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# Masque of Passion

Tesni Morgan

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There was a new woman stirring in Lisa. David had raised her curiosity and he appealed to her sense of rebellion. She had been in a cage and he had part-opened the door.

He grabbed hold of her hair, then took her hand and guided it to where he wanted it most. She closed her fingers around his erection. Lisa needed to feel him inside her; wanted him to share in her intense pleasure. There was no turning back.

# MASQUE OF PASSION

Tesni Morgan

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# *Prelude*

The rhythm of a tango echoed from the petal-shaped horn of an old-fashioned gramophone. The tempo was measured; the sound bitter-sweet with an underlying melancholy. Violins, an accordion, a hint of guitar, a piano and the whisper of a snare drum. The compelling beat grew soft, then louder: romantic, aggressive and passionate.

The woman thrilled as she moved to her partner's lead. He was compelling, too. He guided her feet and bent her body to his will, like a sapling before a strong breeze.

They were alone in the sombre ballroom, the atmosphere one of decadent luxury. The drapes were crimson and black and light filtered down from an art deco lamp, a sunburst in orange, gold and lemon.

Their images were reflected over and over in huge, gilt-framed mirrors – a timeless, ageless couple dancing.

The light glinted on the purple satin and sequinned evening gown with narrow shoulder straps and a cleavage that plunged to her waist. Her skin shone with a pallid lustre. The satin clung to the curves and hollows of her body, outlining breasts, belly and hips. It was slit to the thigh on each side. Every time she moved the skirt opened, revealing long, lovely legs covered in polished black silk, the stockings upheld by garters just above the knee.

Sometimes there was a flash of the russet wedge that furred her pubis; sometimes the white flesh of her buttocks was laid bare momentarily; sometimes the deep amber crease between them.

She could smell her own arousal. Essences crept from the secret garden of her sex, mingling with Phul-Na-Na perfume, her partner's pungent hair pomade and the musky,

masculine odour of his sweat. It was a combination that made her ache with lust, and her nipples pressed against the slippery satin while her clitoris swelled with need between the plump labial lips. Desire crept over her skin like an irritation then retreated into her depths and became a molten ember waiting to erupt into flame at his touch and his rhythm.

In keeping with the role she was playing, her auburn hair had been set in Marcel waves and tight curls. Her make-up was heavy, with a scarlet Cupid's bow mouth, bright spots of rouge on either cheek and a thick layer of mascara spiking her lashes. Drop earrings swung as she danced. A bronze snake wrapped its coils round her upper arm, its eyes two glittering rubies.

Her partner was as agile and sinister as a panther in a black pinstripe, double-breasted suit. A wide-brimmed fedora was canted low over his eyes, and his patent leather dancing shoes were part covered by white spats. He looked like a gangster in an early Hollywood silent movie, exuding animal magnetism.

That's what we are tonight, the woman thought. Stars in a picture show.

The music stopped. He held her pressed to his chest, one arm clamped round her lower back, his big hand spread wide over the dimple at the base of her spine. She tipped her face up to his and his steel-grey eyes bored into hers. He smiled faintly, and his other hand tightened round her fingers as he held her right arm crooked and pulled in against him. She could feel his erection rising, nudging her belly through the cloth of his trousers and the satin of her dress. Hot, damp and demanding.

A servant stepped from the gloom, wound the gramophone, turned the record over and replaced the tone-arm, then vanished into the shadows. The woman shivered as the music began again and her partner's leg passed between hers, his feet placed precisely, her own following

through the intricacy of the sweeping steps. Dip, sway, kick, slide, back to position. Their bodies assumed new shapes, arrangements and designs, with him leading and giving subtle indications.

She kept her knees slightly relaxed – flexible yet firm. She felt his smooth-shaven cheek against hers, her breasts brushing his chest, his hard phallus and his complete control of her, both now and for all time.

He bent her backward over his arm, then pulled her abruptly upright again, while holding her even tighter. The music swelled and her heart pounded in unison. She could feel her juices wetting her inner thighs, but did not falter. He spun her round. She did a graceful twirl, skirt flying open, and was once more in his arms, his feet forming a neat, delicate pattern around hers.

She indulged in a reverie, though remained alert. He was her master, this ruthless man. His present costume as a member of Chicago gangland suited his personality. Too handsome; too filled with that dangerous charisma which few could resist.

