

"About ten minutes, Miss," the pilot said in Spanish over the headset.

Lisa stirred. Bleary-eyed, she looked out the window of the small prop plane at the thick vegetation below her. In an instant, she was wide awake. Two days of flying with only minimal, fitful sleep between hops couldn't hold a candle to the excitement of finally being here!

Her stomach lurched a little bit as the plane began to descend. She had been warned in advance not to look during the landing because this particular runway was hidden until seconds before touchdown. She looked anyway and couldn't help but tense up as the wheels skimmed mere feet above the treetops.

Suddenly, the landing strip came into view, little more than a cleared path. Her stomach lurched even harder as the plane came down, its movement fast and precise—a requirement for the small space. The pilot didn't bother to taxi; leaving the engine running, he bade Lisa good luck while muttering some sexist comments under his breath, waited for her to step out with her small bag and close the door, and then waved and took off again.

"Well," Lisa murmured to herself, looking around. "I hope I'm in the right place."

"Ho!"

She whirled, then did a double-take as a blond, tan, blue-eyed man strode towards her with legs that looked like they belonged on a moose. As he approached, she couldn't help but take a step backward and clutch her bag to her. Muscular and at least six foot six, he had a wild, intense, imperious look about him that made her wonder whether he had perhaps intended to land in Argentina but missed by a few... thousand... miles.

He strode right up to her and then stopped abruptly and squared off with her.

"Dieter," he said, his gruff accent reinforcing her earlier assessment of him.

Lisa opened her mouth, but the only sound that would come out was a perplexed "Uh..."

The man, probably in his mid-20s, looked at her expectantly for a few seconds, then thrust his hand out, palm up, an expectant look on his face.

Lisa looked from his hand to his face, then back. Again, all she could muster was a bewildered "Uh..."

The man exhaled sharply through his nose, then jerked his hand down, turned on heel, and strode off the way he came.

"W—wait!" Lisa called after him. "Is Professor Casca here?"

The man didn't answer but continued walking. Lisa looked around behind her but saw nothing but trees. Springing to action, she took off after him and had to run to catch up. Indeed, even after she had caught up, she had to trot to stay caught up because he walked so fast with such a long stride.

They crested a small hill, and Lisa breathed a sigh of relief. *Here* was the dig site she'd expected to see but had missed during landing and hadn't been able to see from where she'd exited the plane. Tan tents contrasted sharply from the dense green vegetation all around, though they blended in fairly well with the massive pyramids that dotted the landscape. As Lisa surveyed the site, she spied someone stepping out of one of the tents.

"Professor Casca!" she called, veering off her course of following the giant blond man to go toward the tents.

The professor looked up, frowning. He was a portly man with a bushy, white mustache and wispy hair beneath his pith helmet. His arms—well, everything not covered by his khaki short-sleeve shirt, shorts, or hiking boots—were tanned a little darker than golden brown, like a slightly overcooked marshmallow. He wore a red bandana beneath the back of his helmet, presumably to keep the sun off his neck.

As he turned to look, Lisa trotted down the hill towards him, then thrust her hand out to shake his.

"Professor Casca," she said, "Lisa Marlin. We spoke on the phone a few weeks ago."

The professor's eyes sparked with recollection. "Ah, yes, Lisa!" he said, shaking her hand warmly. "I see you've found your way here; it seems you've passed the last question on the interview."

Lisa's mind flashed back to the phone interview she'd had. The whole experience had been strange, with the professor requiring that she mail some pictures of herself internationally to his location in Yucatan, Mexico before he'd even consider her. Once she had done so, the interview had seemed far more concerned with her political and social views than her knowledge of, or interest in, archaeology. No, she wasn't a communist. No, she had never done drugs, and no, she hadn't bought into the free love era of her peers. On that last point, the professor had been *particularly* persistent in grilling her, to the point that she had finally told him in exasperation that she was, in fact, still a virgin—not that it was any of his business. At that, he had at last seemed satisfied and told her that he would see her in four weeks' time. He gave her the coordinates of where he was going to be digging, had the university wire her some funds for travel, and then left it up to her to find her way.

He seemed surprised to see her in person, yet he also seemed pleased.

"Dear girl," he said after he'd shaken her hand, "I trust you've some proper head protection. The sun is not to be trifled with this close to the equator!"

"Yes, Professor," Lisa said, hurriedly digging into her bag and pulling out a much newer but nearly identical hat to the professor's own.

"Lisa, I think you will fit in just fine here," the professor said, his voice hinting that perhaps he had misjudged her. "Have you met Dieter? Dieter!" he called.

The hulking man, who had disappeared into another tent, poked his head out and strode over with the same beeline alacrity from before.

"Professor," he said.

"Dieter, this is Lisa," the professor said. "Lisa, this is Dieter."

Dieter and Lisa looked at each other.

"We've met," Dieter said, then turned on heel and strode away.

"Never mind him," the professor said pleasantly. "He's on loan to us. Hard worker, that Dieter."

As Lisa watched him go, she couldn't shake the feeling of uneasiness he inspired in her.

"So, ah, I'm sure you will want to get your things unpacked," the professor said.

"If you can show me to where I'll be staying, I can just drop my bag and be ready to go from there," Lisa replied.

"Dear girl, you're not going to want to be traipsing around in *those* clothes," the professor chided her.

"No?" Lisa asked with a coy smile. "What about these?"

With a deft flick of her wrist and the *crunch* of Velcro—quite the new invention—she pulled off her skirt to reveal hiking pants. Pulling apart her blouse at the pearl snaps and shrugging it off her shoulders, she looked like an almost identical, female version of the professor himself.

The professor once again looked surprised, but then the corners of his lips tugged upwards into a broad smile.

"Ah, yes! We are *definitely* going to get along just fine," he said, clasping her warmly on the shoulder. "And here I was afraid I was going to have to warn you against the frivolity of makeup out here."

"I don't think 1000-year-old tombs are going to care how well made-up I am, Professor," Lisa replied.

"Quite right," the professor agreed. "Well, then. Let's get you situated."

He led her to a tent, saying apologetically that she'd have to use the one that doubled as the storeroom unless she was comfortable sharing a tent with Dieter, and Lisa quickly took the storeroom option. After putting her things down, she followed him into the dig site, where he pointed out various things they had

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found thus far: a few pottery bits missed by earlier expeditions and a few surprisingly well-preserved wooden weapons. He also took her on a tour of the various buildings—the Temple of the Warriors, the Thousand Columns, the Temple of Kukulcán, and others—talking in great detail about each and its significance.

It was a shame, Lisa thought, that he was not a lecturer; his enthusiasm and vast knowledge made for an enthralling lecture, and she imagined that even in the smoke-filled auditoriums at the university campus, he would still be fascinating to listen to for hours on end.

But, the professor stressed as the tour came to an end, the thing they were looking for, the *main* reason they were out here, was to find the Mask of Ah Puch. Finding that was paramount, and he had been scouring the site looking for the elusive artifact.

"What does it look like?" Lisa asked.

"You will absolutely know it when you see it," the professor replied. "It is a fearsome thing: a human skull, grinning malevolently, with bulging, staring eyes and two rows of teeth. It is very ornate. The pinnacle of metal craftsmanship, it should be copper or bronze, inset with jade and—"

"Sorry, Professor. Bronze?" Lisa asked.

The professor touched his nose and gave her a knowing wink.

"Clever girl," he said. "Yes, this site is one of the few where we believe we might be able to find bronze; it was not widely used by the Mayans, but if there is a place we would find it, it would be here or Mayapán, some fifty miles west of here. All the sources I've studied point to this as its resting place, though even the newest of those is hundreds of years old. I *do* hope it hasn't been stolen and lost to history."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" Lisa asked enthusiastically. "Let's go find it! Where should I start?"

The professor grinned and gave her the knowing look of a professor used to dealing with students eager to prove themselves.

"I would suggest starting with the temple of Kukulcán," he said. "Ah Puch was the god of death, and it seems to me fitting that his mask should lie beneath the temple devoted to the god of life and creation. Of course, that's just my interpretation, and perhaps the Mayans had other ideas."

"It's still as good a guess as any," Lisa said encouragingly. Digging into her pocket, she produced a trowel and a toothbrush. "I'm on the case!"

"That's my girl!" the professor said encouragingly.

He watched her go, then shook his head and chuckled to himself.

The rest of the day did not prove particularly fruitful. For all her good intentions, Lisa realized that she didn't have a whole lot to go on. The site had been picked over for nearly a century by archaeologists and tourists, leaving very little left to discover without some serious digging. Undaunted, she examined every minute crack and imperfection at the base of the temple and fairly quickly discovered a large, loose rock.

Her elation was short-lived, however, when she realized that Dieter had put the rock there to prevent rain from falling into the excavations he had already begun. After a good-natured laugh at her expense, the professor suggested that she shadow the blond man to get a feel for how to go about it. Lisa chided herself for judging him so unfairly and coaxed herself to go along as he preceded her in.

It was cramped inside, too short for Dieter to stand upright but just barely tall enough for Lisa. The ceiling was purely dirt, which Dieter had reinforced with a few sheets of plywood to maintain its integrity. The walls were all dirt, too, and as Lisa ran her fingers over one of them, the soil crumbled off freely and fell to the ground. The floor space was roughly six feet square, enough for them both to work as long as pickaxes weren't involved. Fortunately, the ground was soft enough that they weren't needed.

Inside, Dieter showed her how to make a careful incision into the earth, then start slowly expanding from there, checking frequently for artifacts or signs of stonework. This demonstration was accompanied more by guttural grunts and gestures than by actual words, and Lisa began to wonder whether English was not

his first language. She tried saying a few words to him in Spanish, but he just looked at her blankly, and she abandoned the effort.

They changed places after that, with her continuing to work on the hole he'd started while he watched her. She could feel his eyes boring into the back of her head and squirmed under his unrelenting gaze. A laser, invented only a few years before, would probably have been less focused than Dieter's piercing scrutiny.

Evening came, and the trio broke for dinner. The professor cooked it himself: a pot of beans and some turnip greens thrown in to prevent scurvy. The meal was neither delicious nor something Lisa really ever wanted to eat again, but she had braced herself in advance, knowing that she'd have to make some concessions when she left the convenience of home for the wilderness of the dig.

After dinner, the three sat around the campfire chatting amongst themselves—or, rather, Lisa and the professor chatted, and Dieter stared at Lisa the whole time as if she were some kind of exotic specimen. Lisa told the others a bit about herself, that she was the first in her family to attend college and was studying archaeology and folklore. The professor asked her what had drawn her to those particular areas of interest, and she replied that she'd come to wonder about some of the many superstitions she had picked up over the years.

"In fact," she admitted, "I was a little nervous to come out here because of Camazotz".

The professor and Dieter both started and glanced at each other at the mention of the name.

"You know of him?" Lisa asked. "Oh, who am I talking to?" she chuckled sheepishly. "Of course you do."

"We're familiar with the Mayan bat-god of death," the professor replied, recovering quickly and stroking his chin. "I'm surprised *you* brought him up. Why him, when the Mayans have so *many* gods to be afraid of?"

"Bats kinda freak me out a bit," Lisa admitted sheepishly. "Not that it'll be a problem," she added hastily. "I can get a grip on it if we happen to see any."

"The best way to conquer a fear is to face it," the professor nodded sagely. "We don't run into *too* many bats out here, but rest assured, dear girl, if we do, *I* will be the one leading the charge... away from them as fast as I can."

"You're afraid of bats, too?" Lisa asked, chuckling in spite of herself.

"A tad," the professor said. "Especially man-eating bats. That's why we have Dieter: to fight off the bats if we come across any."

"Bats do not frighten me," Dieter said, his bold yet emotionless claim eliciting a curious look from Lisa that lingered for several seconds before she returned her attention to the professor.

"Man-eating, Professor?"

