

A vertical photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sky is filled with vibrant orange and red clouds, with the sun's glow visible on the horizon. In the foreground, a dark wooden bench sits on a pier or dock, facing the water. The overall mood is serene and peaceful.

SUNSET ISLAND

AJ ADAIRE

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by

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Desert Palm Press

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Published by Desert Palm Press at Smashwords ©2013 AJ Adaire

ISBN 9781301136629

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Back of the Book

Ren Madison is certain her life couldn't be more perfect. She owns a private island with an Inn off the coast of Maine. She treasures her loving relationship with her older brother Jack, his wife, Marie, and dotes on her niece Laura. She has a passionate and supportive relationship with her partner, Brooke, and a successful business that doesn't require her undivided attention allowing her ample time to pursue her true passion, painting.

Ren's idyllic world crumbles when Brooke dies. Friends and family worry that Ren may never fully recover from her loss.

Dr. Lindy Caprini, a multi-lingual professor, is looking for an artist to illustrate the book she is writing comparing fairy tales from around the world. To make working together on the book easier, Lindy takes a year sabbatical and leaves friends, home, and boyfriend in Pennsylvania and moves to Ren's island. Ren soon discovers that the beautiful and mischievous Lindy is a talented author and a witty conversationalist. Their collaboration on the book leads to a close, light hearted, and flirtatious friendship. Will their collaboration end there?

Dedication

One would think that, because this is my first book, there wouldn't be too much for me to say. Quite to the contrary...I have a multitude of people to thank. First on the list is my partner, ICL, who has put up with weeks and months of my long silences as I write. When I'm heavy into writing and things are going well, I tend to work for very long hours. If things aren't going well, and I'm struggling with where the story is going, it seems I'm always preoccupied. When I apologize to her for my shortcomings as a companion, she contends that I shouldn't worry because she knows where I am. She credits my writing for 'keeping me off the streets.' I'm not exactly sure what that means, but I'm glad she isn't angry with me.

Next on my list is Lee. She stuck with me through the five or six rewrites of *Sunset Island*, reading and then rereading it each time, suggesting, editing, and encouraging me through to the end, and finally taking a chance to publish me, a new and untested author. I've learned a great deal from her foremost being not to overpopulate my sentences with commas and to be judicious in the use of exclamation points! (Please forgive me that one, Lee...I just couldn't resist.)

Along the way several other people have read my books and encouraged me, including my friend Pat S. who reads, then makes corrections and suggestions. As I finish each book she encourages me to get busy on the next one.

Kris, thanks for reading this one about four times and for all the helpful suggestions you've made over the last year for this book and the other two you worked on.

Martha, who was the first, followed by Andrea, Bee, Lin, and Pat G., all read and encouraged me not to give up. Special appreciation to the friend who read it after each edit (you know who you are), and to Frankie who read it twice. Lastly, thanks to Michelle who got recruited for a final read through at the last possible minute and who gave me positive feedback just when I needed it most. Thank you everyone.

I especially appreciated the appearance of Sue Hilliker in my life just when I'd exhausted everyone else. You supplied a fresh pair of eyes for corrections and some very supportive comments. Becoming a friend was an added bonus.

Lastly, thank you to my readers who have taken a chance by purchasing this book from a new author. I hope I won't disappoint you. If you like the book, please use the contact information at the end to drop me a note and tell me so. If you didn't like it, write to me anyway and I'll try to do better next time.

Excerpt:

Chapter 1: Look At Those Eyes

September 2005

Ren Madison watched out of the office window of the marina she owned with her brother, Jack, as the door of the out-of-state car opened and a pair of feet clad in comfortable shoes hit the gravel of the parking lot. A grin slowly curled her lips as the rest of Dr. Lindy Caprini emerged from the sports car. The woman stood and stretched before she slowly pivoted to take in the scenery, finally stopping to enjoy the gorgeous view of the ocean.

The picture on the university's website certainly didn't do her justice. Look at those eyes. I'd love to paint her. Collaborating with the lovely Lindy to illustrate her book should prove to be extremely pleasant working conditions, indeed. Ren made a mental note to call her sister-in-law, Marie, to thank her again for referring her to the alluring Professor Caprini.

Lindy pushed her sunglasses to the top of her head and tilted her face upwards, eyes closed, soaking in the warmth of the sun. As if she felt Ren's eyes on her, she turned to glance at the window of the marina office where the dark haired woman sat watching. She smiled and tossed a jaunty wave before turning away to retrieve her coat from the back seat of the car.

Sad that her ability to ogle unobserved was no longer possible she closed up the file she was working on. Ren stood, quickly strode to the door, and went outside to welcome her visitor. She called over her shoulder as she locked the office door, "Lindy? I'm Ren. How was the trip up?"

"It was fun—long, though." As Ren neared the car, Lindy opened her arms, offering a welcoming hug. "I hope you feel we know each other well enough to hug hello."

Ren stepped into the quick embrace Lindy offered. She was pleased to find the woman as warm in person as she had been on the phone and through their written communication over the past months. Glancing at her watch, Ren said, "You must have either made good time, or you woke up the rooster when you left this morning."

"Probably a combination of both. I was eager to get on my way, so I left first thing." She made a melodic sound somewhere between a giggle and a laugh. "You can probably count on me falling face first into my cup of tea if I have to stay up much past nine tonight."