She was aware that he was conscious of her desire. Without breaking the dance, he lowered his head and fastened his lips around her right nipple, sucking it hard, the frisson between his tongue and the thin fabric firing electric shocks from that sensitive tip to her love-hungry bud. He left her quivering breast and his mouth captured hers, his fleshy tongue diving greedily between her lips and tangling with her own.

She almost collapsed with the force of lust spiralling through her body, but a jerk of his arm reminded her. The pattern of the dance must continue. Step, flex, bend – one, two, three.

She knew he was tango mad. Born too late by seven decades, he had missed out on its heyday, but was determined on a revival: not the tepid, sanitised, strictly

ballroom parody, but the genuine, disreputable article created in the brothels of Buenos Aires.

The relentless beat – the music that spoke of dark, obsessive passions – excited and inspired him. Cruelty and pride, love and hatred, sacrifice and jealousy – each emotion was conveyed by tango. And she had become as infatuated with it as she was with him. And with the games he played and the parts he acted out – the bizarre rituals for which the correct clothing must be worn.

She trembled, the heat of their bodies interacting between them.

He guided her across the shining tiled floor with catlike steps, not stopping till her back ground against a pink-veined marble pillar. It cooled her burning flesh. His hands pushed aside her bodice and cupped her breasts, thumb pads rolling over her nipples that rose stiffly to the touch.

His mouth hovered over hers, tongue lip tracing her lips from corner to centre. She moaned, avidly opening in welcome. He plunged his tongue inside, exploring every part of the dark, warm cave, and her tongue was a barb, returning each caress. His spittle was sweet, and she surrendered to those fierce, penetrating kisses. She could almost taste his blood and hear it singing in his veins.

He kissed her as if he was sucking out her soul, and his hands mauled her while his nails dug into her skin, leaving a trail of pain. Her hunger was rising like a madness in her, blinding her to all save him.

Her fumbling fingers found the waistband of his trousers and tore at the fly buttons. She reached into the opening, encountering silk boxer shorts, and went further to touch the wiry hair that coated his lower belly. She closed one fist round the thick shaft of his penis, rubbing gently over the velvety skin, while her other palm nestled his balls, feeling the swell and tension of them.

He groaned and opened her sexual secrets with his fingers, holding the petals apart and massaging the soft wet

core of her, then finding that engorged nub of flesh wherein lay the source of her satisfaction. She whimpered and lifted her pubis to that magical caress, rocking to and fro, her mouth contorted like a mask in a Greek tragedy.

He stroked her as the tango beat pulsed and she reached a crescendo that ended in a blur as she spilled over into orgasm – immersed, lost and dislocated in a welter of ecstasy.

He lifted her effortlessly and her legs folded round his waist as he impaled her on his phallus. She clung to him, her arms linked behind his head as he raised her up and down on his mighty weapon till he shuddered and bucked and came.

The tango, too, reached its climax, the final notes an accompaniment to her sharp pleasure cries.

# *Chapter One*

‘And now, ladies and gentlemen, we come to Lot 112: a miscellaneous collection of glass and china.’

The auctioneer spoke jovially, surveying the audience from his place at the rostrum. ‘What am I bid? Shall we start at twenty pounds? Twenty pounds, anyone, for this useful lot? I’m sure you’ll find bargains in the box . . . great-granny’s brandy decanter, I shouldn’t wonder, with a drop left in the bottom. No? Well, then, who’ll give me fifteen?’

One of his assistants, a dour-looking person in flat cap and brown overalls, tilted the wooden crate on the table. Glass flashed and china gleamed beneath a coating of dust.

That’s a reasonable price, thought Lisa Sherwin, standing at the back of the furniture repository-cum-warehouse where Messrs Deacon, James and Balfour held frequent sales. She waved her folded catalogue where Lot 112 was already ticked.

‘Ah, I have a bid from that beautiful young lady over there,’ crowed the auctioneer, a stout, sandy-haired, middle-aged man who was none other than Mr Balfour himself. ‘Any advance on her offer? May I say eighteen?’

He leered at her and she bristled at his patronising manner. There were disadvantages in being 23 and presentable, even in this day and age of equal rights. Some men never had and never would recognise it. Balfour was one of them. He reminded her of the older tutors at college, still stuck somewhere in the last century.