"You've heard of Camazotz but not his trademark way of dispatching people?"

"Oh! I thought you meant regular bats. Yes, Camazotz, he—he bites the heads off those who get too close, doesn't he?"

"*Some* would say that," the professor replied. "Others claim he devours his victims whole, that the poor souls swallowed by him are damned to wander his belly for eternity."

Lisa cringed. Surely it was just a superstition, but still...

"What about you, Professor?" she asked, changing the subject. "What got you into archaeology?"

"Why, society, dear girl," the professor replied. He waited for her give him the inevitable blank stare, then added, "What better way to get away from society than to traipse off into the jungle?"

Lisa laughed. "I suppose that's one way to do it!"

"All joking aside," the professor continued, "I have been aware of Ah Puch since I was a boy; he has always held a great fascination for me, and archaeology was the best way to explore that interest. In fact, that's why Dieter is here, too, isn't it, Dieter?"

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"Praise Ah Puch, may he bring a thousand years of darkness!" Dieter said, slamming his fist into his chest with a solid *thud*.

Lisa whipped her head to look at him, but he was staring straight up, the firelight casting eerie shadows on his face and neck. She felt a chill go down her spine and squirmed uncomfortably to dislodge it.

"Dieter gets a little *deep* into the lore, I'm afraid," the professor said to her privately. "I know he can be a lot to take in, but he *does* mean well."

If a thousand years of darkness is 'meaning well'... Lisa thought skeptically. She hated to admit it, but *everything* about this guy was giving her red flags. Still, she was committed to stay the full six months at the dig, and if the professor said he was okay, then she needed to just get over her irrational fears of him and get along.

It didn't help that even after she and the professor rose to go to bed, he was still sitting there, staring at the sky.

The next morning, the professor and Dieter were already hard at work by the time Lisa awoke. Embarrassed, she asked them to wake her the next morning when they got up so that she could pull her fair share and then headed for the Temple of Kukulcán. She had been working a little more than an hour when she sensed Dieter behind her.

"Have you found it, yet?" he asked.

She looked at him incredulously over her shoulder. "Yet? I've only just started looking for it!"

Before she could say anything else, though, he turned on heel and stalked off.

Lisa made a face, then shook her head and resumed digging. The soil was surprisingly loose for being buried under a stone temple for hundreds of years and came away easily, but there were no artifacts to be found.

They broke at midday and ate lunch—more beans and turnip greens. The professor had launched into a dissertation on the Mayan economy and how it changed over the centuries when Dieter abruptly interrupted him.

"Have you found it?" he asked, staring intently at Lisa.

Lisa looked around, then frowned curiously at him. "I—I've been sitting here with you for the last half-hour; how could I have found it?"

Dieter made a noise akin to a grunt or a huff and rose to leave.

"Now, now, Dieter," the professor said, looking up at him placidly. "It takes time to uncover artifacts; all in good time."

Dieter said nothing but turned and left.

"Is he—"

"He's *very* keen to find the mask," the professor explained apologetically.

"But I've been here less than 24 hours, and he's been here for—what, weeks?"

"Months, yes."

"And he expects me to find it"—she snapped her fingers—"just like that?"

"Don't mind him," the professor said, patting her shoulder. "Patience is clearly not his strong suit, but like me, he has been looking for the mask for a long time, and the arrival of a fresh set of eyes gave him perhaps too optimistic an expectation."

Lisa started to say something else but then changed her mind. Dieter gave her the creeps, it was true, but he had been there longer, and she imagined that the "new girl" coming in and immediately casting

aspersions was not likely to ingratiate herself at the camp. Instead, she managed a tight-lipped smile, nodded, and then excused herself to get back to work.

"Gotta find that mask before Dieter loses his mind!" she said, only half-teasing.

She returned to the temple and continued digging, but by the end of the day, she had little more than a mound of dirt to show for her efforts.

"Professor," she said at dinner, "Should I perhaps start a new dig site a little ways from the current one? Then Dieter and I could work in parallel to find the mask."

"It's right th—" Dieter started to yell, then abruptly caught himself and seemed to seethe instead.

Lisa's jaw slackened. She turned to look at him.

"It's right... where?" she asked, feeling a twinge of annoyance making her temple tingle.

Dieter glanced at the professor, then averted his eyes.

"Come on, Dieter," Lisa challenged. "If you know where it is, why not collect it yourself? Heck, you don't even need me here if you already know where it is!"

Dieter's eyes flashed to the professor again, who glared back at him silently for a moment.

"I think," the professor said at last, "That Dieter is struggling with his English a little bit. Calm yourself, Dieter. Remember: good things come to those who wait."

He turned his attention back to Lisa and took her hand in his affectionately.

"Trust me, dear girl, your presence here means a great deal to us; we are very glad to have you here. However, starting a new dig requires permission from the Mexican government, so I think it's best if you just keep looking in the current one."

Reassured, Lisa smiled back at him but cast a wary eye at Dieter, who seemed to be sulking.

The rest of the day went without incident—and also without finding any artifacts of interest.

"I tell you, Professor," she said as she started to walk into his tent that evening, "I'm beginning to understand Dieter's frustration—"

She paused, hearing voices inside the tent.

"—in plain sight; how can she not find it?" Dieter was saying.

"You *must* get a grip, Dieter. The time is near, but if you give it away now, all is lost. Don't forget what happened last time."

There was a lengthy silence.

"Be ready, my friend. Any day now."

"Any day what?" Lisa asked, stepping inside.

The two looked up, startled. Dieter immediately averted his eyes, but the professor extended his hand towards her.

"Any day, we'll finally find the mask, and the *real* work of studying it can begin!" he said. "Do you know that some of the masks were made as fetishes and idols, but others were actually worn during ritual sacrifices?"

Lisa frowned. "I didn't know they wore them, no," she said. "Surely they didn't fit very well?"

"Legend has it that the one wearing it was not all that active in the actual rites but rather acted as a stand-in, a place to look when addressing the god."

"Oh, so the person could just stand there; he didn't have to, uh, swing the knife or anything?"

"Quite right. And, contrary to popular myth, not all sacrifices involved ripping out someone's heart or entrails. I'm sure you've seen the sinkholes—the *cenotes*—dotted around the area?"

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"Sure."

"The Cenote Sagrado in particular was used for sacrifice in an attempt to garner favor with the rain gods. *Some* of those sacrificed were killed first, but many were cast in while still alive. The notion of a dagger-wielding priest is a bit of an unfair stereotype."

"But surely it happened sometimes; there's archaeological evidence to that effect."

"Oh, of course. Something doesn't become a stereotype without a grain of truth to it. And, a graphic depiction of vivisection certainly captures the imagination far more vividly than shoving someone off a cliff. A priest holding the still-beating heart of the victim in his hand is an image that is difficult to shake. Thank goodness we don't live in such barbaric times now. Nowadays, it's just the liberals we have to fear."

Lisa shuddered, then did a brief double-take before brushing it off. "Yeah, thank goodness," she agreed. "So, the mask of Ah Puch: do you think it was worn or just a decoration?"

"Decoration," Dieter said quickly.

Lisa and the professor both looked at him. The usual ferocity of his expression had mixed with the optimism of a student hoping for praise after answering a teacher's question. It was actually somewhat adorable, and it caught Lisa off guard to see this side of him.

"Quite right," the professor said, eliciting a grin from Dieter. "We think it was just used for decoration as such a mask would likely have been quite heavy to wear. But, some of the new translations they're working on back home have given me reason to believe that perhaps we are wrong in that assumption, which is part of the reason why we are eager to find it. Perhaps it wasn't all that thick and therefore not all that heavy? Who can say until we can hold it in our hands?"

They migrated to the fire pit and had their evening rations, then talked a little longer before retiring for bed.

The next morning, Dieter thumped on the tent-flaps and called "Morning!" just as dawn was breaking, startling Lisa awake. Rolling over bleary-eyed, she hastily got dressed and then joined him and the professor at the dig.

There had still been no new developments by lunchtime, but as the light was beginning to fade that evening, Lisa felt her trowel strike something distinctly unlike the dirt she had been shoveling for the last few days.

Lying on her stomach, her arm down the hole she was digging, she froze, her breath catching as she moved her trowel aside and reached down to feel of the thing she'd struck. Something coarse but solid and slightly cooler than the dirt around it pressed back against her fingers. Her eyes widened.

She backed up away from the hole, then grabbed a flashlight and shone it down inside. The light fell onto a dirt-covered surface, but despite the grime, she could see the deliberate grooves carved into its surface, far too orderly to be something naturally occurring like fossilized wood. As she moved the light, bits of metal glinted back at her through the dirt.

Her heart pounding, she used her fingers to try to unearth the object, but seeing it firmly embedded in the loamy soil, she carefully used her trowel to excavate the edges. At last, she slipped her fingers behind it and pulled forward. With a sudden give, the object broke free, and she eagerly got onto all fours, then stood up and used the residual sunlight to get a better view.

As the sunlight passed over the figure, she suddenly heard a sound akin to the snuffing of a torch, and the warm evening rays suddenly grew cold, like beams of moonlight over a cemetery. The faint sound of hissing surrounded her on all sides as mist began to seep from the dirt walls. Gasping in shock, she stared at the item in her hand, which had suddenly cooled drastically, the cold shooting up her arm like a chilling poison.

Now paralyzed with fear, she stared at the artifact. Before her eyes, the dirt seemed to fall away to reveal that the item was heavily affected by bronze disease, the patina so thick that it was hard to make anything out.

She blinked.

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Instantly, the patina was gone, replaced by a skeletal, staring face. Two rows of teeth grinned up at her, the lips pulled back and the eyes bulging from their sockets like someone afflicted by tetanus. Goat-like pupils were carved into the jade eyeballs.

There was a sudden flash of light, a glint as she looked at them. The eyeballs swiveled in their jade-ringed sockets.

They stared straight at her.

They looked *through* her.

Lisa began to gasp as if someone had reached into her chest and was squeezing the life out of her heart. As she started panting, smoke began to billow from the mask's jade nostrils. In the back of her mind, she knew that breathing the noxious air would be far worse than passing out.

She held her breath.

The mist from the walls had formed a layer of fog at her feet. As she stared, rooted to the spot, the smoke pouring from the mask settled over it in a completely separate layer that quickly rose to her chest.

Her lungs started to burn from lack of oxygen. A voice in the back of her mind screamed at her to run away, to drop the mask, yet she could not obey.

The smoke rose to her chin, then covered her lips, her nose. It stung her eyes and obscured her vision. She began to tear up as her vision tunneled.

At last, she couldn't hold back any longer. Her eyes bulging, she gasped in a deep breath. As the smell of death and decay filled her lungs, her vision suddenly flashed, and a deafening shriek filled her ears.

She was no longer at the dig site.

A desolate plain spread out before her. The air was gray and hazy, the sky darkly overcast with roiling clouds. Mangled, twisted bodies stretched out over the plain like beached jellyfish as far as she could see. The stench of death was everywhere, as were the flies that consumed it.

She reached her hand out, and the bodies began to quiver, then to wrench with sinew-popping cracks as she forced them to overcome rigor mortis and rise. Empty eye sockets, their contents picked away by vultures and rodents, stared hollowly at her.

She yelled something in a language she didn't speak. A gray mist shot from her mouth and snaked its way across the plains. The ghouls let out a collective, breathy exhale, then turned and began marching into the distance, where specks of light gave away the next town, her next conquest.

There was a sudden, high-pitched shriek. She turned to look upward just as an enormous bat, its wings jagged, hooked, and black as night, its teeth each as long as her middle finger, dove towards her. It had snuck up behind her silently, but it was too late to do anything about it now. Its eyes blazed red as it opened its mouth and swallowed her head.

"Gah!"