"You can make it an early night if you like. Are you starving? We can eat here if you like or, if you feel you can wait, we can get your stuff loaded into the boat, and make it back to the Inn before it gets dark."

"Let's do that, the latter I mean." She flashed a quick smile. "Wouldn't that be easier?"

"Yes, a bit. However, we can do either, honest."

"No. I'm eager to settle in. I did stop for a break this morning around eleven, so it's not like I haven't eaten for weeks. Fair warning however, when dinner arrives I'm going to eat like a truck driver."

There was that infectious laugh again. Ren liked hearing the sound of the woman's laughter. "Okay, let's get what you have packed in your car down to the boat. We'll eat when we get back to the Inn."

Using her cell phone, Ren made a quick call to Maggie, her housekeeper, to be sure that dinner was underway so that they could eat shortly after they arrived at the Inn. Ren expected that it would take them several trips to move the contents of Lindy's car to her boat, and another twenty minutes or so to make the trip to Sunset Island and the Inn she and her brother Jack also owned. It was a surprise when she snapped the phone closed and looked up to find Lindy waiting for her with just her computer and one suitcase. "We can move your car closer to the dock. It'll be easier to get the rest of your things," said Ren.

"Nope, this is all of it. I sent you everything I thought I'd need. I stored all my suits, heels, fancy dresses, and any jewelry worth more than fifty dollars. I did keep out one black cocktail dress and a few things to go with it, just in case it's necessary for me to go somewhere I can't wear jeans, shorts, tees, sweatshirts, and fleece. Hope that's okay, because I'm on a much needed vacation from all that."

"Works for me," laughed Ren. "I think we're going to get along well together, at the least, we'll have the same wardrobes. If you're stuck, we're about the same size so, in a pinch, I can lend you something."

"Do you want me to move my car somewhere out of the way?"

"Yes," Ren said, gesturing to an empty spot next to her own vehicle. "Park down there next to the red SUV. I'll meet you at that red power boat over there."

Because it was a cool and windy day, Ren chose the boat with the enclosed cabin. The cabin wouldn't warm up until they were more than half way to the Inn. At least they'd be out of the September wind because even when the sun was warm, the breeze over the water could be chilling. Once the bags were stored and Lindy was onboard, Ren cast off and they began their first trip together to the island.

"It's certainly lovely here. Marie described everything, although I think she understated the charm." As they neared the island and the Inn came into view, Lindy uttered the almost imperceptible exclamation, "My God, it's absolutely beautiful!" Turning to Ren, she asked, "Is that where we'll be living?"

"Yes, think you'll like it?"

"Why wouldn't I? What's not to like?"

Ren returned Lindy's warm smile. "It is a great place with a long list of positives to recommend it." Ren slowed the boat as she neared the island so she could maneuver into the inlet. "If you need the things the city offers on a regular basis, like the shows, museums, and other cultural events, it'll be a long year for you."

"Do you miss all that?"

"Not really. Although I went to college in the city, I left there years ago and I'm not often drawn back. With my schedule, I'm free to travel there, off-season, when I need a culture fix. Anyway, I've always enjoyed the solitude this place offers, even as a kid." Ren looked at Lindy to gauge her response. "Think you'll miss the city?"

"I can't imagine that I'll have a problem. I'll keep you posted if I start to go stir crazy," replied Lindy, again flashing a quick smile. "My best friend describes me as having no life outside of my work. I tend to focus on my books, writing, and a few close friendships. So, I think this environment will suit my personality."

Ren slipped the boat smoothly into the dock at the base of the stairway leading to the Inn, cutting the engine before she grabbed a line to tie up to the piling. Without having to be asked, Lindy tossed the forward line to Ren to secure the boat to the dock.

"Thanks. Want to hand me the bags?"

Ren carried the suitcase and Lindy shouldered her laptop as they climbed up the stone steps to the entryway of the massive Inn sitting at the highest point on the island. "We're here, Maggie," Ren called as she turned to go straight down the expansive central corridor to the core of the living area. She turned down one of the side hallways and led Lindy to the first door on the left. Opening the door to what would be Lindy's bedroom for the duration of her stay she said, "This is your new home away from home until we finish the book." She smiled at Lindy. "Hope you'll be comfortable here."

Lindy glanced around the nicely appointed room furnished with a beautiful antique dresser, night table, and a queen-sized bed festooned with decorative pillows that matched the blue shades in the wallpaper. "Ren, this is fabulous. Blue is my favorite color, too. I couldn't be more pleased."

After dropping the bag she carried, Ren led Lindy through the doorway into the adjoining room. "This is your private bath and through here," she said as she swung open the door on the opposite wall, "is your sitting room slash office." Ren stepped aside to allow Lindy to enter.

Lindy glanced around, her broad smile and sparkling eyes indicating her pleasure with the accommodations.

Ren gestured at the neatly stacked boxes lining the one wall. "Obviously, I resisted all urges to unpack for you. I figured everyone should keep her stuff organized the way she wants it. There doesn't seem to be that much here. All the boxes were light...thanks for that." Ren flashed a quick grin. "If you need it, I can help you tomorrow."

"Sounds good. Thanks for everything. The pile looks imposing, but you're right, there's really not that much. I'm sure I'll manage." She smiled. "I just packed everything really, really well. I must have used fifty bags of those foam peanuts."

