaron started to cry and Jemma looked Sharon up and down over and over again. Linda felt like the worst mother in the world to be doing this to them, making them assimilate to another new sitter. Making them give up Andrew.

Making myself give up Andrew.

Linda helped Sharon load the children and their bags into her car. Aaron stopped crying and examined the new car with interest. Jemma flicked through a book Sharon had on the car seat. Toby sat in stony silence, the rage causing him to breathe heavily and clench his fists.

Linda waved good-bye. Toby didn’t look in her direction once.

With a deep breath, Linda made her way to her own car.

Even though this nightmare consumed them today, they’d get through it eventually. Somehow, she’d be able to help her children through this. She had to.

* * * *

Walking into the office, Linda was greeted by Mae at the door.

“Welcome home. You look awful. I think we need to meet for coffee.”

Linda felt barely able to lift her head. “Now? I just got here. Whatever you need to say, can’t it wait for lunch?”

“Nope. Millie, take her briefcase. Come downstairs. Helen’s joining us in a minute.”

Millie tugged at the briefcase and Linda's slack arm let it go easily. She allowed herself to be led along by Mae. She didn't trust anything her brain told her anymore.

Sitting at a table in the corner of the café, far enough away from the counter so they couldn't be heard, Mae ordered cappuccinos for all three of them. Soon Helen turned up. Synchronized, they folded their arms in front of their chests. Both looked with sympathy at Linda, but she could tell they meant business.

"Linda, you need to know something," Mae started. "Andrew called me last night."

A jealous knot formed in Linda's stomach immediately.

God, who wants to live with this kind of envy all the time?

"I know you broke up with him. He told me a little about it last night on the phone. Helen and I went out for a coffee with him. He asked to meet us."

Linda looked up with tired eyes. "And you waited until today to tell me?"

Mae continued despite her question. "We had a lot to think through before we met with you. Meeting Andrew changed our mind. We were stunned by his feelings for you and his earnest approach with us." She paused and turned toward Helen.

Helen reached a hand out and rested it on her arm. "Honey, Mae and I had a long talk last night." She drew a deep breath and glanced at her friend as if for support, then back to Linda's weary face. "Darling, we think you need to give this relationship a go and we think you've made a big mistake."

"Excellent. You two were my last hope. I now officially have everyone against me."

Mae stepped in. "Honey, it's not that we're against you. I know we said the opposite before. But we were wrong, and we can see how confused you are. We think it's time you took a leap into the unknown."

Tears stung Linda's eyes. Could no one see the effort behind these decisions, the lucidity and the rationality? The white bikini flashed through her mind, the talisman reminding her why she'd made the tough choice

she'd made. Linda gained some strength, preparing her for her own little speech.

"I can't go out with him. I get jealous and nervous and I can't relax. I feel like I'm just waiting for the moment he runs off with the younger woman. And why shouldn't he? It's worse than my husband. This time he's younger and I am not even meant to have him."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Mae's eyes, wide with shock took on the look of small moons. "He's in love with you, Linda. Can't you see that? Everyone else can." She coughed and shuffled in her seat. "We can see it all over him."

Helen smiled at Linda. "And, I must say, he is so gorgeous. But just because your husband left you, doesn't mean he will. They're not at all the same men."

Mae took up where Helen left off. "Babe, you're scared and you're sabotaging this thing. You're making it bad for everyone. He called us last night because he didn't know what else to do. He just can't get close to you and you shut the door in a very serious way last night."

"It's bad for my kids. They'll get over it at this short stage, but they won't if he leaves me after a year. Or worse, if he leaves me after a couple of years of living with me. How will it be for my children then?"

"How will it be for your children if he doesn't leave?"

"I can't take that chance and I can't play dice with their mental health like this."

Mae and Helen looked at each other. Helen seemed to think she'd have a go. "Linda, there are no promises. We're women. We know that. There are no promises of forever or happily ever after. But what about happy for now? What about the fact of accepting a man who loves you and who really wants to make it work? Why can't you just give it a try?"

"It will add so much pressure to my life." Linda felt like crying. All she could see was the girl in the white bikini trying to get Andrew's attention away from her. "I don't want to go around being scared of a white bikini."

Mae and Helen exchanged glances. "Is that what this is about?" Mae asked. "Youth and beauty?"

Tears flowed freely down Linda's cheeks. "Of course. Why should I have to compete with the younger girls? I'm forty. Can't I give that up now? A twenty-six-year-old boyfriend will simply make me compete with girls I can't compete with. It's bad enough that I lost one man to an infant. Do I now have to spend all my time wracked with fear that I'll lose the next?"

"I don't think this situation has to be that way, Linda," Helen said. "I think you can dive right in here and then work it your way. There is no competition between you and younger girls. Hands down, they lose every time. Why do you think he wants you and not some younger woman?"