Lisa jumped, tripped, and fell onto her back. The mask landed on her chest. She shrieked and slapped at it with the back of her hand as if it were a scorpion or a centipede. Her knuckles connected with it, and it flew into the wall, struck, then fell down on the ground. She scrambled to her feet and fled through the opening.

Behind her, the mask stared into space, its teeth having turned outward like those of an angler fish. A spiked crown had emerged from its ornately carved head and now glinted with a hint of greenish light that faintly illuminated the walls of the excavation. As Lisa moved further and further away, the light faded, then extinguished entirely.

Sprinting blindly, Lisa raced back towards the tents. But as soon as she crested the hill and came in view of them, her head suddenly twitched. She stopped abruptly, then turned and wandered off towards the Cenote Sagrado. Reaching the 200-foot-wide cavernous opening, she stared down the nearly sixty feet to

the water below. She felt a drumming in her chest and ears, felt the water far below calling to her. She leaned forward, stretching her arm out towards it.

The bat figure shrieked up at her from the cavern.

Lisa jerked back. The ground beneath her shifted. A few pebbles fell off the ledge, falling silently for over two seconds before splashing into the water below. Her foot slipped, and she began to teeter. She started to scream.

"No falling into deep holes today!" the professor cried.

A beefy arm caught her in the chest, then swept her backwards off her feet. She fell in a heap, then looked up to see Dieter and the professor standing over her.

"What in the world were you thinking, young lady?" the professor demanded. "If Dieter hadn't been there to catch you—"

"I—I'm sorry, Professor; I..." Lisa trailed off. Squinting, she tried to remember why she'd come here. "I..."

Why couldn't she remember?

"I think you might have gotten a little more sun than you're used to," the professor said gently. "I warned you that it's not to be trifled with in these parts. A bit of a cool splash in the sink hole might seem like a good idea to someone suffering from heat exhaustion. I think it's best that you take the rest of the day and tomorrow to rest. We'll prop the flaps open on the tent to get you some circulation."

"But—"

"Rest assured, Miss Marlin, there is no doubt in my mind that you are working hard, getting down and dirty with the rest of us. Your work ethic is not in question here. But I would rather you take a little time to recompose yourself and get to keep your hard work than burn you out before the first week is up."

"But, Professor—"

"Fine, then: do it as a favor for me, all right?" the professor said, sighing. "Don't make me fill out the paperwork of how you lost your life here, okay?" he said with a faint smirk. "That would be... *terribly* inconvenient for me." The smirk turned into a grin.

Lisa sighed, then smiled herself; his grin was infectious.

"All right, Professor," she said. "But just to spare you the paperwork."

"That's my girl."

Lisa returned to her tent, and Dieter quickly tied the flaps up to let a breeze through while the professor ensured that she gotten onto her cot.

"Professor," Lisa said as he turned to leave.

The bat flashed before her eyes. She jerked, startled, then stared, dumbfounded, at the bat standing next to the professor. Standing on two legs, it looked almost humanoid as it stared at her, its eyes piercing but no longer flaming. As soon as she looked at it, it shook its head. While one wing rested at its side, it folded the other at the elbow and brought a claw up to its upturned mouth.

Lisa did a double-take.

Was it... *shushing* her?

"Yes?" the professor asked.

The bat lingered, its gaze ominous as it looked directly at her, then shook its head again.

"N—nothing," Lisa murmured.

The professor looked at her curiously, then gave a faint, helpless shrug, turned, and left. Lisa looked for the bat again, but it, too, had disappeared.

Swallowing hard, she stared at the ceiling of the tent for a long time, trying to piece together what all had happened. She remembered going into the hole to continue excavating, but she had no clue how long she was down there. She had a brief memory of running, but the next thing she remembered for sure was Dieter yanking her back from the ledge.

Had she remembered to thank him for that? She felt a pang of guilt.

"Dieter!" she called as he strode past.

He stopped abruptly, then ducked his head and looked inside. "Hm?"

"Thank you," she said. "If you hadn't saved me, I'd be... well, awfully wet, at least."

"Mm."

Dieter nodded perfunctorily, then extracted his head, turned on heel, and continued striding wherever he was going.

"He is *awfully* strange," she murmured.

That night, her dreams were full of terrors.

The first dream saw her back at home, yet walls that should be straight were instead wavy and slanted at odd angles. She could hear what she knew to be her mother's voice, yet the woman sounded demonic, and when she at last appeared, blood streamed from her empty eye sockets and black smoke poured from her nostrils. Her hair was as brittle as straw, and it and her skin were gray with death. Sickly, emaciated arms reached out towards Lisa, and long, claw-like fingers wrapped around her throat. She could feel herself suffocating and clutched her mother's hands, begging her in a voice not her own to let her go. Her mother replied in a language she didn't speak. Suddenly, her mother's teeth jutted outwards like an angler fish's, and she lunged towards Lisa. Lisa started to scream, and from out of her mother's face came the bat, her mother's teeth now its own as it snapped at her head.

Lisa flung herself awake and nearly fell off the cot. Panting and grasping at her throat, she looked down to see herself drenched in cold sweat.

The tent flaps were still open, and out the side, she could see a half-moon, its rays streaming down through ominous wisps of cloud. The other tents were dark, and she wondered what time it was.

But not for long. Exhaustion got the better of her, and she fell asleep again.

She was flying high above the ground. Ahead of her stood green, lush forests. Beneath her, fire and ash billowed in her wake, and behind her, nothing but charred earth and moaning corpses remained. She was filled with a deep sorrow, yet in her dream, she seemed proud of the destruction.

A sharp screech sounded above her. Before even looking up, she dodged to the side as the bat from her other nightmares swooped down, narrowly missing her. Looking up, it fixed her with its blazing eyes, then swooped abruptly towards her. In her dream, she dodged, but observing it, she gaped, gawking at the bat's penis, which reached three quarters of the way up his torso and was flanked by two large testes that could not possibly be very aerodynamic for the types of aerial acrobatics he was making.

She didn't have time to ponder the strangeness of the situation, though, because the fearsome bat abruptly slammed into her from underneath. She went flying and felt herself plummeting towards the ground as his penis grazed over her body, feeling for an entrance.

She wasn't sure whether it was the falling or the visceral sensation of his penis rubbing over her that woke her up, but she once again jerked back into consciousness.

The moon had set, but the sun had not yet begun to lighten the horizon. The air was deathly still as even the insects that had been chirring the last time she awoke had gone to bed, and not even the earliest of birds had risen.

More tired than she had been when she went to bed, she sighed heavily. Did she dare risk closing her eyes and experiencing another nightmare? She thought not. Groaning, she got off her cot and made her way to the part of the tent where the books were kept. The professor had brought along quite a few reference

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materials, and if she wasn't going to be able to sleep anyway, she figured the least she could do was try to make sense of these horrific visions she was having. Grabbing the flashlight from beside her bed, she held it in her mouth and examined the titles. One in particular caught her eye: *The Legend of Camazotz*.

She took the book back to her cot and sat hunched over it, the flashlight in one hand as she flipped pages with the other. What she hoped to find was a picture to compare against the bat she'd seen in her visions.

About a third of the way through the book, she found what she was looking for. The picture was hand-drawn and not in color, yet the sharp, bony wings, the large ears, and the vicious teeth immediately gave it away as the creature she had seen. Her eyes started to move to the caption beneath the picture when she caught movement out of the corner of her eye.

Gasping, she looked at the picture, which itself turned to look straight at her. As she stared, too entranced to look away and too afraid to close the book, the creature's mouth began to move.

"Hola, Señorita," it said, its words thunderous and jarring, like a derailing freight train. "Me llamo Fernando Antonio Pizarro Quijano—"

"What are you doing with that?"

Lisa gasped and looked up, dropping her flashlight. Dieter stood over her, his hands on his hips, scowling down at her.

"That's the professor's book."

"I—I was just looking—"

Before she could finish explaining herself, he turned and strode away.

Had she—had she done something wrong? Swallowing hard, she peered into the book again, but the figure did not reanimate. Putting it aside, she lay back down on the cot and tried to get a few hours' sleep before sunrise.

She woke up visibly worse for wear the next morning, enough so that the professor questioned whether she'd had the mandatory vaccinations before her arrival. She confirmed that she had, and he inquired as to where she had stayed on the trip to Cichén Itzá, whether she had drunk any of the local water or eaten any exotic foods. She answered in the negative, and the professor continued his probing.

"Really, Professor, I caught a cab from my house to the airport, ate a light meal at O'Hare, then flew to Mexico City and caught a prop plane to here. They served us peanuts and soft drinks on the flight from Chicago, and that was all I had before I arrived. Besides, I've been here for several days; surely the beans and turnip greens are more likely the culprit than anything I had days ago?"

The professor frowned and shook his head. "I'm at a bit of a loss, then," he said. "You haven't... come into contact with anything unusual around here, have you? No drinking from the cenotes... surely you must know better than that?"

Lisa shook her head. "The only thing I can think of, Professor—"

The bat swooped in and loomed ominously over the professor's head, his eyes flashing warning.

"Yes?"

"—N—nothing."

She shook her head. The bat vanished.

The professor gave her a hard look. "Are you... *sure*?" he asked. "You didn't happen to come into contact with the Mask of Ah Puch yesterday... did you?"

Lisa's eyes flashed as the memory came back to her of what she'd seen. She saw the goat-like eyes looking at her, smelled the decay filling her lungs.

It was gone in a flash, yet it left her trembling.

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"Well?" the professor urged. "Heavens, girl! You look as though you've seen a ghost!"

"I—I—"

The bat reappeared. Far from its almost humanoid appearance from the last few times, it looked like a demon straight from Hell. Its smoldering eyes cast shadows that made its wings loom like the malevolent sails of a damned ship. In its incorporeal form, it lashed out at the professor, attacking him over and over again with such viciousness that a single blow entering the mortal plane would have splattered his viscera halfway across the site. In its face was such anger and loathing that Lisa shrieked in terror and covered her face with her pillow.

"Dear girl! Whatever is the matter?!" the professor cried.

"It's Camazotz!" Lisa cried.

Suddenly, the bat vanished. Panting and squeezing her pillow, Lisa's eyes darted from the professor to the top of the tent where it was darkest. There, very small, the bat-creature was shaking its head sadly. Its eyes, no longer flaming, peered at her with a look that could only read as heartbreak. Then it vanished.

"Camazotz..."

The professor pursed his lips thoughtfully. A subtle change came over his expression, a faint hardening of the corners of his mouth, as if thoughtful curiosity had given way to grim determination.

"You've seen the mask."

It wasn't a question. In fact, it wasn't even fully addressed to her.

"That means..."

He turned his back on her, his arms clasped behind him. He rocked forward on the balls of his feet, then back on his heels. His gaze was very far away.

"The mask has seen you," he said at last.

Lisa did a double-take. "Seen me? What do you mean, Prof—"

"Quickly!" the professor said, grabbing her wrist. "We must hurry."

"What is it, Professor?" Lisa cried as he hauled her to her feet and nearly dragged her along behind him, moving surprisingly fast for such a portly, old man. "Dieter! Come!" he called.

The tall, blond man's head poked from his tent. His eyes practically burned with intensity as he leapt from behind the flaps and proceeded to overtake the professor and Lisa.

"What's going on?!" Lisa cried. "Professor! Where are you taking me!"

"No time to explain; we must hurry before the effect wears off!"

Lisa began to struggle, but the professor's grip on her wrist was like a vise. He herded her up to the Temple of Kukulcán, but instead of moving for the displaced rock she'd found a few days ago, he led her straight into the side of it through another, much larger rock that Dieter had moved aside.

The sounds of birds and insects all but vanished as they entered the stone chamber. Lisa gasped and looked around.

"What *is* this place?" she wondered aloud.

"The inside of the temple," the professor replied. "Come, and don't look down."