"I'm going to go check on the progress of our dinner. You can freshen up if you want. Then we can eat before I give you the tour if you feel up to it."

"Where do I meet you?"

"Just go out the door, and turn right. Keep going and you'll eventually come to the dining room."

Ten minutes later, Lindy showed up for dinner and Ren introduced her to Maggie. "It's a definite pleasure to meet you. Ren has been working hard on the illustrations for you. It's made her happier."

Lindy's raised eyebrows conveyed her puzzlement at Maggie's statement regarding Ren's happiness. In response, she settled for a noncommittal, "It's a pleasure to be here. I've been enjoying the work we've been doing together long distance and look forward to being able to do more now that I'm here. I'm glad that Ren and I will finally be working in the same place—no more mailing, e-mailing, and waiting."

The three women ate dinner, a simple meal of broiled chicken with roasted vegetables and a huge salad. When Lindy commented about how good the food was, Maggie accepted the compliment. "Can you cook?"

"I love to cook. Because I live alone I don't do it very often. Cooking for one is no fun. If I make a roast I have to eat it for a week. So I guess the answer is I can, but don't usually. Why?"

Ren interjected, "Maggie takes pity on me during the off season, when the Inn is closed. Left to my own devices, she thinks I'd starve to death. I think she worries about my limited diet of the few things I'm capable of making for myself."

"What are they?"

"Actually, I'm not a bad cook. I learned from one of the best." Ren glanced away for a minute and blinked several times, sadness clouding her eyes. "Like you, I don't. Besides soups, salads, hotdogs, and steak, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are my staples. They are all quick and easy to make and there aren't usually any leftovers to deal with."

"Yes," Maggie agreed. "I cook for her because if I didn't, there wouldn't be a single vegetable pass through those lips of hers."

Ren laughed. "Guilty as charged."

"You won't have to worry, Maggie, I promise to ply her with vegetables."

They all laughed when Maggie looked towards the heavens, and folded her hands as if in prayer. "My prayers have been answered."

When dinner was over, Maggie took the dishes back to the kitchen to clean up while Ren gave Lindy the promised tour of the house.

"This place is huge," Lindy commented. "I may need to drop breadcrumbs for the first few days until I get the layout down pat. I'm sure the views are spectacular in the daytime. I can't wait to see the rest of the island, too."

"It's too dark to see the cabins tonight. Tomorrow should be nice so you can tour them in the morning." Ren told Lindy about the cabins generally rented to families with children after showing her the rooms in the other wing that were available for rent in season. She returned to the main living area to show her the library, porch, and sitting areas, ending the tour back at Lindy's bedroom door. Pointing down the hallway she said, "My studio is next to your sitting room, and my bedroom is next to that should you need anything during the night."

"I think once my head hits the pillow, that'll be it for me tonight."

"Okay, in that case, I'll wish you a good night. Don't forget, if you'd like some help unpacking tomorrow, I'd be glad to assist. When we don't have guests, Maggie and I usually fend for ourselves for breakfast and lunch. Off-season, we generally eat dinner together a few nights a week. You know, the vegetable thing." She was pleased when Lindy grinned. "I think she'll be glad you're here though, because it will free her up to spend more time with Bob, her fiancé. They're planning their wedding...the big day is in February. After that they're taking a couple of weeks off for their honeymoon. She doesn't know it yet, but my wedding present to them is two additional weeks in Tahiti. So we'll be on our own for over a month." Ren grinned. "I think she was relieved to hear you're capable of cooking because she's convinced herself that, left to my own devices, I'd starve to death if she wasn't here." Ren shrugged. "Sadly, there's probably some small degree of truth to her fears."

Lindy looked Ren up and down and smiled. "You don't seem to look like you've suffered any ill effects from your lack of vegetables. Besides, I know exactly what it's like to have to eat alone. I'm glad we'll be sharing meals together."

"Well I'd better let you get to bed. Goodnight."

Lindy put her hand on Ren's arm to stall her departure. "Oh, one more thing. About tomorrow...the first item on my agenda is to set up my office and unpack. Once that's done, I'll take a survey to see if I need anything that I've forgotten. After that, I have a little more to do on the analysis of the first series of fairy tales. I've been working on them at home and I only have a bit more to write before I pass them off to you so you can get started whenever you're ready. Snow White is our next series. With the work I need to do, I'd say I'd probably be out of your hair for about two days before I'll be ready to meet to discuss the next group of stories. Will that be acceptable to you?"

"Yes, absolutely. I'm still working on one of the other sketches from the information you sent me before, plus I have a couple of other jobs I'm finishing up. I'm sure that we'll get into a routine as we work together."

"No doubt. Will I disturb you if I use the computer late at night or early in the morning? I could type in my bedroom if it will."

"No, my studio is between your office and my bedroom. I'm sure you won't bother me." As Ren turned to go towards the library, she paused. "Lindy, this is your home now, so make yourself comfortable. There's brandy and wine in the library if you'd like a nightcap before you turn in. Please feel free to help yourself if I'm not around. I think I'll head down and have a sherry now. Sure you won't join me?"

Lindy shook her head. "Thanks anyway. After that long drive, I won't need that tonight. I'll see you in the morning." Lindy smiled and gave a little wave.

