

Fiction/Adventure

"Skye will become one of your all-time favorite characters! The tone and scenes bring readers into a distressing world and forces them to read on until the heroine allows them to leave...at the end of the book. Her writing is superb, the characters will become your heroes, and you will be searching for the next book in the series long before it is available. Trust me! This author is on the move! Watch her! She is a challenge to many other well-established writers. This is definitely a MUST-READ!"

-G. A. Bixler, bookreviewers.org

"Jacqueline Randolph has successfully captured the intense drama of this type of exciting and suspense-filled novel. Her characters are ... believable and endearing. Her writing is clear and colorful...This is a wonderful, exciting and romantic read, and I strongly recommend it."

-Nancy Morris. Allbooksreviews.com

"Filled with emotion, action, patriotism, passion, suspense, vivid description, and many plot twists and turns. Deception's Fury is a one-sitting read...because you won't want to put the book down to tend to anything else. Be prepared to be frustrated as the story ends and you long for it to continue—right now!"

-Dian Moore, Bookpleasures.com

Skye Mathews, acclaimed DEA undercover agent, pilot and consummate actress and her CEO husband, Rhys Wielde, are married with three children from the conclusion of *Deception's Guard*. Skye schemes for a last mission to Argentina and Antarctica—to save lives and settle an old score. In ensuring her selection on the team, some would say she exploited the unthinkable and others applauded her ingenuity. Arriving in Buenos Aires, she is promptly captured and brutalized and her fellow agents murdered. Rhys is deployed to the country only to find his wife raving mad and barely alive. Thus begins their journey through Argentina, Chile and Antarctica involving deception, betrayal, revenge, ruthless murders, a shipload of lethal experimental narcotics, and their relationship threatened on the brink of fury and destruction.

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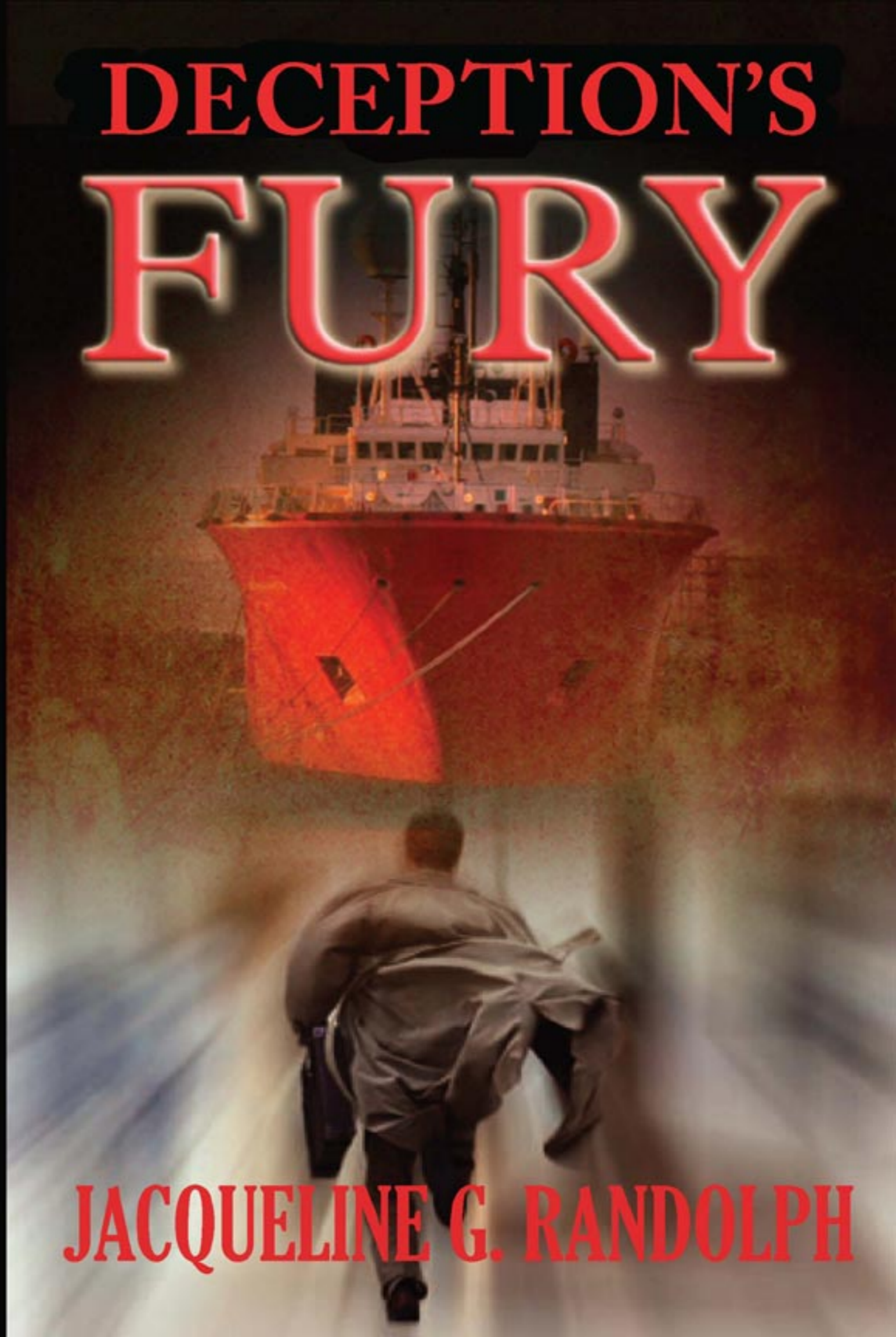
DECEPTION'S FURY