The crowd shuffled their feet and shifted in their seats, not particularly interested. They were eager to move on to the more important lots of the day – a pair of chairs, reputedly by Chippendale, and a painting called *Lady and Dog*,

believed to be the work of a Gainsborough pupil. These were out of Lisa's league as yet – but one day, she promised herself optimistically – but this was only the beginning.

She thought Lot 112 a foregone conclusion, experiencing that thrill which was like no other on earth. Her fingers tingled in anticipation of taking it to her flat and examining her treasures. Maybe there would be nothing of worth – just a load of junk. Maybe she would come across a real find, overlooked by other punters at the pre-sale viewing.

It was the uncertainty that was so thrilling. Excitement made her heart thump. It was far more stirring than anything else she knew – even sex. But then, sex with her fiancé, Paul, had slipped into dull routine. Not that it had ever been brilliant, but of late it had become positively stressful – for her at any rate. He seemed oblivious, grunting and bucking his way to orgasm while she faked it.

She was waiting for the auctioneer to bang his gavel on the rostrum and take her name when she became aware of a movement to her left. A man stood there, leaning an elbow nonchalantly on a bow-fronted rosewood chest of drawers labelled Lot 130.

He nodded almost imperceptibly to Balfour, who now said, 'Eighteen I'm bid. Twenty anywhere?'

Damn! Lisa thought, doing quickfire sums in her head. There were porcelain figurines which she had hoped to purchase. But another glance at the rather arrogant, swarthy, dark-haired man decided her. She would not be defeated.

Again her crumpled catalogue lifted.

The dark man smiled across at her with a flash of even, white teeth. He was tall, she noticed, wearing a pair of battered 501s and a soiled T-shirt. Broad shouldered, whiplash lean, very casual and confident. And those jeans were a tad too tight, emphasising the bulge behind the faded fly fastening. Lisa could feel herself blushing. She assumed her most icy mien and dragged her eyes away.

Sweat trickled between her breasts, dampening the cream lace brassiere that cradled her full breasts under a loose cotton shirt. It was hot in the saleroom with the noonday sun pouring through the high windows, and she wished she had worn shorts rather than trousers. Her tension mounting, she stiffened her spine and nodded vigorously at Balfour.

He smirked beneath his scrubby moustache and said, ‘Any advance on twenty?’

One or two people began to fidget, wondering if they were missing out on something. A plump lady in a flowered hat signalled. A wiry dealer behind her winked at Balfour. The bidding went higher, encouraged by the dark-haired man.

In a ferment of anxiety, Lisa kept up with it, accepting the challenge which this raffishly handsome stranger was issuing to her, and her alone. She was convinced that he did not care about the rest. Why was he doing this? Was it simply to drive home the lesson that novices like her should not tangle with the big boys?

She pushed back a lock of curling brown hair that clung to her sticky forehead, and concentrated. The bidding had reached £30 more than she had intended to pay. The flower-hatted lady shook her head. The ferret-faced man behind her dropped out. Now there was only Lisa and the annoying, impossible-to-ignore stranger.

Their eyes met and she was riveted. His features were striking, with high cheekbones and a slightly bent nose which looked as if it had been broken in a scrap. But it was his eyes which distinguished him – the extraordinary power and persuasiveness of his piercing green eyes.

‘Have you all done, then?’ Balfour asked, his voice breaking the spell.

‘Thirty-two,’ said the dark man, and his lips lifted in a teasing smile as he glanced at her.

‘Bastard!’ Lisa muttered under her breath. She felt as if she had been running a marathon. Her pulse was jumping

all over the place and her shirt was wet at the armpits and cleaving to her back.

There was a pause, a waiting, breathless stillness, and then, ‘Thirty-five,’ she pronounced clearly.

‘Thirty-five it is. Everyone finished?’ Balfour waited a moment, then brought down his gavel. ‘Sold for thirty-five pounds to Miss . . .?’

‘Sherwin,’ Lisa said quickly, flushed with triumph, rage and worry.

‘Thank you, Miss Sherwin,’ Balfour said crisply, entering her name in a ledger. ‘Pay before you leave, please, and collect your goods.’ He turned his attention to the crowd, saying, ‘Let’s press on. There are many items to get through this afternoon.’

They shuffled and coughed, examined their catalogues and settled down again as two auctioneers’ helpers carried in a threadbare chaise-longue and placed it on the platform near the rostrum.