But the tears seemed to have struck a chord with the other two women and they started to back off a little. Linda could think of nothing but the white bikini and fear struck her in the heart as she imagined herself confronted with that everywhere they went together. She thought of the flight attendant. How many other women will there be? As she got older and became less of a novelty, Andrew would find his gaze led away from her, and that fact would eventually destroy her self-confidence. A fact of life.

Linda wiped the tears away. She looked at her two friends with resolve through red, puffy eyes. Helen looked at her with sympathy. Mae avoided her gaze.

"As nice as Andrew is," Linda said, "my life with him would be a swirling mess of self-inflicted hell. I just don't think I could cope."

Helen reached out a hand. "Darling, your life is already a mess of self-inflicted hell. Can't you see that?"

The three women started to laugh. The laughter momentarily lifted Linda's spirits and then she crashed into tears again.

Helen continued. "I can see it's really upsetting you. Don't worry. I'll back off. You do what you know works."

Linda shifted her eyes toward Mae.

"Hell, I won't back off!" Mae said. "What you're telling me is that this is just too hard. But you know what, Linda? So is our business. Life is hard for women. But if you don't confront it and take it head on, it's never going to change for anyone. The men have been dating hot, young women forever, and it never occurs to them she'll leave for a younger man. They have no

moments of insecurity at all. You're letting the team down. Here we have the perfect scenario. You can prove to all of us that it can be done. But you're not brave enough and we're supposed to understand."

Mae stood, moving behind her chair and tucking it under the table. "I don't want to continue this conversation. I'm upset by your cowardice. I love you with all my heart and that never changes, but I won't sit here and listen to another word of this. I will see you upstairs."

And she left the table.

Linda's tear-stained face turned toward Helen. "What do you think?"

Helen softened her eyes and continued to stroke Linda's arm with all the warmth of a motherly caress.

"I think Mae's right, but I'm not going to walk out on you."

"It's easy to ask someone else to be brave." Linda felt tired of defending herself.

"I know. But I'm asking it anyway."

* * * *

Back at her desk, Linda felt doom sit heavily on her shoulders. Colleagues stared at her and she shut the door to her office. Everyone steered clear, giving her space. The distress showed so clearly on her face. Soon Millie knocked at the door.

"Yes, come in." Linda coughed and straightened her hair, not knowing yet what to do about her terrible state.

"Hey, Boss. I'm sorry to bother you, but your phone rang about five times while you were out, and I wanted to let you know."

"Thanks," Linda blurted out weakly as Millie left her bag on the desk and backed out the door.

Linda picked up the bag and reached for her phone.

Better get myself to the ladies'.

Her phone had six missed calls. She scrolled through them. Three calls from Toby's school, and three from her ex-husband. Something must be wrong.

Linda's heart leaped.

Hurriedly, she listened to the messages. The first three were from the school.

"Ms. Jacobs, we need to ask you if you picked Toby up at recess today. We can't locate him in class anymore. Please call the school if you get the chance."

"Ms. Jacobs, we're quite worried. We're going to call Toby's father."

"Ms. Jacobs, we have called Toby's father. Please contact the school or we'll call the police."

Then three from her ex.

"Linda, the school wants to know if you picked up Toby. Call them."

"Linda, where the fuck are you? No one can find Toby. He didn't come back after recess."

"Linda. Call me!"

Linda dialed her ex-husband right away.

"Thank Christ. Is Toby with you?" he asked.

"Jesus, no! I haven't picked him up from school."

"Oh, my God. I'll call the police. You ring the school."

Linda hung up, her stomach churning. Toby may have run away. Trembling, Linda rang the school.

"Ms. Jacobs! Thank God. We've been trying to call you."

"Yes. I'm sorry. But I need to tell you that I didn't pick Toby up, and his father is now calling the police. I am going to ring around to see if anyone else has picked him up."

Linda hung up. Perhaps Sharon picked him up for some reason. Linda's hands trembled as she held the phone and scrolled down to Sharon's name.

"Hello? Ms. Jacobs?"

"Hi, Sharon. Did you pick Toby up from school by any chance?"

"Um, God. Sorry, no. Was I supposed to? I thought just this afternoon, not in the middle of the day. Have I missed something?"

"He's missing from the school grounds. We've called the police. We don't know where he's gone."

Panic started to rise up. Who had her son?

“Ms. Jacobs, I’m so sorry. I dropped him off as normal. He seemed very upset this morning, but I assumed that to be about his sitter being taken from him. I thought it completely understandable. But I dropped him off at eight-thirty, as normal.” *Click*. Linda hung up.

Her phone rang immediately. Ed’s name flashed up on the screen.