The reason for the latter directive soon became clear as the wall on her left vanished behind her, opening into a massive cavern the shape of an inverted pyramid, its walls and floor all formed from slabs of cut limestone. They emerged at the top of it, and its bottom was so far below that Lisa couldn't have seen the bottom if she'd tried. Eerie, warm light pervaded the space, yet for the life of her, Lisa couldn't find its source.

For over half an hour, they descended the staircase as it followed the walls, moving closer to the center of the cavern each time they made the ninety-degree turn. At last, they came to the final stair, and Lisa looked

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around her. To her left was a square hole, sixty feet wide and twenty feet deep. At the bottom of the hole was a stone floor. In the very center was an off-white stone slab about two feet high, eight feet long, and four feet wide. Red stains on it gave it the appearance of a strawberry cheesecake.

As Lisa took all of this in, a sinking feeling began to dawn on her.

"Professor," she said warily, "What are we doing down here?"

"Dieter, you take her from here," the professor said.

In a flash, the massive man grabbed her from behind, threw her over his shoulder, and began to descend a staircase inset into the sides of the square hole. Lisa shrieked in fear and began kicking and beating her fists on his back, but she might as well have been beating the limestone walls themselves.

Despite his usual hurry, Dieter seemed deliberate in his movements now, and his descent took on an almost stately or parade-like quality. The more frantic Lisa became, the calmer he got, and all the while, his face practically beamed with the intensity of what he was doing—what he was about to do.

They reached the bottom, and he strode deliberately across the stone-tiled floor. At last, he reached the slab. In a deft move, he cast Lisa down onto it on her back with one hand, then pinned her in place with his other. From his back pocket, he pulled a length of rope, its end pre-tied into a slipknot. This he looped around her wrist, and before she could react, he pulled it down under the lip of the slab. With another flick of the wrist, he tied it off to something under there.

The wind knocked out of her from being practically thrown onto the slab, Lisa spent precious seconds trying to catch her breath. By the time she tried to roll over on her side and scoot towards the rope to free up enough slack to get herself free, Dieter had already grabbed the opposite leg by the boot.

"No! No!" Lisa cried, trying to kick at him, but even the soles of her hiking boots striking him were no match the powerful man.

From beneath the slab surface, he pulled up another rope, dropped it, then used the same hand to deftly untie her boot. As she continued to kick and flail at him, he grabbed it by the heel and flung it off, then hastily looped the rope around her ankle and pulled it tight. A split-second later, Lisa was stretched diagonally across the slab, and the rest was a foregone conclusion. Unable to free herself or even mount an adequate defense, Lisa found her other boot stripped off her, her ankle restrained and pulled tightly towards the corner of the slab, and her last wrist pulled opposite.

Hyperventilating from terror, Lisa began to cry, begging Dieter to let her go.

"He cannot."

Lisa gasped and turned to look at the foot of the stairs, where the professor stood. Seeing him, she did a double-take.

He was dressed in nothing but a rope around his waist. His whole body, from fingers to potbelly to flaccid penis, was the same golden color as his arms. In one hand, he held a curved dagger. In the other, he carried the Mask of Ah Puch.

"A—a dagger?!" Lisa protested. "I— isn't that an unfair stereotype?"

"Dear girl," the naked professor replied, exasperated, "Every stereotype has a grain of truth in it."

"How can you call me 'dear girl' when you're about to murder me?!" Lisa cried.

The professor considered it. "Ah, yes. I suppose I *can* drop that affectation now, can't I?"

He advanced on her, and she began to struggle again, banging her head against the unyielding stone.

"Now, now," the professor said as he stood over her, the dagger clutched in his fist like a ski pole, "We must face the gods with a stiff upper lip, not cowering in fear."

He raised the dagger. It glinted in the eerie light from the mask. Lisa screamed.

Rip! Rip!

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She flinched as the cold metal grazed over her skin, deep enough to leave nicks but not enough to cause grievous wounds. Dieter appeared at the side of the slab, his own clothes no longer present as he, too, wore only a rope around his waist. As Lisa looked up at him in terror, he reached forward, grabbed the cut-up side of her clothes, and yanked sideways.

Cool air played over her whole body as she was stripped naked in a single movement. Her knees instinctively tucked inward, trying to preserve her modesty, but the tight ropes around her ankles would not permit it. She began to tremble, feeling utterly vulnerable.

"W—what are you going to do?" she whimpered through tear-blurred eyes, her lip trembling.

"Why, free Ah Puch, of course," the professor said as he began to hone the dagger's blade on the edge of the altar.

"The god of death?!" Lisa cried. "*Why?!*"

"The world has fallen into disorder," the professor replied. "The liberals and communists have taken over, spreading their pestilence and filth at all levels of society. They partake of illicit drugs not for spirituality but for a cheap thrill! They copulate with no mind for procreation. They are animals, mindless rutting beasts! Women have forgotten their place as mothers and housewives; now they parade the streets, burning their bras instead of providing for their husbands and families! It is utter disgrace! And *you* are the very pinnacle of our debauchery! Women—in science! Ha! How *far* we have fallen from the golden days!" He raised his dagger. "Well, the debauchery ends now! Ah Puch, god of darkness and disaster, we call on thee! *Purge* this wicked world of its sins; bring on a thousand years of darkness!"

"If you didn't want me here, why did you let me come at all? You could have just said 'no!'"

"Ah, well, you see, the ritual requires a virgin sacrifice."

It was all coming together now. The weird questions during her interview, Dieter's frustration at her not finding the mask, which he obviously must have planted for her to find.

As the professor spoke, Dieter held aloft the Mask of Ah Puch with one hand and half-cupped his mouth the other. He began to ululate, punctuating the words of the professor's prayer. The mask flickered, the goat's eyes flashing as a jolt of electricity shot from it to the sharpened blade of the dagger in the professor's hand.

"Yes! Ah Puch has heard our prayer! Emerge, O Dark One!"

The blade crackled with energy as the professor raised it high over his head.

"With this blade, I set you free!"

SCREECH!

A collective gasp from the three echoed off the stone walls as all eyes turned towards the ceiling.

"It's Camazotz!" Lisa shrieked.

"You're too late!" the professor cried exultantly, a wild look in his eyes. "The ritual is com—"

He started to strike down with his dagger, but in a flash, the bat slammed into him, flinging him into the wall of the pit. The dagger clattered to the slab beside Lisa.

"Dieter! Finish it! Finish the ritual!" the professor yelled.

"At *last!*" Dieter cried. Seizing the dagger, he leapt up onto the slab, straddling Lisa.

"Time to break the vessel," he growled.

Lisa flinched, squeezing her eyes closed as the dagger flashed.

"A—ugh!"

She opened her eyes, then gasped in horror as the bat's teeth came down on Dieter's shoulder. Blood splattered everywhere. Lisa shrieked and turned her head away as Dieter struck out with the dagger but

missed. The bat-creature's leg shot out and launched him across the room. He would have hit the professor if the latter hadn't already gotten up and begun sprinting up the steps three at a time.

"Finish it!" the professor yelled over his shoulder.

Shaking his head, Dieter bared his teeth and tossed the dagger from one hand to the other as he squared off with the bat.

"Boy bats suck off other boy bats," he spat. "You disgust me."

The bat screeched in response, then lunged at him. Dieter dodged and swung at the creature's abdomen. The bat sucked in.

From Lisa's position on the slab, she could see the bat's head move behind Dieter, out of his line of sight. As Dieter swung, the bat's head lurched forward.

His fangs found their mark. Lisa jerked but could not look away in time.

Blood splattered all over her.

Dieter stared out of his remaining eye, a look of disbelief crossing the half of his face he still possessed. A second later, his body collapsed to its knees, then fell forward, the right half of his head, from crown to chin, bitten clean off.

The bat roared in triumph, then whipped around and leapt into the air. His shrieks echoed off the walls of the cave as he hunted for his other quarry, but the professor had already escaped. The bat shrieked again in fury, then turned its attention on Lisa.

"Please, no!" Lisa shrieked.

She tried to shield her face, but her limbs were still bound.

The bat swooped down, then landed over her, straddling her and roaring directly into her face. She could see bits of Dieter's flesh still hanging from its teeth. Squeezing her eyes closed, she began to cry.

Seeing that, the bat seemed to snap out of its rage. It looked around, seemingly bewildered for a moment, then looked back at her, its expression softer though still frightening. It panted a few times, trying to catch its breath after the fight. At last, it let out a soft moaning, warbling sound.

Lisa gasped. She hesitated a moment, then whipped her head to look at the bat.

"Wh—what did you say?" she asked.

A glint of hope came into the bat's eyes. It inhaled, then tried again, letting out a low, warbling moan.

It said, "Hola, Señorita. Me llamo Fernando Antonio Pizarro Quijano Montoya de Triste Figura. No temáis."

Recognition sparked in Lisa's eyes as she translated: "Hello, Señorita. My name is <something really long and Spanish>. Don't be afraid."

"Y—you can talk?" she asked.

The bat looked at her blankly, then she tried again in Spanish.

"Of course," he replied. "Are you all right?"

It was Lisa's turn to stare blankly.

"I—I'm lying naked on a sacrificial altar a hundred feet underground, thousands of miles from home, and the renowned professor I came to work with just tried to murder me. I'm having horrifying apocalyptic visions, and—and I'm talking to the bat who has haunted every one of those visions," she said at last (in Spanish).

"I don't think I'm quite all right."

The bat jerked, startled, then hastily bit through the ropes binding her.

"I'm sorry, Señorita. Where are my manners? Here," he said, grabbing her tattered clothes and dropping them on her lap. "I will explain as best I can, but I must ask you not to run away; we have important matters to conduct first."

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As Lisa was sitting up and doing her best to cover her breasts and groin with what remained of her clothes, she suddenly jerked her head to look at him.

"Matters? What matters?"

"You are possessed," the bat informed her. "Ah Puch flowed into you, and it is his visions of glory that haunt your dreams."

"N—no, *you* haunt my dreams!"

The bat audibly sighed, his posture visibly sagging.

"This was so much easier when I was human," he muttered. "Look, I'm sorry I frightened you. I tried first to wake you from your dream. That worked, but then you fell asleep again. I tried to warn you about the professor, but—"

"How do *you* know about the professor?"

"He has been here for months. Every day, he goes to visit the mask. When you showed up, it was obvious what he wanted. Incidentally, that is why we must conduct certain"—he hesitated, and Lisa actually saw him drag a toe awkwardly over the slab—"matters before you go."

It would have been cute if she hadn't just watched him remove half of Dieter's skull in a single bite.

"*What* matters?" Lisa pressed.

"They will never stop hunting you, the 'professor' and his cultists, that is," the bat said evasively, seemingly having trouble bringing himself to say it. "I must remove your curse."

Lisa did double-take. "Remove my curse? You can do that? Yes, please, by all means—"

"I—I *can*, but I don't think you'll like the, um, *manner* in which it is performed."

"Is it worse than being cut in two by a dagger?"

"I hope not."

"Tell me?"

The bat hesitated. If it were possible for an 8-foot-tall, man-eating bat to blush, he somehow managed to achieve it.

"I must breed with you."

Lisa stared at him silently. For a long time, neither of them spoke as the silence grew increasingly awkward.

"Well, um, that's... quite the imagination you have there," Lisa said, inching towards the edge of the slab.

"While I *appreciate* you freeing me—"

"—and saving your life—"

"—*and* saving my life," Lisa added with a sinking feeling, "I am a virgin, and I would like to stay that way."

The bat sighed again.

"It's not my imagination," he replied. "Your own professor just tried to murder you. You're having visions—"

"*You're* haunting me in them!"