Lisa, feeling curiously deflated and somehow cheated as she had overspent and would have to forego the figurines, walked across to the clerk near the door and drew out her cheque book. As she wrote the amount, she prayed there would be enough in her account to cover it. The rent was almost due for the showroom below her apartment and with any luck this would be paid in promptly and restore the balance of her overdraft.

‘You gave over the odds for it,’ murmured a low, husky voice in her ear. It sent a tingle along her arms, down her spine and into her epicentre.

She started and looked round. Her adversary was grinning at her. She glared up at him. He was so tall that the top of her head did not quite reach the pit of his throat. She wished she was wearing high heels instead of flat toe-post sandals.

‘No thanks to you,’ she snapped, briskly returning cheque book and catalogue to her shoulder bag. ‘Why did you

continue bidding if you didn’t think it worth it?’

‘I wanted to see if you had the balls to go on,’ he replied laconically and, to her horror, she found that she was achingly conscious of his muscular body so close to her own.

His white T-shirt contrasted almost shockingly with his deeply tanned face and bare, darkly furred arms. His hair curled at the nape of his neck and flopped over his brow, and she caught a whiff of Calvin Klein’s Eternity, overlaid with a woody aroma which could have been that of shower gel.

Just for an instant she was tormented by a vision of him naked, with water cascading over him, gleaming on his iron-hard body and tight flanks, trickling into the forbidden area of his genitals and streaming down those long, strong legs.

She fought for control, her mouth suddenly dry and her sexual juices wetting the cotton gusset of her panties. All the frustration she suffered because of Paul seemed to rise up in a great, unfulfilled torrent of longing.

‘Miss Sherwin? Are you OK?’ the stranger asked, and one of his copper-hued hands grasped her elbow. His fingers seemed to sear her skin. She dragged her arm away.

‘Perfectly. It’s just the heat,’ she faltered.

‘I know. Terrible to be indoors on such a lovely day. What say we find a quiet pub by the river and have lunch?’ he suggested, no way deterred.

‘I can’t,’ she said at once, though there was no real reason why she should not accept his invitation, apart from the obvious one that he was just too confident of his ability to charm her. ‘I’m meeting my fiancé,’ she added, retreating into safety by letting him know she was already committed.

‘I see,’ he answered, still smiling, his bright emerald eyes seeming to bore into hers and read all her secrets. ‘Another time, maybe. My name’s David, by the way. David Maccabene. Here’s my card. Could I give you a ring later?’

‘I don’t think so,’ Lisa declared, taking the card but not offering her telephone number. She panicked as she struggled to lift Lot 112. She wanted to escape this disturbing man.

‘Here, let me help you. Where’s your car, Miss Sherwin?’ he asked, taking the crate from her effortlessly.

Outside, the heat hit them as if they had opened an oven door. Sunshine slicing across the car park formed blinding white patches and deep purple shadows. Lisa went to where her elderly Ford van waited, unlocked the rear doors and David stowed Lot 112 inside.

‘Thank you,’ she said stiffly, longing for him to go but wanting him to stay, tossed in a maelstrom of emotion.

‘That’s OK. Any time. Will you be at the auction next week?’ he questioned, resting his lanky limbs against the hot metal of her car. His legs were crossed and his pelvis thrust upward, prominently displaying his full crotch.

‘I don’t know,’ she said, suspicious of his motives and doubting that he was sincere.

‘Not a regular dealer? Just buying for yourself?’

He asked too many questions and Lisa bristled as she went round to the driver’s side and let herself in. The leather seat scalded her thighs through her thin trousers.

‘I’m not dealing . . . not yet,’ she ventured, closing the door and winding down the window.

‘Don’t get into it, Miss Sherwin. It’s a tough old business,’ he warned, the light slanting across his eyes and running over his nose and finely moulded lips.

‘You’re a professional?’ she asked, making conversation as she wondered how it would be to lick his mouth with her tongue and taste the sweat forming on his upper lip.

‘I turn a coin here and there,’ he returned casually. ‘I’m glad you didn’t stay to bid for the so-called “Gainsborough school” portrait. It’s a fake.’ Then his face became serious and he added, ‘Promise to get in touch with me if you ever

consider spending a hefty wad on something like that. Will you, Miss Sherwin?'

'I have no intention of going for expensive items,' she answered frigidly, trying to quell the tumult of her senses. She wished he would stop leaning in the window and looking at her so intently. He breathed sexuality from his very pores and it was totally unnerving. 'Goodbye, Mr Maccabene.'