“I’ve called the police. I have to tell you, they’re really worried. A young boy disappearing from school grounds is not the favorite missing person’s report. We need to get together. Can you meet me right away at the police station?”

“Of course.”

* * * *

Sitting on a wooden bench, staring at a woman shuffling paperwork around, Linda and Ed didn’t speak. At first Ed tried to get something out of her, anything it seemed, but Linda couldn’t go through possible scenarios with him. He gave up and they both slouched in the seat, staring at the large clock on the wall, waiting for the detective assigned to the case.

Linda watched the large hand indicate the minutes going by. The same minutes that may see her beautiful son experiencing terrible pain or some other monstrous crime inflicted on him by a desperate stranger. Sickness rotated and churned in Linda’s stomach, causing beads of sweat to sit on her forehead and gather under her armpits. The clock floated in front of her, swimming around, making a mockery of her stillness when she should be on the streets screaming her son’s name. A man appeared at her side and she looked up at him. He wore a blue shirt she knew to be Target home brand and some brand of trousers. She couldn’t remember the brand name right now.

Why can’t I remember that brand?

Linda looked hard at the seams and the way the belt sat in its small eyelets, but her mind remained blank.

“Hi, I’m detective Samuelson. Sorry to keep you waiting. I have some questions for you. Please come into one of the interview rooms. Follow me.”

Detective Samuelson put them through a series of questions designed to ascertain Toby's movements and to find out if anything other than kidnapping may have happened to him. In the questioning, Linda revealed she harbored a glimmer of hope that the argument in the morning may have had something to do with Toby's disappearance. Ed turned to her with a questioning look, probably wondering why she hadn't mentioned this earlier. The detective wanted to know the same thing.

"Do you know if he would run away, Ms. Jacobs?"

"I doubt it, but he was terribly upset. It is possible."

The detective wanted to call Andrew. Under the troubled gaze of her ex-husband, Linda phoned him.

"Linda, I don't want to talk."

"Andrew, I need your help. Toby is missing. He didn't come back from recess at school today and no one can find him. I fought with him this morning, about you, I mean. We think maybe he has run away."

A moment of silence followed. Linda glanced up into the eyes of Detective Samuels, who looked hopefully at her, and then turned to her ex-husband who stared down at his hands, fumbling with his coat belt in his lap.

I've put everyone through this.

It became too much for Linda and she started to cry. "Jesus, can you help us? Do you think you have any idea where he might be?"

"I think I might. I'll try the beach. It's a long way from the school, but my guess is that's where he would go."

"Okay. Thank you, Andrew."

"It will be all right, Linda." His phone clicked as it hung up.

Linda relayed the other side of the conversation to the men in the room. Her ex-husband looked at her. The detective started making a list of Toby's friends so he could interview them to make sure no suspicious characters were at the school. Linda felt sick with worry. Her phone rang again. Relief flooded through her when she saw Andrew's name flashing on the screen.

"I've found him. You'd better come down to Bondi Beach."

* * * *

Ed attacked Linda on the phone all the way to the beach. He accused her of mishandling his son. He wanted to know what she meant by fucking the babysitter and where the hell did she get off exposing his children to a male sitter, anyway? “How could you fuck someone so young, Linda? It’s irresponsible.”

Linda, fuelled with the heat and distress of the day, turned on him with venom. “You prick. What about you leaving two wives for younger women? What kind of effect do you think that’s had on our kids? Toby, in particular. He wasn’t a sweet, happy, little boy when Andrew met him. He was troubled and sad. Andrew brought some male guidance into his life.”

“He did it to try to fuck you, you idiot.”

“Really? Did he? Are you nice to your children just to impress whoever your little squeeze is?”

“Blood is different, but as a matter of fact, sometimes I am.”

She hung up and turned off her phone. She couldn’t bear another word from that hypocrite.

Linda drove on through the streets of Bondi to her son, quaking with rage at her ex-husband and the general unfairness of it all. Here she burst herself open to do the right thing by her children and he didn’t care at all about his own behaviors.

Suddenly Linda screeched to a halt by the side of the road.

She had a clear picture. She hadn’t been protecting her children. She’d taken Andrew from them. She’d done the very thing she feared most. They needed him and she’d taken him away. And it took this desperate act by her eldest son to make it all clear to her.

“I’ve been a total fool,” she said aloud.

It all seemed so obvious now. Andrew wanted this, her children wanted and needed this, and she needed him. She needed his maturity and his strength.

Everyone saw this except me. I am such a big idiot.

Slowly she put the car into gear and started on down the road. She thought of the way Andrew behaved with Toby and the way her ex behaved with Toby. They couldn't be more different.

So much for blood. It hasn't helped Toby out much in getting him a real father. If that rule doesn't apply, maybe there are other rules that don't apply as well.