"I will leave your visions alone if you like, but did you *enjoy* that scary woman trying to choke you? Did you *like* twisting mangled bodies to serve you as an army of the damned? I didn't enjoy seeing that, and I look like *this*! I'm trying to help you, Señorita. Those visions—they won't stop until you remove the curse. The professor—there are many more like him. They will hunt you down. Cut you open. Release Ah Puch into the world. Please believe me, Señorita; this is what will happen if you do not let me remove the curse."

"Look, are you, like, the Mayan version of Zeus or something? Super horny, can't keep it in your pants? You rubbed your penis all over me in one of my visions, you pervert!"

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"I was trying to appear to you in a less terrifying way. I—I realize I am not exactly a knight in shining armor anymore."

Lisa started to retort, then frowned. "Anymore?" she asked.

"I was a conquistador, a brave knight sent by the Spanish crown to convert the pagans to Christianity."

"To loot and pillage, you mean," Lisa muttered.

"There were those in our ranks who did, yes." The bat hung his head. "My best friend among them. I warned him not to touch the mask, but..." He trailed off. "When Au Puch took control of him, I begged for an answer. I cast myself on the altar of Kukulcán and pleaded on his behalf. Kukulcán answered. In exchange for freeing my friend's soul, I would have to give up my own, to become his paladin rather than Christ's. It was a foolish bargain. Christ asks only for one lifetime of service; Kukulcán demands eternity. I have guarded the Mask of Au Puch ever since, intervening on mortals' behalf when one of you is foolish enough to touch it. Every time I do, Kukulcán punishes me, turning me more and more bestial for my failure to ward you off before it was too late. It was easy at first; I could show up in one of Au Puch's visions as my human self, and the victim, seeing me as a savior, would seek me out. You will be the fourth person I have cured, and now I am as fearsome as Au Puch himself."

"That... sounds like a terrible fate," Lisa said at last.

"It is... hard. Lonely. But, I assure you, Señorita, it is far worse to be Au Puch's vessel. I saw what he tried to do to my friend. Having your throat cut and your guts spilled will be the least of your worries."

Lisa didn't say anything.

"I can tie you back up, if you prefer, so that you don't have to be complicit in coupling with a—with a *beast*."

The last word dripped with bitterness and what Lisa could tell was just the surface layer of deep self-loathing.

"You can close your eyes, pretend that none of it happened. You can say I took you against your will. But, one way or another, Señorita, I *must* cleanse you before you leave this temple. I would spare you that violence, Señorita, but you *cannot* leave until you are cleansed."

Gut-wrenching fear twisted Lisa's stomach into a knot. Revulsion at the notion of copulating with a bat—a *bat*, of all creatures!—made her skin crawl. Despair at her situation made her hunch over and bury her face in her hands.

"I promise to be gentle, Señorita," the bat said earnestly.

Buried beneath all that negativity, a spark of curiosity illuminated the darkness. A virgin all her life, she wondered what it would be like to experience sex for the first time. Would it hurt? Would it feel good? She'd had fantasies, of course, but always with a tall, dark, handsome stranger... She shook her head. Not with a bat; *never* had she imagined sex with any animal, let alone a *bat*!

"Shall I tie you up, then?" the bat asked, sounding a little hurt.

"If that's what it takes," Lisa whispered.

"Very well."

With a heavy sigh, he hopped off the ledge and somehow managed to procure more of the rope. Lisa had no clue how he managed to tie knots with bat-claws, even if he really *was* a former human.

She lay down willingly enough—reluctant, but willing—but as he tied the first loop around her wrist, she began to have second thoughts. She started to struggle, but the bat quickly restrained her.

"All right, Señorita," the bat said once she was spread-eagled once more.

"Please... don't..." Lisa pleaded.

"I am... sorry, Señorita. Truly, I am. It is not a very good story, you know—the one where the knight *rapes* the damsel in distress."

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Lisa's heart pounded as the bat stood over her. For the first time, she had little else to distract her from his frightening visage and found herself forced to take it all in.

Standing at eight feet tall, he tried his best not to look terrifying, yet his fangs were so long that they jutted out from his lips even when he had his pig-like snout closed. His eyes, though not glowing, smoldered like fiery embers against the black, rat-like background of his face. His ears, too, were sharp and pointed, with matte black hair growing inside. Sharp, talon-like claws tipped the tops of his wings, and long, fishhook-like barbs protruded off the bottom edges. His wings themselves were as black as night, with bits of glossy or satiny bits. His legs were thin, even spindly. It surprised Lisa that he had been able to pack such a powerful kick.

Perhaps the most recognizably humanoid part of him was his torso, which was slight in build, his ribs visible through a thin layer of leathery-looking fur. Lisa could clearly see his pecs and even nipples underneath. His arms, if they could be called that, were fused with the upper edge of his wings, and though there were bulges here and there that could have been biceps and forearms, they clearly no longer served that function.

As the bat clambered up onto the slab with her, Lisa's eyes darted to the sharp-clawed, four-toed feet that came down on either side of her bare legs. He knelt down, and Lisa was surprised to notice that although the lower half of his wings joined his legs just below the calf, it didn't seem to affect his ability to kneel.

"No temáis," he murmured softly.

Lisa squeezed her eyes closed and bit her lip as his clawed wing came down to brush her cheek.

As soon as he made contact, she gasped and opened her eyes. Despite looking like coarse leather, his wing was actually very soft, softer than a newborn puppy. Her eyes darted to his face. Though his pig nose, snaggleteeth, and burning eyes were still unpleasant to behold, she became aware of a tenderness that his harsh exterior was incapable of displaying. As his claw gently grazed over the side of her face, she realized that his character would be revealed not through his appearance but through his actions.

She closed her eyes again, but not in fear. The strangely soothing touch moved over her forehead, gently moving a few hairs out of her face. It continued down her cheek, rounded her chin, then grazed lightly over her lips.

Her breast rose suddenly as she inhaled in surprise, the unfamiliar touch making her lips tingle. They parted as she opened her eyes again to see the beast regarding her kindly.

His claws trailed down suddenly, lightly grazing over her neck, her breast. They tickled, yet they also sent little electric currents shooting through her skin. Her mouth opened wider, and her legs squeezed together involuntarily as new, pleasant sensations availed themselves to her.

As his claw found her breast and began to circle her nipple, his other wing moved forward and caressed the other side of her face. Letting out a quavering sigh and closing her eyes again, she leaned into his soft touches.

His claw grazed her nipple. She doubled over slightly, her mouth opening wide. Her eyebrows arched, and she began to breathe heavily. A soft moan escaped her lips.

She heard a faint shuffling sound. Opening her eyes, she gasped on seeing his face hovering inches from hers.

"No temáis," he whispered soothingly.

He leaned down, and his pig-snout began to snuffle against her breast. At first, the idea of it repulsed her, but only for a second. As his hot breath wafted over the flesh awakened by his gentle caresses, Lisa's eyes rolled back in her head. Writhing below him in her restraints, now, she thrust her chest up towards his snuffling lips. The light graze of a tooth elicited a surprised, breathy moan, and then she felt his lips close around her nipple.

Her eyes snapped open; her mouth did, too. She began to pant, to moan and squirm as his lips, tongue, and teeth awakened her nipples. Each light squeeze of his lips, each casual graze of his tongue or teeth felt like intense, pleasant vibrations in the innervated tissue.

But the thing that made her really gasp was when that feeling started being mirrored in her groin.

Mask of Death

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"H-h-how?" she moaned, squeezing her legs together and concentrating the intense pleasure in her virginal folds.

Though some of her friends at school had described masturbation to her, she had seen such actions as a little debauched. She had wondered from time to time what it would feel like, but her mother's warnings about keeping her hymen intact for her future husband had stayed her hand. She was, as a result, completely unprepared for the flood of not only sensations but also emotions that washed over her in that moment.

In the blink of an eye, she felt light as a feather but also mortified with embarrassment. She felt pleasure beyond her wildest dreams, yet she also felt somehow dirty. The jarring mix of emotions frightened her. She wanted to pump the brakes, to slow down and try to process, yet there was also an underlying current, a desire building up to something bigger and grander.

In that moment, she was glad that she was tied up because she knew in her heart that had she been able to, she would have run away. And, as she would realize not long afterwards, doing so would have been a terrible shame.

In that same instant, she felt arousal for the first time, building deep within her groin. An unfamiliar warmth, an ill-defined need akin to an itch or a tickling but neither of those things, made her bite her lip and moan. While there was something pleasant about the feeling in the way that smelling good food is a pleasant way to build anticipation for actually consuming it, it was accompanied by a sense of frustration, of not knowing what to do to quench the fires that the bat was actively stoking.

As he continued to nurse her nipple, he let the wing caressing her face trail down her body. The brush of velvety fur preceded the sharp, tantalizing graze of his claw as he moved his wing down her neck and breast. She was expecting the secondary rush of pleasure as his claw teased her nipple, but she was completely unprepared for the string of goosebumps that went up her spine when he brushed along her side instead. A welcome distraction from the nearly overwhelming feelings of building orgasm, she leaned into it just a bit, but she was left feeling bewildered and off guard as his tongue slurped once more at her nipple, pulling her back into pleasure's mind-warping embrace.

Nor did his wing stop there. The bat had been watching her closely, and he could see the flicker of doubt between her brows as she wrestled with these newfound feelings. While he did not want to rush her, he did want to show her that sticking it out was worthwhile.

His wing continued down to her hip. Kitten-soft hair teased her inner thigh, eliciting a hoarse, frustrated moan. With a deft motion that seemed uncannily dexterous, he grazed the tip of his claw over her clit.

Her eyes snapped open.

That!

Suddenly, she knew what it was her body was building up to. Though she still had yet to experience the true joy of climax, at least she knew *where* to scratch if she were to try to scratch the increasingly importunate itch.

Or so she thought.

Her arms tried to move to her groin, to rub that spot the bat had grazed so casually. Yet, to her dismay, she found them still tied up, unable to move, unable to shield herself from his all-encompassing attention or to alleviate the increasing anticipation.

Another frustrated moan escaped her lips.

The bat paused his ministrations and raised himself up to look at her face.

"Would you like me to untie you?" he teased, knowing the answer already.

Caught off guard, Lisa struggled to respond, yet the answer was plain as day. Unable to form words, she shook her head vigorously.

"It's too intense," she managed at last. "I-I'll run away."

"Not if you stay tied up," the bat replied.

Lisa bit her lip and nodded, a pained expression on her face as she made her decision.

"Good. Let's continue."

While she was wrestling with whether to be released or not, he had moved his wing into a slightly new position. Now, as she resigned herself to the ongoing torment, he brought it to bear. She felt a faint brush of softness on her thigh, then an unfamiliar pressure between her labia. Glancing down, she gasped just as the bat slipped a claw up inside of her. Careful not to hurt her, he lightly grazed the ultra-sensitive flesh inside her passage.

She felt moisture seep out of her and instinctively tried to close her legs, to keep it contained.

"Let it flow, Señorita," the bat cooed. "Trust me; you will appreciate it soon."

Feeling a little dirty, yet also feeling a little turned on *because* she felt a little dirty, Lisa reluctantly relaxed her legs and felt her first drops of arousal trickle down between her thighs. It itched and tickled, yet like all the other sensations she was feeling, it also contributed to a heightened awareness, an edginess that was equally thrilling and frustrating.

He continued to nurse her breast a little while longer, occasionally grazing her clit or her slit with his claw, but pretty soon, he felt his own growing arousal urging him to move on.

Growing acclimated to the slowly building pleasure, Lisa gasped as she felt the bat release her nipple. Opening her eyes to watch him, she caught sight of his long, pointed ears sliding down her waist just as a new, powerfully intense feeling erupted in her crotch. His tongue had slipped out, and with the rapid darting of a snake's, he flicked her clit once, twice, three times in rapid succession.

"U—ungh!"