'Goodbye, Miss Sherwin,' he said with mock formality, and bowed from the waist, then saluted, as she started the engine and slipped the van into gear.

She moved off, so agitated that she almost forgot to buckle her seatbelt, thinking of nothing but putting as much distance between herself and that infuriating man as she possibly could.

As Lisa drove towards West Deverel, she allowed the peace of the area to enfold her, thoughts of David Maccabene retreating. It was good to be living in the old market town again, with its broad central street, timbered cottages, eighteenth-century houses and squat, square-towered Norman church. It had been the centre of the Somerset wool trade up until the last century.

Though she had completed her three-year stint at Warwick University, leaving with an honours degree in history and art, she had never really settled there, popping home whenever she could get away.

Now the road unwound like a grey ribbon in front of her, and familiar landmarks came into view. The Fleece and Firkin inn at Little Deverel, the lane leading to Highfell Woods and the standing stones on Starhill, the trout farm, the lake where as a child she had gone fishing with her father.

She reached the market square and her destination: the showroom and apartment above it which she now owned. There was a lane to one side of the building and she parked her van, opened the back and started to heave at the crate.

At once the closely clipped fair head of her tenant, Martin Troon, popped round the side door of the shop. ‘Need a hand?’ he asked.

‘Thanks,’ she replied gratefully.

‘You look knackered. Leave it for a moment,’ he ordered, turning and shouting into the depths. ‘Phil! Put the kettle on.’

‘Will it suit me?’ his partner, Phil Stevens, answered from within.

Martin lifted his eyes heavenward. ‘He says that every time. Honestly, darling, sometimes I think he’d bore a glass eyeball to sleep.’

‘But you love him,’ Lisa said with a grin, having listened for hours while they complained about each other after a falling out.

Martin shrugged his tanned shoulders under his skimpy black vest. ‘I’m a glutton for punishment.’

She shoved the box back inside the van and locked the doors, then followed Martin into the showroom. Pot-pourri spilling from sacks on each side of the floor perfumed the air – rose petals, lavender, sandalwood and citrus, an endless variety of scented powdery leaves, stems and blossoms. Shelves above held an amazing display of knick-knacks. Martin was the one with taste while Phil was his business partner and accountant, as well as being his lover.

The shop, aptly named Charisma, was already renowned for incense, fragrant candles, myths and magic figures complete with crystals, ceramic fairies in woodland settings, pottery, dried flowers, gift cards, wrapping paper, Celtic jewellery, Victorian reproduction dolls and the biggest selection of teddy bears that side of the border.

‘Meet Mr Humphrey,’ Martin said, lifting a large red Steiff bear from among his furry companions. ‘He’s one of a limited edition. Comes with his own papers and all.’

‘How much?’ Lisa asked, reaching out to touch the bright fur and gaze into Mr Humphrey’s friendly eyes.

‘Three hundred and fifty to you,’ Martin answered with alacrity.

‘You know I can’t afford it,’ she reminded him. ‘Poverty struck, that’s me.’

‘How did you get on at the auction?’ he asked, replacing Mr Humphrey before putting up the CLOSED sign and leading her into the storeroom.

It was all white paint and sparkle, with a sink, microwave oven, kettle and coffee maker. The back door stood wide open, leading to the parking space beyond, protected by high stone walls and a steel gate.

‘I did OK,’ Lisa replied, sinking into a wicker basket chair, aware that her feet were aching.

‘Did you get what you wanted?’ Martin said, hazel eyes sharp in his thin, clever face.

He perched on a packing case, long-legged and elegant in form-hugging jeans. The light glinted on the three gold hoops in his left ear and another piercing his eyebrow.

‘Yes, but I had to pay more than I intended.’

‘How so?’

‘Someone was bidding against me.’

‘The bitch. Was it anyone you knew?’

‘No – a pushy, insistent dealer,’ she answered angrily.

His brows shot up. He was just too intuitive for comfort. ‘A man?’ he questioned. ‘It must have been to rattle your cage like this.’

‘Yes.’

‘Good-looking?’

‘Oh, yes . . . and he knows it.’

‘Ooh, sounds delicious. Tell all,’ Martin insisted, with a wriggle of his lean hips.

‘I don’t want to talk about him. He’s a shark,’ she said stiffly.

‘I’m sure you’re dying to. He’s got to you, hasn’t he? Come on, you can’t fool me.’