Linda arrived at the beach. She could see the backs of Toby and Andrew sitting together in the sand, talking. Linda's heart jumped as she thought of her beautiful child, sitting there safe and well. Just at that moment, her ex-husband's car pulled up. He got out as he ended his conversation with the police, confirming they'd found Toby.

"Maybe we should leave them to talk for a while?" Linda asked Ed.

"Absolutely not. I want him home with me. I don't want to leave him with you and that child you're sleeping with a moment longer."

He stormed off toward Toby and Andrew. Linda followed thinking again how age didn't matter. Ed, the eldest person of them all at the beach, definitely behaved with the least maturity.

Followed closely by me, the second oldest person at the beach.

Linda arrived at the pair, sitting down at the same time as Ed.

"Toby, we were worried sick, son. I want you to come home with me. Your mother told me of the mess she's in. I want to give you a chance to work it out in peace."

Toby looked up at his dad from his tear-stained face. He looked over at his mother.

Then he spoke.

"Andrew says he will come and be our manny again."

Andrew nodded. Linda tried to look him in the eye, to show him warmth, to say thanks, to say she'd been wrong and she wanted to make it all okay, but he avoided her gaze.

"Over my dead body. I don't want someone this young looking after my children."

"Ed, he's older than your new wife. Are you saying you won't ever leave the kids with her?"

“Women are different. They’re meant to look after babies. Any man who is hanging around children wants something strange from them.”

Andrew rolled his eyes and turned to Toby. “You do whatever you’d like, Toby. If you’d like a couple of days with your dad, you take them.”

Toby straightened his back. “I want to go home to mum’s and I want Andrew to come with us.”

Ed started to complain and Linda interjected.

“Andrew, would you mind taking Toby for an ice cream? I want to talk to Ed alone.”

“Sure thing. Let’s go mate.” Andrew and Toby walked off toward the shops of the Bondi Beach promenade. The three o’ clock traffic started to pile up and the start of the shadows cast the long end of the day.

Linda turned on her ex-husband, all the desperation and venom pent up over the years bursting out of her.

“You stupid little man. Your child needs you to put yourself last, just for tonight. He needs you to be a man for once. Can you please, put your own feelings to the side and think of Toby?”

“I am not happy with this, Linda.”

“You know what? I’m not happy with the infant you have spending time with my kids, either, but I put up with it because what goes on in your house is none of my business. My kids deserve a relationship with their father, poor father though he is. It’s time for you to put yourself aside and let us sort this out. Toby wants Andrew tonight. It does not mean he isn’t your son, it just means he needs some space from his stupid parents.”

“I don’t want that guy taking my kids.”

“Then you’re going to have to work a little harder to keep them, and make an effort when they’re there so they want to be with you.”

Ed seemed to think for a while and then he turned to look at Linda, a faint smile on his lips. “And you’re sure this guy’s okay? References and everything. You checked?”

“Afraid so. There’s no escaping the hard work you’ll have to do, now that the children have a chance to see what a real man is like.”

Ed shrugged and turned to walk toward the car. "I'll be watching, Linda. I mean it. I don't want this guy taking my kids away." Linda sighed after him.

What an asshole.

She turned in the direction of Toby and Andrew. Her bright, clever little boy had shown her the way with the only power he had over her. He'd given her hope and the open eyes to see that life does not have to follow a stereotype.

Indeed, if women have any chance at all, then it mustn't follow a stereotype. At least every now and then it mustn't. Toby had scared her into a certain kind of understanding and asked her for something he didn't have the words for.

As she walked toward them, two lone figures talking, sitting in the sand, eating their ice creams, Linda could see a life together. She could see a future and all the possibilities it contained. "Hi, guys." She pulled up next to Andrew. Toby sat on the other side.

Andrew reached down and held her hand. "Toby, I'm going to date your mum. You don't mind, do you?"

Toby leaned forward, a big smile on his face. "I don't mind. Just don't listen too much to her. She's pretty dumb a lot of the time." He sat back and Andrew extended a protective arm behind his back.

Andrew turned to Linda and smiled. "I'll take that very wise advice on board. I think it's a good suggestion. She needs to calm down and take it as it comes."

He leaned in and kissed Linda on the mouth.

She turned to look out to the ocean. The setting sun signaled the closing down of another day and for once, Linda rejoiced in the prospect of a brighter tomorrow.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barbra Novac lives in Leura in the Blue Mountains, just an hour's drive out of Sydney, Australia.

She has two children and lives with her writer husband in a large house overlooking the Megalong Valley.

Barbra has written several books.

She studied archeology at university but these days does accounting as her day job—don't ask.

The bulk of her “research” takes place in the loving arms of her devoted husband, her partner, and soul mate.

She loves to hear from everyone and will do her best to answer any communication. She can be contacted through her website.



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