It had come out of nowhere. Sure, there had been this slowly growing intensity, this yearning for some kind of release she couldn't place, but she had never expected this. Now, doubled over as best the ropes would let her, her eyes squeezed tightly shut, she felt her passage explode in pleasure, heat and tingling radiating from her womb outward, filling her belly with a contented feeling and making her woozy. Something wet splashed out of her, and her face burned with embarrassment; she was certain she'd peed herself.

"Mrrflrflr."

Lisa's eyes opened to squint between her legs, where the bat's face was crushed against her pelvic floor. Cautiously, she relaxed her legs.

The bat gasped and grinned sheepishly. "Ah, thank you, Señorita. It seems you enjoyed that?"

Lisa nodded wordlessly.

"Well, then, I shall sample your nectar."

Sample my—

"Uuggghh!"

The bat's tongue shot up into her passage, far deeper than she even knew was possible. She did not notice as he broke her hymen or the resulting drop or two of blood that blended in with her arousal fluids. What she did notice was when he grazed that ultra-long tongue against a particularly sensitive spot.

She *thought* the itch she'd been meaning to scratch was that little nub on the front, yet as his tongue rubbed this new place, it seemed to scratch the itch even better than the first one had. Her hips bucked involuntarily, and she began grinding herself against his face as best she could, her mind given over completely to wanton lust at this point. If *this* was what sex was, then she absolutely wanted him to continue doing it to her. She felt like she never wanted it to stop.

Yet, stop it did because by this point, the bat's self-control was beginning to weaken. It had been some hundred and fifty years since the last time Fernando Antonio Pizarro Quijano Montoya de Triste Figura had made anyone's acquaintance, and the experience had been rather transactional: she accepted the need

for him to copulate with her; he did so without overture, and she was cleansed of the curse. *This* meeting was far more enjoyable, with a great deal more build-up. And, after a century and a half without release and now with an exceptionally responsive partner, the bat's penis was already throbbing; his balls uncomfortably full. While it was true that he *could* go ahead and breed her now—all the prerequisites were in place—he didn't know how long it would be before his next opportunity, and he was determined to milk this one for all it was worth.

But first, he *had* to blow off a little steam.

Panting hard, he raised himself up.

Lisa felt him moving, glanced down, and saw him raising up away from her.

"Is it—is it over?" she asked, clearly disappointed.

The bat snorted as Fernando laughed in spite of himself.

"No, Señorita, it has not even started, yet," he said. "For that, we need this."

Lisa gasped as he revealed his penis, its throbbing visible even where it was between her feet. She vaguely remembered it from her dream, yet it must have been distorted. In person, it was far longer than she remembered it being. At 2-1/2 feet long, it was longer than her entire torso, and at 2-1/2 inches in diameter, it was bigger around than her wrist.

Seeing it, her eyes widened apprehensively.

"Wh—where does *that* go?" she asked nervously.

She had never had sex before, but she knew that the sensations from the bat's tongue alone had proved almost mind-numbingly intense. She wasn't sure whether this new appendage would even fit, and if it did, would the feelings be so intense that she blacked out?

Would that be so bad? taunted a voice in the back of her mind.

She shivered, aroused by the very thought of it.

"Pacito pacito Señorita," the bat cooed.

Clambering up onto the slab, he leaned forward and dangled his throbbing penis an inch or so above Lisa's body. Then, adjusting his position, he leaned forward again and touched the tip to her cleavage.

The tip was rubbery and had a faint drag to it, but it oozed a copious, clear, slippery fluid from the tip that, once rubbed lightly over his glans, made it slip effortlessly over her flesh, leaving a glossy trail behind it. It was warm to the touch, and when he held still, she could feel it lightly pulsing against her skin. She had never seen an erect penis before, let alone felt of one, yet at an instinctive, primal level, she knew that the bat was extremely turned on by her, that seeing her naked this way, seeing her squirm, feeling and tasting of her, made him excited, made his penis do this.

That thought excited her.

The furnace between her legs had been quenched again when the bat's tongue slipped inside her, but not for long. The slick, glossy pool between her breasts was beginning to excite her, and she squeezed her legs together again as the bellows started to blow. As she did, the bat felt her moving against his balls and shuddered ecstatically.

Just a little feel, he told himself.

His hips shaking, he pulled his long penis back, savoring the feel of human skin gliding along its length. He rocked backwards, shifted his weight a little to the left, and managed to cradle his glans between her labia, perched atop her mound.

So... warm...

He jerked his cock up, bending over slightly backwards to flop it onto himself as his balls began to quiver.

That was close... he breathed.

"F—Fernando? Are you okay?" Lisa asked.

The bat glanced down at her. If he could have blushed, he would have, forgetting that from her perspective, he had abruptly broken contact with her.

"S—Si, Señorita," he breathed. "I am... *extremely* aroused by you. It is... hard to hold back when you are... so lovely, so... *aroused*. It makes me want to let go, to breed you like the beast that I am."

Lisa's heart fluttered. There was definitely a threat concealed in that compliment, the risk of danger. Yet, like a moth to a flame, she felt herself drawn to that danger, curiosity and anticipation overpowering caution and diligence.

"Okay," she said, biting her lip as her heart raced. "Do it; breed me 'like the beast you are'."

The bat let out a guttural, bestial grunt, his eyes blazing as he doubled over. For several seconds, he panted, his turgid cock drizzling burning hot pre onto Lisa's abdomen like hot wax.

"N—no, Señorita, not yet," he managed at last. "We will get there, but I must not hurt you by being hasty." He hesitated. "Are you—ready to be untied?" he asked.

Lisa thought about it, then shook her head. "I—I kinda like it," she admitted, biting her lip. "It's *exciting* not being able to defend myself."

The bat let out a faint croak, then shook his head and regained his composure.

"But—" Lisa hesitated.

"Yes?"

"May I—taste it?" she asked.

The bat's cock bobbed.

He leaned forward, and the drooling trail drizzled its way up past her navel, between her breasts, up her neck, over her chin. Not that she would have recognized it, but the bat's penis looked strikingly similar to that of a circumcised human, roughly the uniform in thickness along its entire length, save for a slight bulge at the glans. The one major difference was the size of his urethral slit, whose opening nearly completely bifurcated the tip of his penis.

As that large, oozing slit floated over her chin, Lisa tentatively lifted her head, stuck her tongue out, and tasted of it.

The touch of her tongue on the bat's penis made him shiver with delight. To Lisa, his pre was mildly salty and quite slippery, though it clung to her tongue with strange persistence. His penis itself felt firm yet pliable and rather bouncy.

Deciding it didn't taste too bad *and* she was curious to do more, Lisa looked up at him.

"Could you... you know?" she asked.

The bat looked perplexed for a moment, but then he gently lowered his hips, pressing the tip of his still-drooling prick to her lips. They parted, and she pulled him inside.

His hips bucked instinctively, though he pulled his punch as best he could. The sudden shove of an entire mouthful of cock startled Lisa, but she adapted quickly, spread her jaw as wide as she could, and welcomed the newcomer in with her tongue and hard palate. The part of his shaft that she could feel seemed very similar to his glans, though maybe a little more rigid and less bouncy. Curiously, she ran her tongue all around the rim of his urethra, then poked it inside.

She was rewarded by a large blob of pre that filled her mouth and threatened to drool out the sides if she didn't swallow fast. It was hard with such a large penis in her mouth, but she did the best she could, and the little bit of pre that dribbled down the side of her mouth and landed on her neck excited her in the same sordid way her arousal leaking out of her did.

She continued to nurse the tip of his cock, increasingly enjoying the flavor, but then he abruptly shifted, taking his cock away.

"I wasn't done with that," she protested.

The bat chuckled. "Señorita is too kind," he said. "A gentleman pays back what he is given."

With that, he flipped around and backed up until his penis was pointed straight down at her face. Looking at it this way—like looking down the barrel of a shotgun—her eyes bulged at just how long it was. In the back of her mind, she *knew* where it was supposed to go, and she also knew that it was far too long to fit.

But she had little time to think about that because just then, Fernando lowered his hips, and his penis brushed her lips again. She opened her mouth and took it inside, lapping greedily at the precum that had collected inside while he changed positions. Before she was finished, though, her eyes bulged, and she slammed her head down against the slab.

The bat's tongue had found her labia and slipped up into them again. For many long seconds, he worked his tongue in and out of her, catching every wall, every square inch of her passage. More than anything else, he focused intently on the highly textured surface where her g-spot resided. Adjusting his position, he was able to run the underside of his tongue over her clit on its way inside and then back out in a sawing motion. Though her legs squeezed tightly around his stubby muzzle, his tongue was too thin and slippery for her, and he continued to taunt and tease her relentlessly.

The third round of climactic build-up had abated somewhat as Lisa started sucking Fernando's prick, curiosity and mental stimulation superseding the purely physical pleasures he'd inflicted on her before. But now, too distracted by physical pleasure even to remember that she had a bat's dick in her mouth, she felt the furnace quickly heating again, skipping red and jumping to orange and yellow-hot in mere seconds.

She felt goosebumps at the base of her skull, and as her body began to quiver and shake from the exertion of closing her legs and the approach of her imminent orgasm, those goosebumps spread up the sides of her scalp, then all across the top of her head all at once.

"Ah—*haha*," she moaned, feeling the squirt of fluids from between her legs.

There was suddenly great commotion between her legs, and orgasm number four arrived before even announcing its approach. As her hips thrust upward, the bat's mouth opened and sealed itself against her labia. Her eyes bulged as his teeth dug in, pricking her mound and inner thighs, and his tongue drew a tight vacuum. Her eyes rolled back in her head as his tongue flitted inside of her, seeking out and swallowing every drop of her arousal it could find, while the suction felt as though he was trying to suck her life-force out of her through her womb.

Twitching involuntarily, she collapsed on the slab as soon as he let go of her. Chills went up and down her spine, followed by hot flashes. Her mind swam; her body buzzed; her ears rang. Beneath the cacophony of overstimulation, an overwhelming urge welled up inside of her, a desperate need that she *had* to fulfill.

"Let me go," she panted. "P—please, let me go."

The bat started. "Señorita?" he asked. "Are you okay?"

She nodded vigorously. "P—please, let me go," she pleaded.

Reluctantly, the bat did as she asked, freeing one arm, then the other.

"Señorita must not try to run away," he chided her.

Before he could move to her legs, she sat up, grabbed him by the shoulders, and pressed her lips to his.

Taken aback, Fernando jerked in surprise and started to pull away, but chivalry and the feeling of Lisa's lips on his quickly changed his mind.

Lisa wasn't sure what she had been expecting; all she knew was that she desperately needed to express her appreciation in the only way she could think of at the time. Now, feeling his fangs brushing her bangs and poking her breast, she wasn't quite sure what to do.

She leaned into it.

Reaching forward with her lips, she found his surprisingly supple lower one and pulled it into her mouth. His eyes bulged—not that she saw it as hers were closed passionately—and she sank her teeth into it.

It wasn't a *hard* bite, but it *was* unexpected, and it pushed a button the conquistador-turned-bat didn't know he had.

A deafening shriek erupted from his lungs as his cock quivered and threatened to erupt between them.

Lisa wasn't expecting the shriek, but she took it in stride, pulled backward to draw the bat closer to her, then began kissing him passionately, her mouth moving with abandon over his protruding teeth and nipping relentlessly at his lips.

What could he do? Fernando kissed back.

An upwelling of ferocious affection sparked a bestial reaction from him, and he leaned into her kissing, kissing back the best he could with a mouth full of teeth.

It wasn't long before their tongues got involved.

As she would remember it years later, it was he who initiated, but as he would continue to remember centuries later, she slipped him the tongue first. In reality, they probably both had the idea around the same time, but it didn't really matter. Their tongues met between his teeth, did a cautious courtship dance, then fully embraced one another. Her tongue slipped into his mouth, and his slipped deep into hers.