‘Really, Martin . . . I’m not interested. I’ve enough on my hands with Paul.’

‘He’s such a stuffy old thing,’ Martin declared, dismissing him with a shudder. ‘You can’t possibly marry him, much as I want to be a bridesmaid and wear daffodil-yellow taffeta.’

‘That would never be allowed, and you know it,’ Lisa replied, smiling widely. ‘I doubt I’ll be permitted to add you to the guest list.’ Then her expression darkened as she muttered, ‘His mother wouldn’t like it. Anyone would think it was her wedding. She’s a right pain in the arse.’

‘And Paul’s so homophobic that it makes me wonder if he’s not a closet gay,’ Martin opined. ‘You know what they say about those that shout the loudest. Is he getting better in the sack?’

Lisa pulled a wry face. ‘Not much. He won’t admit there’s anything wrong.’

‘That’s men all over. I’ve had to train Phil and he’s just about learning what to do. Isn’t that so, Philip, you old trout?’ Martin addressed his partner, who was setting out mugs and taking milk from the fridge.

‘Whatever you say,’ Phil agreed, winking at Lisa. He was a muscular man with a short haircut and military moustache, and wore a spotless white shirt and chinos. ‘Who am I to argue with your queenly highness?’

‘Absolutely,’ Martin proclaimed.

‘I couldn’t afford to buy more stuff at the auction. I hope I’ll have enough to fill a market stall,’ Lisa broke in, changing the subject.

Martin cast her a shrewd, understanding glance, and asked, ‘Is there anything we can do to help?’

‘You do!’ she cried impulsively. ‘You help me all the time, just by being there.’

This was true: she felt at ease with them. There was no pressure, no male ego trying to put her down. Martin in particular understood the feelings of women, almost like the sister she had never had, yet he was protective too,

dropping his effete pose and becoming aggressively macho if the need arose.

‘You’ve been great to us, too,’ he said, leaning over to pat her hand. ‘The rent on the shop is so reasonable. It’s given us a real start and you’ve helped Charisma take off over the past eight months.’

‘Why can’t I make relationships work?’ Lisa suddenly asked.

‘You just haven’t met the right man yet,’ Martin told her. ‘Paul’s wrong for you and caught you when you were vulnerable, after your dad died.’

‘You’re probably right,’ Lisa agreed. ‘When my father died I didn’t know where to turn – and he was there, offering to take charge of me.’

‘But he wasn’t your first lover, surely?’ Martin enquired, his eyes wide with disbelief.

Lisa could feel a blush heating her face as she admitted, ‘I bedded two students –’

‘At the same time, darling? How bold,’ Martin interjected.

‘No . . . not together . . . separate affairs, brief and not entirely trouble free. I lost my virginity to Ivan. It wasn’t that I was terribly keen, but I wanted to get it over and done with. Then there was Harry. Ah, the handsome, charming, entirely unfaithful, womanising Harry. That ended when I arrived home unexpectedly one day and found him in bed with my houseshare girlfriend. End of romantic illusions.’

‘Men are scum, ruled by their dicks,’ Martin declared in heartfelt tones. ‘So you’ve settled for dull Paul. You’d rather be safe than sorry.’

‘That’s right. Now I can’t very well get out of it.’

‘You can, you know. You can do anything you like.’

Lisa sighed and shook her head, thrown by her meeting with David Maccabene and alarmed by her body’s flagrant sexual response to him. That’s all it was, she was sure – nothing but sex.

She waved away a salad-filled baguette that Phil offered, and went on, ‘I hope the market thing works, but I need to get a job as well. This place needs a fortune spent on it. The roof, for example. Dad was so generous, opening up the showroom as a gallery to promote the work of struggling artists. I couldn’t afford to do that. If I can make a success of buying and selling antiques, it may avert disaster.’

‘Let’s drink to that, sweetie. Have another cuppa,’ Martin insisted. ‘Then Phil and me will help you get that box upstairs. I’m dying to see what’s in it.’

After they had lugged Lisa’s purchase through the front door, up the stairs and into her living quarters, it was two o’clock and time for Martin and Phil to open for business.

‘Phew!’ Lisa exclaimed when she was by herself. Leaving Lot 112 unpacked on the living-room carpet, she entered the pine-fitted kitchen and opened a can of Coke.

She was grateful that Martin and Phil had been there with tea and sympathy. She regarded them as her closest friends, despite the fact that Paul made no attempt to hide his dislike of them.