Ren tossed back a quick wave in response before heading down the hallway toward the library. She recognized that she was enjoying her time with Lindy and felt a bit disappointed that she would not be joining her for a drink. However, she fully appreciated that Lindy was tired after her long drive.

As Ren sat in the library sipping her grandfather's favorite sherry, her thoughts turned to the many evenings she, her grandfather, and her lover had sat together in the beautiful room. She wished that he and Brooke were there with her now. She had no problem admitting that she was lonely. During the season, having guests meant that there were people around. Regardless, it was completely possible for her to be lonely even with a group of people in the house. She was looking forward to having Lindy around for the long, dark winter months. From what she had seen since Lindy arrived, she was sure that the friendship they began on the phone and through e-mails, several months before, would deepen with time spent together. At least she sure hoped so. She allowed her mind to wander back to the spring when she'd had her first contact with the lovely Dr. Lindy Caprini.

Chapter 2: I Hear Michelangelo Is No Longer Available

March 2005

Ren Madison was lonely. Her phone calls several times a week with her old friend Mallory helped assuage her loneliness to the point that she was able to function, as did seeing her friends Joey and Ben, and Peg and Penny. Still, it had been a difficult few years and a long winter season at the Inn while it was closed. With some free time on her hands, it was still two months until the Inn reopened in late May. She decided to reorganize her workspace, store her excess paintings and photos she wasn't yet ready to part with, and display some of her work on the longest wall of her studio. She sorted through the plethora of pictures and paintings currently stacked in the corners of the studio and chose a selection of those she wanted to hang. She laid the body of her work on the floor so she could organize the different sized works into a display pleasing to her eye. Once she knew how she wanted them displayed, she got out the ladder and began to hang the frames on the wall. When finished, she stepped back to admire the display of her work from the earliest to her most current efforts.

For the centerpiece of the display she chose the nude she'd painted years ago, her largest painting. Brooke, her now deceased partner, stared back at her from the canvas. The piece had always held special significance for her and looking at the painting still evoked mixed feelings. When her lover was alive, it served to remind her of how much Brooke loved and wanted her. Now, especially when she was depressed, it sometimes reminded her of all that she'd lost. *As if I need an additional reminder*, she chided herself. After serious consideration, she concluded that the painting provided her with memories and feelings, most of them pleasant. In her heart, she knew that particular painting was her best work—a true labor of love. Regardless, she couldn't bring herself to part with it, so it went up on the wall with the rest of the artwork she was placing on display.

Mixed in with a large number of sketches she'd made of Brooke when they'd first met, were several pictures of her grandfather and grandmother who had raised her and her older brother Jack. Ren was only two when her parents died, leaving her and Jack orphans. As she shuffled through the pile her mind drifted back to her first date with Brooke. She recalled how nervous she was to meet the tall, willowy blonde for their first date, nearly twenty years ago, during the second semester of her freshman year in college. It was not only her first date with Brooke—it was also her first date with a woman. She smiled as she remembered how her heart pounded and her palms perspired while she waited in front of the restaurant where they'd agreed to meet. When the bus stopped and Brooke stepped off, she had greeted Ren with a quick kiss on the lips and a warm hug.

She shook her head and chuckled as she thought about how they had struggled to find a place to be alone during the first few months they'd dated. Brooke had multiple roommates, and Ren had a dorm mate they had dubbed 'the mole' since she never left the room except sporadically for a class. All seemed to conspire to keep the young couple from sharing any intimate time together. As a last resort, they had turned to meeting in the campus library for a quick kiss behind the shelves in a remote area of the stacks of dusty research tomes.

Ren shook herself from her reverie and forced herself to focus on her project. She selected several more paintings and put those aside to store. Those she was ready to part with she would wrap and send to her art dealer in New York. Some of the darker paintings of storms over the ocean that she completed after Brooke's death, along with many photos of the island, the ocean, local landmarks, and other sites of interest she had taken over the past few years, she would take to the local gallery. The ocean scenes sold better to the tourists who visited the local area than they did in the city. *Makes sense*, she thought.

Ren felt better now that her work area was more functionally organized and presented a much more welcoming environment. It was almost too coincidental when her sister-in-law, Marie, called the day after Ren finished cleaning and organizing her studio. Ren answered the phone when it rang. "Hello Marie. Welcome back. How was your week in the city?"

"Great. I really enjoyed it. Despite the fact that I missed Jack and Laura, of course, I have to admit that I had a nice time and learned a lot. Hey Ren, I gave out your phone number to a friend of mine," Marie said without further preamble. "Dr. Lindy Caprini is a woman I've known since college—one of my sorority sisters. I just spent the week with her at that conference I attended. We talked a lot about a big project she's been working on. She received a grant to write a book about fairy tales from around the world. Lindy told me that she needs an illustrator to work closely with her so, of course, I immediately thought of my favorite artist."

Ren, who loved to tease her sister-in-law, asked, "Really? And who would that be?"

"Well, I hear Michelangelo is no longer available—so I suggested you."

Ren could picture her sister-in-law's raised eyebrow just from the tone of her voice. Laughing together gave an additional boost to Ren's already positive mood. "Okay, I'll be happy to talk with her if she calls. Thank you."