As they began making out, their bodies moved up next to each other, and with a deft flick of his toes, Fernando released the ropes holding Lisa's legs. They rolled over onto their sides on the slab, their bodies intertwining with Fernando's penis nestled between Lisa's breasts. Both of them squeezed their eyes closed and began to grind against each other, their bodies urging them to go further, to do what they both knew needed to be done by this point, yet they continued to hold back, to edge, to stoke each other's furnaces into raging infernos. As they ground against each other, their motions began to synchronize, and before long, Fernando was lightly thrusting his penis between Lisa's tits, the constant ooze from his prick providing ample lubrication.

Obviously, this was all new to Lisa, but as she basked in the wonderful, new sensations, she couldn't help but notice how much strength and power was contained in each of the bat's thrusts. Though he wasn't moving very much, she could feel the firmness of his body against her, the hard throb of his prick as it effortlessly spread her cleavage. A glimpse of foresight flashed in her mind, and she shivered with anticipation as she imagined that force, that strength, that *throbbing*—she bit her lip—being brought to bear on much more sensitive areas.

While the idea excited her, her curiosity once again got the better of her. Glancing up at the bat's face, she was surprised to see his eyes closed as he focused on the gentle tit-fucking. Seeing her chance, she reached up and put her hand on his chest.

The bat opened his eyes, startled, and looked down at her. Her hand moved up to the side of his face. For once, it almost seemed as if he were the virgin, timidly leaning into the unfamiliar but welcome touch.

Emboldened, Lisa leaned up and brought her other hand to his chest. As they met each other's gaze, the spark of understanding flashed in the bat's eyes. Slowly, he leaned back and over, rolling onto his back and pulling Lisa onto him.

Finding herself in a position of power, Lisa wasn't quite sure what to do at first. But then, her curiosity reminded her, and she sat up, straddling the bat's waist as she ran her hands along the undersides of his wings. Despite his fearsome appearance, it seemed every part of him was softer than any teddy bear she'd ever owned. His wings were velvet-soft and surprisingly supple for being strong enough to carry his weight.

As she felt along his side and up his arm, he let out a breathy sigh, and she stopped abruptly, her eyes darting to his face. All she saw there, though, was contentedness; the bat's eyes were closed, his toothy mouth slightly agape as he felt her exploring him. In the back of her mind, she wondered how long it had been since he'd last felt a tender touch. Had he been married before sacrificing himself for his friend? The thought crossed her mind that this might well be the first time had *ever* experienced intimacy like this.

The thought made her sad.

She let her hands continue exploring upward. Under her fingers and palms, she felt the ribs of his wings, bony and surprisingly thin.

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Her hands made it to what remained of his shoulders. Too thick for a bat, they looked almost as if he had sewn bat wings to his arms and had lost his hands in the process. Her hands explored his muscular arms, and she wondered what he had looked like before his transformation.

Once she had explored as far as she could reach, she lingered a moment, her fingers wrapping around one of the claws at the top of his wing, feeling of the glossy, hard texture before slowly retracing their steps. As she brought her arms back inward, she let them follow the inside of his arm. As she reached where his armpit would be, he shivered under her and exhaled sharply.

She glanced up, then gasped herself as she felt his other wing come down on her back, gently caressing her shoulder like an animated blanket. Sighing contentedly, she rested her head on his chest and felt it rising and falling beneath her. As she began to trace her finger through his fur absent-mindedly, she felt something rubbery under her finger. Curious, she frowned and lifted her head a little bit to see.

It was his nipple.

Remembering how wonderful it had felt when he had touched hers, she began to circle it, to rub it and lightly pinch it.

She felt his chest rise sharply beneath her.

"A—are you okay?" she asked.

"Si," the bat chuckled. "It feels funny, but... good?"

Lisa grinned. Moving her head over to it, she hesitated with her lips above the soft fur. Was this gross, putting her mouth on a bat?

She shrugged. Goodness knew, he'd put his mouth on her, and she'd loved it.

She brought her lips to his nipple and lightly licked its surface.

The bat squirmed beneath her, his wings flying open as he drove his shoulder blades into the slab. Looking at his face, Lisa could see his eyes rolled back in his head.

Chuckling to herself that she had so much sway over such a massive, fearsome creature, she rolled over to prop herself on her arm and felt something lumpy under her. Looking down at it, she was greeted by the tip of Fernando's penis twitching plaintively at her.

Whatever she'd been thinking about before disappeared as this new curiosity presented itself. Sitting up, she ran her fingers down the long, hard, rubbery member, then reached down and squeezed it with both hands, eliciting a surprised thrust of the bat's hips under her. It was extremely rigid, yet as she explored it, she realized that it had a little more give to it than she had originally thought. It was as if a solid cylinder had been coated in gummy bears: there was some squish to the outside, yet the core remained hard as a rock.

As she squeezed it again, it suddenly jerked towards her. Startled, she let go and flinched out of the way.

"Sorry, Señorita," Fernando chuckled sheepishly. "It is... very sensitive."

She cocked her head, then reached out and gently ran the backs of her fingernails down its surface. When the bat's whole body shuddered beneath her, she got an idea.

Scooting down a little so that she could see his whole member, balls and all, she lightly cupped her hands around the base of his shaft, then leaned forward and ran her palms along his length. His hips thrust in response, his penis quivering, straightening out, and lifting off his body. She let go, and as it started to fall back towards him, she grabbed it and pulled it to her again. Before the bat could react, she brought the tip to her mouth and ran her tongue along the underside.

The bat snorted sharply, his hips bucking much harder than before. Losing her balance, she fell over just as his wing came down on top of her.

"S—s—Señorita, I think perhaps you have toyed with me enough," he chuckled. "If you do that again, I might not be able to hold myself back."

The threat of danger again seduced Lisa's mind. She let out a quavering breath at the thought of it. How effortlessly he'd unseated her! A primal urge welled up inside of her and bubbled just beneath the surface, a wanton desire to be used like an animal.

Do it.

The words were on the tip of her tongue, yet she held back. How easily he *had* unseated her, and if that was holding back... Her eyes started to dart to the remains of Dieter, but she quickly forced the idea out of her mind.

Fortunately, Fernando had a distraction prepared.

Lisa rolled down his wing as he gently extricated himself from her. She landed on all fours on the slab, and he wasted no time burying his bat-snout between her legs. Her eyes bulged, and she squealed involuntarily as his hot, wet breath blew over her perineum. Her legs instinctively spread; her back arched, thrusting her hips back towards him.

His tongue flicked out, and she moaned loudly as it slurped into her pussy, withdrew, and then ringed her ass.

Her eyes snapped open. The tickling at her back door made her feel dirty, and yet...

His tongue tapped gently on her anus.

She squeezed her legs together. A droplet of arousal pooled between her labia.

The tip of his tongue flickered, wheedling itself into her puckered orifice.

The droplet grew.

His tongue withdrew. She held her breath, then ventured a cautious sigh.

His tongue slurped at her taint. She gasped, letting her guard down for a split-second.

His tongue found its entrance. Her eyes bulged, and she moaned, thrusting her hips sharply back towards him as arousal drizzled down her front and splattered on the slab.

The bat's tongue flitted this way and that, wriggling, rotating, and writhing inside of her. Each motion made her jerk and twitch as a tickling in her butt synchronized with a fluttering in her womb and a tingling in her temples. Even her nipples started to buzz as his tongue slipped in and out of her, lightly stretching her hole this way and that.

Her head snapped backwards as he withdrew. Her breath caught, and when she finally let it out, it was as a frustrated, horny groan.

The bat took advantage of that. Pressing his hot, moist nose against her taint, he slid his tongue down her flesh, grazed over her mound, and began to tap, swirl, and stroke her clit. She squeezed her legs closed, trying to make him stop, but it was child's play for the long, slender, slippery appendage. Inevitably, she thrust her hips at him again, and his tongue turned its attention to her slit, teasing between her folds a few times before slipping down inside. Lisa bucked and writhed, her arms shaking so badly that she lowered her chest and rested her face against the slab.

She was not expecting his claw.

As she writhed in the throes of ecstasy, she suddenly felt something firm and tapered press against her butt. She gasped, and it slipped inside. As it did, the bat's tongue found her g-spot and began rubbing it hard and fast.

An overwhelmed moan started in the back of Lisa's throat but caught as the claw in her butt gently tugged on her anus. An intense, pleasurable twinge shot from her ass to her pussy to the base of her skull. Her legs bucked again, and then there was a sharp *splat* as she squirted all over the slab.

"A-ugh!" she groaned hoarsely, her hips bucking again as another squirt splattered noisily on the limestone beneath her.

The claw twitched inside of her.

"Oof!" she grunted.

Her pussy and ass both clenched down, wringing a stream of arousal out onto the altar.

Her arms had straightened out in the intervening time, and now her head hung limply from quivering shoulders. As she panted and tried to get her wits back about her, she felt the bat's claw withdraw. She started to breathe a sigh of relief, but then her eyes bulged, and an involuntary squeak escaped her lips as he thrust his muzzle up against her pussy.

"A-a-ahh!"

Lisa squirted right into his mouth.

She felt him tense, then pull back. Exhausted, she looked over her shoulder and saw him licking his lips. He was hunched down on all fours, using the tips of his wings to support himself like a gorilla, their opaque surface plunging his groin into darkness. Despite the shadows, his penis stood out like a lance, glossy, glistening, and throbbing angrily, its black hue tinted red as it bobbed up and down.

Once again, Lisa felt a deep, instinctual sense that the wildly arcing rod was not meant to be left out in the cold. Her labia began to tingle, drawn to him like a magnet twitching at the approach of its counterpart.

Climbing off the slab, she went to him, knelt down, and grasped it in her hands. He squeezed his eyes closed and gritted his teeth.

"You—you're hurt?"

"N-no," he growled hoarsely, "I am holding back."

Do it!

"But *why?*!" Lisa cried, unable to take it any longer. "You are a beast, aren't you? Take me like one!"

"No!" the bat roared, his eyes flashing. "No, Señorita," he said again, softer. "Not... not yet. Once I let go... you will not want to be around me anymore, and I—I am enjoying you very much."

"I'm enjoying you, too!" Lisa said earnestly. Reaching up, she put her hand on his cheek. "I'm sorry I called you a beast. Part of me... wonders what it would be like."

"You shall see, Señorita," Fernando replied somberly. "But first, allow me to be a man... just for a little while longer."

Lisa started, then fell into thoughtful silence.

"I don't think the stories call it 'rape'," she said at last.

Fernando's eyes darted to her.

"I think they call it 'ravishing'."

He averted his eyes.

"Fernando?"

His eyes returned hesitantly.

"You can ravish me anytime you like."

His body jerked, his penis bobbing as he chuckled.

In a flash, he swept her up in his wings, then flopped onto the slab again, lying on his back with her on his chest. She ran her fingers through his fur a few times, then reached down to feel of his testes. Even with most of their weight resting on his abdomen, she could feel how heavy they were. Each one was bigger around than a basketball and slightly elongated, a couple inches taller than it was wide. They were covered in the finest, softest hair anywhere on him, and for a moment, she lost herself just petting him.

And yet, the magnetic attraction remained. Even as she stroked and fondled his balls, she felt the telltale itch of moisture lubricating her passage. Sitting up and biting her lip, she straddled him.

His twitching had subsided somewhat, thanks in no small part to the strong emotions that spoiled the mood a little bit, but as she lowered her mound onto the underside of his shaft, it sprang to life again under her. Stretching out and straining, it resisted her weight as she sat down on it, and as she leaned forward, she learned that it felt very good to grind against. As she did, her slick, wet folds clung to its sides, and she and Fernando both shuddered with pent-up lust.

After a few minutes of grinding against him, though, Lisa realized she wanted more. Her heartbeat had synchronized to the throbbing rod under her, and now her pussy was pulsating in rhythm, too.