‘He’s so macho . . .’ she sang quietly as she wandered out to the roof garden beyond the lounge.

This had been constructed over the downstairs extension and Frank Sherwin, Lisa’s father, had turned it into a delightful spot in which to sunbathe, or wine and dine cronies on warm summer evenings. Flowers tumbled from hanging baskets and rioted in terracotta pots. The murmur of a trickle fountain soothed the ear, and he had made an area into a Zen garden for meditation, complete with rocks and gravel and bonsai trees.

It was easy to maintain and Lisa enjoyed keeping it as he would have wished. Apart from this, the apartment itself was decorated with flair and exuberance: antiques mixed with modern pieces in harmonious profusion. It was her home and she didn’t want to leave it, but Paul had other plans.

‘Sell up, darling,’ he had declared, once she had accepted his engagement ring – a small, conventional diamond cluster.

‘But I like it here!’ she had started to protest.

He had closed her mouth with lasses and snuggled her down on the couch, his hands taking possession of her breasts. ‘You can’t go on living alone,’ he had said decisively, unfastening her bra. ‘We’ll have the best house on the estate. Nothing shoddy . . . a Georgian reproduction facade, double garage, patio, swimming pool and the garden landscaped. You’ll love Kingsmead. It’s going to be the best.’

Paul had inherited Everard Homes Ltd from his father. He was ambitious and had had the money to buy land during the recession – a large amount of land on which he and several other builders were constructing a model village, with a green around a duck pond, shops, a cinema, schools, a golf course and a sports centre. Lisa had seen the plans and could not fault them – if one liked living in such a well-heeled, close-knit, utterly safe community surrounded by woods and with security guards on call.

‘It reminds me of the Stepford Wives,’ she had said when he took her round proudly. He had been mortally offended, glowering darkly during the drive back to West Deverel.

She had not agreed to move, despite his continual harping on about it. And lately she had been vague about the date of their wedding.

Now she sat on the edge of the little fish-pond and watched the meaderings of the fat golden carp as they lazed beneath the lilypads. The garden was a sun trap and she dabbled her fingers in the cool water, her eyes alighting on the hose.

She was uncomfortably hot and her clothes were sticking to her. This was a secluded spot. There were no houses overlooking it as the building backed on to a park. Lisa unbuttoned her shirt and took it off, then unhooked her bra

and released her breasts. She sighed and closed her eyes in relief, placing her palms beneath the undercurves of the full globes, lifting them and allowing her thumbs to brush over the prominent nipples.

Instantly aroused, they rose into hard peaks. Hurriedly, she untied the drawstring of her baggy trousers and kicked them off. Beneath, she wore a brief pair of cotton panties. Without further hesitation, she turned on the hose and stood beneath the sprinkler. The water was tepid, heated in the plastic pipe by the sun all morning. She moved the jets over her body, the spray seeking out every inch of her and lingering between her legs where her panties clung, soaking wet. It was exquisite.

Thoroughly drenched, her skin glistening with myriad droplets, she switched the hose off and moved to the padded lounger, water running from her in rivulets. After spreading a beach towel across it, she lay down, relishing the build up of sensation between her legs. Soon she would release it. Like a cat luxuriating on an old garden wall, she stretched languidly, drying out in the sunshine and enjoying the feel of her fingers plucking at her tingling nipples.

Images filled the screen of her brain – Ivan, with his long, thin, pale-skinned cock, and Harry, with his circumcised, thick and upward curving member, the helm bare and shiny. It had always sprung to attention for her but, alas, not only for her, sharing its largesse with other girls.

Sex with these lovers had been a novelty at first, but a grain of discontent had soured it for her. They sometimes took the trouble to satisfy her, though more often than not were intent only in releasing the seed from their testicles.

Then there was Paul, and here the memories were shot through with frustration and anger. She had tried to tell him what she needed to bring her to orgasm, but he was convinced that all proper women came when their men did. He was determined on simultaneous orgasm. They had tried it every which way – with him on top, sideways, backward –

while he strove to make her climax. It had become almost a point of honour with him.

Once he had rejected her attempts to explain her desires, she had capitulated, her confidence draining away as he hinted that he did not go along with ‘all that messing about’. He thought fellatio and cunnilingus were activities for perverts.

She could still hear him saying, ‘My cock is all you need. Come on, let’s try again. Now, if you lie this way and I put it in and drive deep, that should do the trick.’