"I think her project is right up your alley. Lindy has been teaching at the college level for quite a few years now and, in September, she's taking off a year to do some writing. Apparently the college encourages their professors to publish. From what she told me, she'd prefer to write her own fairy tales even though she's obligated to, as she put it, do something 'more scholarly.' So she's doing research now and plans to produce a textbook of some sort. Really, it'd be better if she tells you about it. She's a lovely woman. She speaks a gazillion languages and I think you'll enjoy her sense of humor. She's really fun."

"She sounds fascinating. It's impressive that she speaks all those languages. She'd be a great person to have as a travel companion." Changing the subject, Ren asked, "How's my older brother and my favorite niece?"

"What do you mean older brother, you nut?" Marie laughed. "Jack, your *only* brother, and Laura, your *only* niece, are both fine. Think you can join us for dinner later this week?"

"Sounds good. I'll give you a call when I figure out when I'll be on the mainland."

After a few more minutes of light banter, they completed their call and Ren returned to her work. Less than an hour after she concluded the conversation with her sister-in-law, Lindy Caprini called to speak to Ren about her project.

Following brief introductions and shared pleasantries, Lindy explained the reason for her call. "Marie suggested that I contact you. She seems to think you're quite talented."

"Well, she might be a bit prejudiced."

"I don't know, I've known Marie a long time. I think she's an honest person. How about I describe the project to you and then we can discuss if it's something you might be interested in doing. Is this a convenient time?"

Ren glanced around her work area disappointed that Lindy couldn't see the condition of her workspace, knowing it probably would never be this neat again. "Absolutely. I'm eager to hear about it."

Lindy took a deep breath. "I've been fortunate to land a grant to study something I have an interest in anyway. I've always found it intriguing that the fairy tales my mother and grandmother told me in Spanish are quite different from the fairy tales that kids in the States hear. I became intrigued enough that I began researching fairy tales throughout the world and am now in the process of writing up my findings. I'm planning to take a year off, after I do the summer session here at the college, to write and work with an illustrator on a book comparing fairy tales from around the world."

"You're lucky, at least that sounds like an interesting topic."

"Yes, it is," agreed Lindy. "When I began my research, I was amazed to learn that there are at least six or seven hundred versions of Cinderella alone."

"Really? I'd never have guessed that there are that many."

"It's true. In one of the Italian versions, Cinderella kills her stepmother. If I remember correctly, she ends up marrying a king instead of a prince. I'm not really sure what kind of moral that teaches." She laughed.

Ren noted that Lindy's melodic laugh was very nearly a giggle. She liked the sound. "At least you can read many of them in the original language. Marie tells me you speak a gazillion languages."

"Sadly, that's a slight exaggeration. I only know four and a half. I was lucky to grow up in a multi-lingual household. I speak my father's native language, Italian, and my mother's, which is Spanish. There is English, obviously, and I took French in college with Marie."

Ren's brow furrowed. "Tell me about the half of a language."

Lindy giggled. "Well, my half-language is Latin. I can read it; however, Latin is not really spoken anymore except, on rare occasions, in church—ergo, half a language."

Ren chuckled. "Oh, I see. Now it makes sense."

"Anyway, I can't write while I'm working full time, so I've been doing most of my research after teaching hours. I find it difficult because just when I find something of interest it's time to stop, and I lose momentum. It makes for slow progress. I need time to lock myself away so I can really concentrate uninterrupted by the real world. I find that I'm not all that disciplined at home, so I need to be somewhere other than here where I'm tempted to do anything and everything other than what I should be doing. Without distractions, I can be pretty disciplined. In addition, I need to work closely with the illustrator, probably almost on a daily basis. When I find someone to work with, I'll probably rent a place nearby wherever the artist I hire lives. Although I want the drawings to be a collaboration, I do have some specific ideas I want incorporated into the style of the illustrations."

"Marie told me that she'd mentioned you might stay here if we agree to work together."

“Yes. After she raved about your artistic talents, she mentioned that you and Jack have an apartment over your marina’s office. The availability of possible accommodations, either with or near you, was one of the supporting reasons I decided to give you a call.”

“Tell me a little more about the project.”

“I’m happy to see I haven’t bored you to death yet. I love to talk about it, so stop me if I go on too much.” Lindy inhaled another deep breath. “My intention is to concentrate on fairy tales from the countries whose languages I speak, in addition to the stories from Germany and China. I already have someone working on the German and Chinese translations of the stories I plan to focus on in the book, so as soon as that’s finished I’ll be prepared with information for the text. What I want to do is to select several of the tales, such as Cinderella, then tell each story by country. Your role would be to provide an original illustration for each country’s version that visually conveys the major variants for each of the tales. Following each of the translations, I plan to summarize and compare the differences and similarities of the stories. Marie told me that in addition to your painting and photography work, you’ve done some illustration work for a local author. Do you think this project is something you’d enjoy doing?”

Lindy’s animated and enthusiastic detailing of the project intrigued Ren, her mind already thinking of how she might bring visual life to Lindy’s words with her art. “I have to admit that you make it sound like a great adventure so yes, I’d be interested. Besides the mediums Marie mentioned, I also have some experience with generating graphics on the computer. It may be an avenue we can explore for this project, depending on what you have in mind. I’m sure before we go any further, you’ll want to see some samples of my work. I have a website that shows some of my drawings and photographs, although none of it will relate directly to what you indicate you want for the book. It won’t hurt for you to take a look at the work there anyway just to see the quality of the work I do. Why don’t you send me a story you want to illustrate, give me an idea of what you want me to highlight in the drawing, and I’ll whip up a couple of sample illustrations. That should at least give you an idea of whether you like my work and if we’ll be able to communicate along the same wave length.”