She wanted it inside of her, *needed* it inside of her.

She began scooting forward, rubbing and grinding herself against it as she went. The further along its length she got, the more vigorous the twitches beneath her. She was getting close.

At last, she could feel Fernando's slippery pre beneath her, mixing with her own abundant fluids. The heat pouring from the tip of the bat's penis was sweltering, and it made her pussy buzz with excitement.

She leaned forward, biting her lip and getting down on all fours, straddling Fernando's chest. The bat knew what was coming, yet he refused to hasten it, leaving Lisa to take it completely at her own pace. The pained expression on his face, though, seemed to imply that the anticipation was killing him, too.

Lisa could feel him bobbing behind her, could hear the soft *smack-schlick* as his glans flopped into their mixed fluids, clung to his velvety skin, then broke free. With her legs spread this way, she could even feel the increase in heat as his cock bobbed towards her, the cooling as it dipped down.

Smack-schlick. Smack-schlick.

His chest was rising and falling irregularly below her. As she scooted back, she felt him hold his breath.

Smack-schlick.

He gasped, his breathing resuming its ragged cadence.

Smack-schlick.

Her hips rocked back.

They both gasped.

He was so *warm* against her, and the lightly yielding pressure against her oh-so-wet folds filled her with the desperate need to feel him inside of her. Without thinking, she rocked back further.

His cock slipped out, and let-down groans escaped both their mouths.

Smack-schlick-smack-schlick!

She leaned forward, then rocked back again. She felt him pressing against her. She leaned a little more.

"Guh!" she groaned in frustration as he slipped out again.

Her legs were trembling, and so was his chest as she positioned herself again.

Third time's a charm...

She gritted her teeth and squeezed her eyes closed. She wanted this so badly! If she could just—

"Pacito Señorita," Fernando grunted, his breathing now coming as ragged panting.

Slowly...

Lisa exhaled through puffed cheeks, took a shallow breath, and did it again. Her own breathing was beginning to resemble panting as she lined herself up. She forced herself to relax and tried to reach behind her, but the position was too awkward. Looking down, she reached below her and felt of his shaft.

Not expecting it, Fernando's hips bucked. Both their breath caught as he jerked inside of her.

The stretch was, in a word, incredible. She could feel the tension being pulled on her labia, which felt good on its own, but it also had the effect of spreading the nerves out and pushing them up against the welcome

invader. In the split-second when he slipped inside, a million nerve endings all felt him rubbing against them at once.

She came on the spot. Fernando's leg twitched, slamming into the ground.

With the sudden release of hot, wet lubrication that had nowhere to go, Lisa found that the bat's penis slipped inside of her *very* easily after that. Merely rocking back to rest her buttocks on her heels drove the bat's penis up to her g-spot.

Her eyes twitched.

Fernando's tongue grazing over the sensitive spot had been amazing, but it was *nothing* compared to the feeling of a hard penis pressed against it. Moreover, the constant twitching stimulated the sensitive nerve-bundle even when he was holding still. Lisa's vision blurred and began to go dark. She was so aroused that she was on the verge of passing out.

Overwhelmed, she lurched forward, yanking herself off the bat's penis and sprawled on his chest, panting and shivering.

"Ah, Señorita, what did I say? Pacito. You are too eager!" Fernando chuckled.

"It f-feels s-so good," Lisa panted.

"Si, Señorita. *¡Que bien!* Pero..."

He reached down with his wing and gently stroked her head. As she looked up at him, he softly reiterated, "Pacito."

She slumped on his chest, and the two caught their breath.

But the urge would not leave her alone. After only a few minutes, she was back on all fours, thrusting herself against him again. The second time was a little easier, and he slipped right in. After recovering from the surprise, she began to slowly rock forward and backward, inching a little further back at a time as she went. His glans hit her g-spot and made her knees tremble, but she willed herself to keep going, the urge to feel him fully lodged inside of her too strong to resist.

Inch by inch, she took more of him, felt his girth stretching her tightly around him. It was such a unique feeling unlike anything she'd ever experienced that she couldn't find a way to describe it. She knew it felt good—*very* good—and that in a way, the stretch she felt was like stretching her arms, a kind of imposed tension that released other tension. In a way, it was also like a filling, like the pleasant feeling of being full after a meal, but not too full. It was also a bit like scratching an itch or getting a massage, a powerful sense of relief that made her feel weak and invigorated at the same time.

And yet, though it was all of those things, it was also in a category all its own, meeting a primal need unlike any other, a bestial, *carnal* urge to copulate, to pass her genes on to the next generation.

Little did she know...

At last, she felt a kind of pinch, a thump, a mild discomfort as she inched backwards, the unmistakable sense that she could go no further.

Fernando felt it too, and raised his head.

"Very good, Señora," he said, his eyes glinting.

"Señora?" Lisa asked, surprised, "What happened to Señorita?"

In response, the bat glanced significantly at the bulge in Lisa's abdomen.

Lisa cocked her head, and then it dawned on her: by her own actions, she was a virgin no more. She felt a pang of remorse, of loss.

"Would you like some help, Señora?" Fernando asked gently.

Lisa hesitated, then slowly nodded. He brought his wing up, and as she leaned against it, he lowered her down on her side. Wrapping his other wing around her, he gently rocked his hips back.

Lisa's eyes closed, and her mouth parted, the brief regret vanishing.

The feeling of slowly filling herself up had been deeply satisfying, yet the feeling of sharing the moment with someone else, of surrendering a bit of control to the other person, was thrilling. The intimacy and closeness she felt was so intense that her chest ached even as her body shook with ecstasy.

Fernando's hips pulled most of his penis out, and then he gently rocked back inside. Only an inch or so slipped in before he started backing out again. Lisa had braced for the mind-warping feeling of having her g-spot rubbed, but he had stopped just short of it. Yet, as he rocked in again, she felt warmth and an almost painful level of happiness wash over her. She curled up tightly in his wings, inexplicable tears running down her cheeks as he made love to her.

She came once more, but unlike the climaxes that preceded it, this one felt more cathartic than physically gratifying. As her arousal built, then streamed out around Fernando's penis, she began to sob quietly in his wings, her body shuddering uncontrollably as pent-up feelings both good and bad vented themselves in an incoherent but powerful release.

The slow, firm contractions that accompanied her orgasm subsided. She felt her heartbeat and his throbbing hard against each other in the comfort of her womb.

She sighed, feeling as though a great weight had been lifted from her.

With a sudden realization, she gasped.

"Did—did you remove the curse?" she asked.

ALMOST, SEÑORA.

His voice was guttural. Demonic. Angry.

She gasped again, this time in fear.

She felt him shifting around her. Suddenly afraid, she caught herself as he moved out from under her, leaving her on the slab. She whirled to look at him.

I AM SORRY.

His eyes blazed, and his body twitched and jerked as if wracked by spasms.

PLEASE, SEÑORA, REMEMBER ME FOR THE MAN I TRIED TO BE, NOT THE BEAST I HAVE BECOME.

With a bestial roar, he lunged at her. She shrieked in terror and tried to crawl away, but he was on her in an instant. Powerful limbs grabbed her around the waist.

"Fernando!" she cried. "Stop! This isn't you!"

She felt the bat's wings yank backward. She braced for impact.

It didn't come.

WH—WHAT DID YOU CALL ME?

Her chest heaving, she looked over her shoulder, where a flash of intelligence flickered within the bat's smoldering eyes.

"Fernando," she breathed. "You're a better man than this."

Fighting against the abject terror she felt, she exhaled sharply and tossed her head.

"I told you that you may ravage me whenever you like," she said as boldly as she could, "But let's keep it at ravaging, shall we?"

A confused look came over the bat's face. For a moment, he stared at the ground, but then, his mind made up, he redoubled his grasp on her waist.

The painful blow she had expected never came. His hips rocked forward quickly, but not sharply. Despite the moment of terror, she was still plenty wet, and he slid effortlessly into her.

What followed was terrifying, an overwhelming flood of endorphins released by overstimulation, exhaustion, and residual fear. He bred her faster than a dog, harder than a horse, and for as long as a pig. The frightening hints of overstimulation she'd felt before were nothing compared to what she experienced then. Within seconds, the feeling of his cock rapidly rubbing her nerves was too much. Her stomach twisted, and panic gripped her, yet there was no slowing the beast, let alone stopping him. Her vision began to tunnel. She screamed in fear, ecstasy, and confusion. She climaxed.

And then, she blacked out.

She would black out twice more before the ordeal was over. Every time, she was abruptly reawakened by the overpowering blaze in her groin, the feeling of being stuffed to the cervix and emptied three times every second. She moaned, she wailed, she gasped, she drooled. By the end, she had gone limp, her body too exhausted to keep upright as the bat truly did ravish her.

At last, his cock throbbed harder than ever, his testes shivered and shook. She felt something hot erupt inside of her, so hot that even in her exhaustion, every muscle in her body went rigid.

With a final thrust, the bat buried his cock as deep as it would go. Lisa's eyes and mouth gaped soundlessly as she felt him cumming inside of her, his fleshy tip sealed so tightly against her that she could feel his semen squirting through her cervix.

It was terrifying.

It was overwhelming.

It was the best fuck she would ever have.

Her voice too hoarse to scream, she let out a breathy hiss as she doubled over, groaning painfully as the hardest orgasm she'd had yet wracked her body. The bat held her hips tightly as her vagina squeezed around him, keeping his still-spurting penis pressed firmly against her inner orifice, ensuring that his seed reached its target. Between each contraction, he squirted a million sperm into her uterus so that when she contracted again, she squeezed the fresh batch up into her fallopian tubes.

By the time he let go, the first of his seed had already found an egg.

His grip on her relaxed. She gasped as he suddenly dismounted, then groaned hoarsely, her back arching as he pulled out. A gush of unnaturally hot fluid gushed out between her legs, splattering her thighs and coating the slab. Panting, she stood there on wobbly fours for a few seconds before collapsing and rolling over to look at him.

He was hunched over and seemed preoccupied with licking his penis but was unable to do so because of violent spasms wracking his body. Lisa felt a pang of pity for him and, forgetting about the mess between her legs, slid off the slab and went to him.

"Fernando," she rasped, "What's wrong?"

She reached for his face.

Fire blazed in his eyes, the intelligence gone. He let out a guttural shriek, then leapt into the air, knocking her over. Colliding off the walls several times, he swooped down, snatched the Mask of Ah Puch from where it had been dropped on the floor. Lisa jerked her head up just in time to see him vanish through the doorway at the top of the cavern.

The room fell silent.

Panting, she tried to come to terms with what had just happened. Looking around, she jumped at seeing Dieter's mangled body, an involuntary yelp escaping her lips.

Suddenly very afraid, she threw on her tattered clothes and shoes, then raced up the stairs.

When she finally burst through the doorway, night had fallen. As the realization set in that she was alone in the jungle, she felt her survival instinct kick in. She raced back to the camp, intending to find and confront the professor.

What she found instead twisted her stomach.

Mask of Death

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The professor's tent had been shredded, its contents crumpled and strewn hundreds of feet. The same had befallen Dieter's tent and its contents.

Swallowing hard, Lisa approached the camp. The professor's helmet was there, a deep gouge cut into the pith.

The professor himself was nowhere to be found.

Three weeks later, Lisa awoke in her own bed. She had managed to build a fire big enough for a passing plane to investigate and had been rescued not long after. There was no word of the professor; no news articles reported him missing. The whole trip felt like a blur.

As she rose and went to the window, she stared vacantly out at the street below her.

Had any of it been real? Had a giant man-turned-bat really killed a man and taken her virginity?

She shook her head. It was ridiculous. Maybe the trauma of being stranded had made her invent a wild story to explain it. Why else would the professor have gone missing without a trace?

She started to feel a little relieved when something suddenly twinged in the back of her mind.

Her period was six days late.