It didn’t, but she pretended it did, just to shut him up. It seemed that he had no idea about the clitoris, and wouldn’t have a clue what to do with it even if he was enlightened. So she suffered his love-making and, eventually, gave up hope. She started to resent him, avoiding caresses which would stoke her fires but not satisfy them. Masturbation was easier and absolutely fulfilling. No letdown; just a sweeping pathway to bliss.

And she must do it – now!

Aware of little but the compelling force driving her actions, she trailed her fingers over her mound, tracing round the rim of her labial lips through her panties. Every hair covering her pubis seemed to be ultra-sensitive, responding to her light touch.

The triangle of damp material was drawn tight into her crease and as she ventured a finger between her legs, she could feel her nub swelling and smell the oceanic fragrance of her juices. She closed her eyes, still seeing the red penumbra of the sun through the lids. Its fiery warmth caressed her breasts, her nude body and her pudenda. It was like a highly skilled lover who would know exactly how to bring her to ecstasy.

Unbidden but vivid, a picture of David Maccabene formed in her mind. Her clitoris quivered and her finger pressed against the delicate little bud. She allowed her imagination full rein as she pushed her panties down, freed her legs

from them and splayed her thighs so the sun and her finger could heat her tiny, rampant organ.

She indulged in one of her favourite fantasies, where she occupied an examination couch in a doctor's surgery. This time the medical man was played by David.

'So, you've never climaxed before?' he said, in a sexy accent.

'Never.' Lisa nodded, waves of heat laving her. There was a heaviness in her loins as if all her blood was settling there.

Though it was her own fingers playing with her bud, she loved to act out scenarios of her own creation. Today, David was her co-star, and she aroused herself even more by pretending that they were being watched and he was a doctor complete with white jacket and stethoscope, explaining about the female genitalia to a group of medical students.

'Her breasts are extremely sensitive,' she imagined him saying, and touched her nipple as if it was him performing this act of homage. 'This must be remembered if one wishes to successfully arouse a woman and make her wet. If she doesn't lubricate, then you've lost her. She won't be excited enough to permit penetration and if it is forced on her while she's dry, then she will experience discomfort and even pain.'

'Are you a gynaecologist?' Lisa enquired of him in her fantasy sketch. 'You must be. You're so right, and know so much about it.'

'I specialise in female arousal,' he answered, and she felt fingers parting her secret lips, dipping into the honeydew and spreading it over her hungry bud as he continued to address his students. 'The most important part of a woman's sex is her clitoris, designed exclusively for pleasure. It has no other function. It's like a miniature penis, with a little hood, but it doesn't eject fluid.'

As Lisa listened to these imaginary words, her fingertips worked on her bud, inflaming it with little slaps and

squeezes, circling it, arousing it to frenzy, then stopping and keeping herself in suspense, her finger hovering over the engorged head while the spasms faded. Retreating from the orgasmic edge for a moment, she concentrated on the image of David, then returned to press down on it again.

The phantom students were in a highly excited state. Lisa could see them in her mind's eye. The women were lifting their skirts and fingering their own pink clefts while the men unzipped their trousers and released their cocks, rubbing them energetically.

Lisa moaned, in two worlds – the garden and the mysterious place which she shared with the imaginary Doctor David Maccabene. He had straddled the couch and was lifting his penis from his pants. He plunged it into her. It was long and thick, the glans fiery red. Was it possible that she could take all of it? No problem. She was so wet, swollen and expanded that he sank it easily into her sheath, prodding deep inside her.

Lisa panted at the thought and once more located the fleshy pearl crowning her cleft, continuing the magical, slow, slippery massage. Her head fell back, fingers fluttering over her clitoris, then grinding it harder.

'I can't wait any longer!' she cried aloud, and released the pressure in one short, savage burst, coming against her finger. A rush of ecstasy swept over her.

'Good God! What on earth are you doing out here naked? Cover yourself at once!'

An outraged male voice ripped through the wonderful aftermath of orgasm, shattering it completely. She opened her eyes and jerked into a sitting position, surreptitiously wiping her wet fingers on her discarded panties.

'What does it look as if I'm doing?' she answered sharply, consumed with guilt. 'Sunbathing, of course.'

He strolled over to her, a big-built man in a cream poplin shirt and lightweight grey trousers, his jacket slung over one shoulder and his tie loosened. He was fair haired and blue