“Perfect! I love your willingness to send me samples of your drawing style and being open to collaborate to create exactly what I want in the illustrations.” Lindy’s smile was evident in her tone. “That sounds great...very good suggestion. The fact that I know Marie and through her I have heard a bit about you and your brother—well, it will be nice to work with someone I feel I almost know rather than with a total stranger.”

After they exchanged e-mail addresses Ren asked, “What’s your timeline on this project?”

Lindy flipped her calendar to month view. “I’ll be able to send you the first story in, hopefully, two weeks.”

“That fits perfectly with my schedule. I have off hours even while the Inn is open.”

“Now for the hard part. I’m excited about our working together. I’m almost afraid to ask what your fees will be for this project.”

“Let’s wait to discuss fees until after we’re sure you like my work and want me to do the illustrations,” suggested Ren.

“What happens if I can’t afford you?”

“Trust me. If you like my work I can assure you we can arrange something agreeable. I promise.” Ren didn’t tell Lindy that she felt interested enough by the proposal that she would almost pay her to do the job. The idea itself intrigued her and she loved the excitement that Lindy demonstrated when she talked about her plans.

True to her word, within the specified time, a copy of the different versions of Cinderella showed up as an attachment in Ren’s e-mail. Along with the stories, Lindy sent a separate sheet indicating what she had in mind for the illustrations. Ren was relieved that the instructions were clear and gave her a good idea of what the woman would like to see. At the same time, they also left her a great deal of flexibility to explore her imagination and create a work of art that would please the artist in her. The illustration work she’d done in the past definitely didn’t offer her this degree of artistic freedom. She wanted to do this job badly so, although Lindy expected that she would do less, she made three different detailed drawings in three different styles. Ren enclosed a note along with her illustrations that explained her thinking on each sketch. In conclusion, she added that she had a favorite among the three, but she wasn’t saying which and requested that Lindy call her when she finished reviewing the submissions. She was so excited to get the illustrations into the mail that she made a special trip to the mainland post office to send them using overnight delivery.

While she waited for the call from Lindy, Ren continued to work on the sketches, playing with texture and light to refine her original illustrations. Seeing Lindy’s name on the caller ID when the phone rang elicited a sharp intake of breath from Ren. Her pounding heart, and the fluttering butterflies in her stomach, confirmed that she was nervous.

Lindy didn’t waste any time on pleasantries. After a simple, “Hello,” she said, “Okay, bottom line, I love the sketches. They are fantastic, amazing, in fact. Now, let’s talk about the details.”

“Okay, let’s,” said Ren, excitement evident in her tone.

"I liked all three styles of sketches you sent very much. Personally, I identify with the second sketch you sent the most, so I guess I'd say that was my favorite. However, I was wondering if we should consider using a different style for each country? What do you think?"

"That would be an interesting approach. It's something we could try to see how it works. For me, it would certainly be more interesting. I have the three stories you sent me that I can play around with for now." Ren laughed, "I take it I got the job?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I was so excited when I got your drawings, that there was no other option in my mind. Yes, will you work with me?"

"I can't wait to get started on the rest of the illustrations."

"Well, we have until September to play around and decide what approach we want to take. I won't be starting my full time work on the book until after I finish up my obligations here. I've collected the majority of my data, however, I'm still working with the Chinese translators on some of the stories. I'll need to finish my analysis and comparisons once I've had the chance to review the text they provide me. Can you hang on a minute till I get my calendar?"

"Sure." Ren could hear papers shuffling as Lindy got her calendar open and could hear her thinking aloud as she calculated when she could have some preliminary material to Ren.

"I think in a month or so I can finish the text for the introduction and complete the analysis for the first fable within a couple of months, say by June. Will that work for you?"

"I start to get busy here at the Inn from early June through Labor Day when we close for the season. Still, even when we have guests, I should have enough time to work during the down times each day and evenings after dinner. I'll definitely be able to pick up the pace in September after the Inn closes, which seems to mesh well with your schedule."

"All we have left to do now is work out how much you'll charge for your illustration services and find me a place to stay."

"If it's all right with you, I'd prefer to charge you a flat fee for my work. I like to be able to tinker with my drawings so that they please me. If I don't charge a flat fee per illustration, I end up feeling rushed because I don't want to spend more of my client's money than I have to."

"That sounds very fair."

"Good. So, we're agreed. I feel very excited about your book and am eager to work with you on it. I think it'll be a fun venture." Ren paused, the artist in her hating this part of the negotiation process. "I'll send you an e-mail with a list of some additional information I'll need from you and once you respond, I'll give you a price. I'll enclose a contract for you, too. It's my standard contract, and although it's reasonably straightforward, I still suggest you have your lawyer review it."

"Yes, I will. Thank you."

"We've begun limiting our months of operation, so from mid-September until May I rattle around here in the house, essentially by myself. Although the apartment at the marina is an option, my preference would be for you to stay here on the island with me. Especially for the winter when there are times that making the commute to the mainland can be difficult. It would just be more convenient for me to have you here while we're working together...I won't have to travel to you or you to me."

"That's a very generous offer."

"I don't view it that way. This is a project that has really excited me, and there's certainly ample space here for both of us. I think it's a perfect solution."

"I can see your logic regarding being easily accessible while I'm working on the book with you," Lindy agreed. "I'll need to be there nearly a year, so I insist you let me pay for my board and that, at the least, when you are in season you charge me as a guest. My grant covers living expenses for me, so I have a budget for it."

"Okay, done. We'll give you the special 'friends and family long term rate.' I'll put rates, contracts, and information about the Inn in writing and e-mail it to you in a day or two. If you agree to everything, let me know and I'll send you notarized copies in the mail."

"Ren, I can't tell you how much I appreciate everything you're doing for me. I've been excited about writing this book since I started talking to my publisher about it. Finally being able to begin seriously planning a strategy and making final arrangements has just stoked my enthusiasm. I'm very optimistic that we'll make a good team."

"Yes, me too. So, tell me more about what you envision for the illustrations." With the business out of the way, the two women talked for another half hour discussing their project and relating how they got interested in their fields.

By the time they hung up, Ren had to stop herself from skipping down the hall. She went into her studio and began another sketch for the Italian version of Cinderella's story. As she reread the tale, the thought crossed her mind—*this is certainly more macabre than the American version.*

As Ren started her sketch, she began to wonder what Lindy would be like. She knew from the sample stories that she was a talented writer. Marie had told her "Lindy is a very sweet and caring person with a good sense of humor, an easy laugh, and an infectious giggle. She's probably about the same height, maybe a little taller than you. She's shorter than my 5'7". She has dark hair like yours, although hers is straight and yours is wavy. You wear yours short, while hers is shoulder length, and she has dark brown eyes instead of your dark blue ones."

Ren enjoyed and looked forward to her phone conversations with Lindy and to listening to her voice with its pleasing, slightly husky, timbre. The thought of Lindy's voice piqued her curiosity. Taking a break from her drawing, she looked Lindy up on the web and found her picture in the staff section on the university's website.

"Good God, she's gorgeous. She could pass for that famous movie star's sister." Her right eyebrow rose of its own accord and she uttered softly, "Next year is certainly looking up."

Over the rest of that summer Lindy sent information to Ren who was spending nearly all of her free time working on the sketches. Until the time when they would begin working together at the Inn, they spoke frequently, collaborating on the phone and sending drawings back and forth over the Internet. Together they developed a look and feel for the style of the pictures for each country that satisfied both of them. Lindy was so impressed with the pictures Ren sent that she asked that there be one full-page sized illustration as a lead in to the story, and two or three additional smaller drawings inserted within the text for each tale. Ren was more than happy to agree to do the extra work especially since she was enjoying the collaboration between them and their chats about the creation of the drawings. By August, Lindy and Ren were eager to get started working seriously on the project every day. As the two women worked to plan the layout, look and feel of the book, they began to appreciate their extremely positive working relationship and quickly deepening friendship. They often called each other just to chat about their days, sometimes not even mentioning the book during their conversations.

In August, becoming more excited by the day, Ren began to make plans for Lindy's arrival. She decided to put Lindy in a suite of rooms next to her studio. The two bedrooms, joined by a private bath between them would make a comfortable and private suite area where Lindy could live and work. Ren had the bed and dressers removed from the larger of the two bedrooms, before setting it up as a sitting room and office for Lindy. Two comfortable chairs, one on each side of the window with a table separating them, would make for a comfortable reading area. Opposite, on the shorter wall next to the door, she placed the desk and a bookshelf. As the neatly labeled boxes that Lindy shipped to her began to arrive, Ren stacked them carefully in the office/sitting room or bedroom, depending on the neatly written list of contents on the side of each box. Although tempted to stack the books on the bookshelf, she restrained her curiosity and refrained from doing so. In town one day running errands, Ren stopped at the office supply store and bought all the necessary supplies for the new office. She even picked up a new, faster router so they would be able to share access to the Internet and printer. Ren hoped Lindy would be pleased with the work area and the living arrangement.

Chapter 3: Really, It's Me, Not You

"Ready to go?" Jim yelled as he bounded up the steps to Lindy's apartment? "I've got the picnic supplies packed in the car. All I need is you. You might want to toss in a sweater. I know it's July, but the air seems a bit damp...hope it doesn't rain. By the time they set off the fireworks tonight, it could get really chilly."

"Thanks. Yes, I'm ready." They were attending the 'Concert and Picnic In The Park' fundraising event the local orchestra presented annually. It was an event that was usually well attended, and the spots on the grass near the bandstand filled up quickly. Local garage-type bands performed first, followed by the small local professional orchestra. The evening concluded with a fireworks display. Lindy looked forward to the event every year. She hurried to grab a jacket and joined Jim for the short ride to the park.

"Look. There's a perfect parking spot near the fence. I can hand everything to you and we won't have to carry it all the way to the gate and back up here. Here's your ticket. Go inside and meet me back here."

Lindy did as instructed. She walked to the gate, produced her ticket, entered the park, and made her way back to where Jim was standing on the other side of the plastic fence strung around the perimeter of the field. He handed the cooler and blanket over the fence to her. "Careful, the wine's in this. I'll just lock up the car. Now where's my ticket?" He patted his pockets. He flashed a grin as he held up his ticket. "Looks like there's a line at the gate now. I'll see you in a couple of minutes."

Lindy nodded, her fondness for him showing on her face. "Okay."

As he darted off, she spread the blanket and began to organize their belongings. So far the rain was holding off even though the threatening sky promised a downpour any minute.

"Hope it doesn't rain until after the fireworks," Jim said as he joined Lindy on the blanket.

By the time they finished their picnic lunch, the concert was ready to begin. The crowd that had chatted and had their meals as the local rock bands played quieted when the orchestra began to play a selection of patriotic music. Everyone was clapping along to some of the marches they played just before the finale of the 1812 Overture, which signaled the beginning of the fireworks display. The colors burst in the sky in time with the music. The rain arrived with the final massive crescendo of fireworks. Rain poured down as the crowd scattered as leaves would if blown by gusting winds. People tugged the orange plastic fence from the support posts and ran for their vehicles as the first bolts of lightning flashed.

Jim and Lindy were soaked by the time they made it into the car. "Wow! What a cloudburst," Jim said as he wiped the rain from his glasses. "We're lucky we were parked so close."

Lindy wiped her face with her sleeve. "I know. Look, those people are soaked through. I'm glad we got to see the whole concert before the heavens opened up, though."

"Yes, me too. It was fun."

It was amazing how quickly they made it home. The traffic leaving the park was orderly and they made it back to Lindy's place in just a few minutes.

"Thanks, Jim. I had a wonderful time."

"Shall I come in?"

"Do you mind if I beg off tonight? I'm kind of tired and want to get an early start tomorrow morning with the last of my chores."

"I understand. Can't say I'm not disappointed though."

"I know. I'll see you later in the week, once I have things more organized."

He gave her a gentle kiss before leaving.

Lindy Caprini Journal

July 6th already. Had a nice holiday. It's less than two months until I leave. I've been so busy that I've been even worse than normal in recording life events here. I'm notoriously bad about writing in my journal, but this time I've been especially remiss, even for me, who is not all that diligent about keeping up with my writing under the best of conditions. I've come to a conclusion, and I dread the conversation I need to have with Jim. It's been over a year now that I've been dating him. There isn't a man on the face of the earth better suited to me in so many ways. Jim is intelligent, tall, good looking, well built, affectionate, witty, and a wonderfully entertaining companion. He's my mental equal, adept at arguing his point without anger or sarcasm, and someone who can admit defeat with humor

and grace when I best him in a discussion. Perhaps his most admirable trait is that he doesn't gloat when he wins. Overall, Jim is the perfect man, someone I'm happy with in every way except one and the fault there is mine, not his.

I fully accept the blame for the fact that we don't mesh sexually. He really has been very patient with me, and is gentle and considerate as a lover. Even though, in bed, he spends a sufficient amount of time on foreplay before attempting intercourse with me, he just has never been able to bring me to orgasm. It is a point of issue for us. I'm reticent to continue this relationship with him for this reason alone. Both of us feel a failure, and neither of us should have to settle for this. Eventually, I think it will tell on our relationship even though I've told him repeatedly it's not his fault. I've even gone so far as to confess to him that the two previous lovers I was intimate with faced the same challenge with me, with considerably less aplomb. The first gave up after a month of unsuccessful attempts at sexual intimacy. Bill, the second man, was much less gracious, calling me 'a frigid bitch' before he stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

When I told Jim the story he held me and told me, for the first time, that he'd fallen in love with me. He told me it was his desire to please me sexually, as well as in all other aspects of our relationship. So, at his suggestion we agreed to try sex without condoms, using birth control pills instead, to avoid pregnancy. After we both got tested and waited the requisite couple of months, we went away for a weekend.

I was hopeful. I felt optimistic. I knew I loved him. Still, I continued to wonder why I didn't get excited, wet, and breathless like the heroines in the paperback novels did when the rugged men of their dreams kissed them, making their blood boil, their pulse race and fireworks explode. After all, I view Jim as everything any woman could ask for. He should be perfect for me, and he is...except for the racing, boiling, sparks flying and fireworks thing.

He took me away for a romantic weekend in the mountains. After dinner, we took a walk through the garden where he kissed me in the moonlight and told me he loved me. Later, in bed, he was tender and spent an extended amount of time touching and kissing me before he entered me. We were both disappointed that the results were just not earth shattering. I have to admit that, to some extent, the act was better without a condom, and I did eventually have an orgasm. Sadly, the earth barely trembled for me. What's the expression something about not with a bang but a whimper? In my case, it definitely hadn't moved and no fireworks either. He swears we'll be okay and things will improve. Yet, in my heart, I know this is just not going to happen for me. Maybe I am a frigid bitch.

If I'm honest, the sex act itself is a bit distasteful to me, especially now that I have to deal with the aftermath that intercourse without the condom leaves. I hate to disappoint him. I feel I owe him honesty and an opportunity to find someone who would be a better sexual partner for him than I'm able to be. All that remains is for me to tell him, a task I dread.

Seven weeks from now I'll be leaving here for a year to work on my book with Ren Madison. This is probably a convenient way for us to separate without having to run into each other at work, day after day. I dread the conversation with him and having to hurt him. I need to tell him that I don't want him to wait for me. I sincerely want him to find someone who can offer him everything I can't. I feel this decision is fair to both of us. Although I'll miss his friendship, in my mind, our love affair is already over.



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