JACQUELINE G. RANDOLPH

# DECEPTION'S FURY

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# Deception's Fury

by

Jacqueline G. Randolph

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# Dedication

To God  
The source of my  
Adventures, Success, and Joy

~\*~\*~\*~

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding  
abundantly above all that we ask or think  
according to the power that worketh in us.”

(Ephesians 3:20)

# Preface

Writing *Deception's Fury*, the sequel to my freshman effort, *Deception's Guard*, has been an inspiring growth experience. It has been almost two years before I made the effort to write this sequel as I was waiting for God to give me another bolt of the four-day genius in which I wrote *Deception's Guard*; it never came. Finally, I realized God required me to take the first step so I did in finally putting pen to paper.

Rhys and Skye leapt onto the pages in another of their adventures as if they had been imprisoned within my soul. In two months I had written the entirety of the sequel which explores the many forces threatening to tear their relationship apart and the decisions they make in standing together to defeat the onslaught of wrenching conflict, fury and hate.

This story is especially poignant to me as many of my friends were experiencing separation and divorce during this writing. I believe God's word in which He implores us "...Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:18). He further exhorts, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18) and "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." (Romans 12:10). Somehow I sought to convey the possibility of sticking out the storms for the prize of a different relationship that could be stronger and richer for the struggle. I think Rhys and Skye are the better for moving beyond their certainties about one another to the deeper, often hideous, truths as they stand together, souls bared, against all stormy blasts. I think we all are the better for going the distance in our relationships. Ultimately, Skye and Rhys's legacy is how I strive to live: loving true and deep!

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May you enjoy the journey of reading *Deception's Fury* even more than I enjoyed the writing; especially as I spent a grand time adventuring in Antarctica and Argentina during my research! As always my hope for us both is love enduring and adventures unimagined!

# Prologue

Cold. Dark. Imprisoned. Rotting stench. Screaming pain.

*How long have I been here?*

Her body aches. Her spirit is numb from conditions no human could long endure. Some part of her fading existence registers a gnawing sensation and terrifying sounds at her cheek. Scurrying activity of rodents surrounds her. Weakly protesting, her raised hand attempts to brush off the repulsive offender. Slicing pain rips raggedly through every nerve, shutting down all physical responses more effectively than an electrical overload. From a long distance in a far away place, the advancing sound of rats and the night eyes of slithering creatures assaults her ever-deadening senses.

She closes her eyes and concentrates on the faces eerily wafting behind her eyelids. A tall man; sun-darkened, thick black hair raked through with hands tender and familiar. Warmth. Passion. Blue eyes gaze upon her with love and grief and determination. Hers. Rhys. Two children: the same but different. A fair-skinned girl; waist-length dark brown hair and expressive brown eyes. "Mommy." Hers. Sierra. A dark-skinned, dark-haired boy. Mischievous. Adventurous. He whispers excitedly, "Mommy." Hers. Jon. Now a gruff man. Loyal. Faithful. Friend. DEA. Gabe. "You must tell him. Don't leave like this." "All right then, it's your way."

Dry bile claws up her throat. Nausea saturates her near-numb senses. She concentrates on the faces in her mind. A toddler. Her heart squeezes. Her breath catches. Her breasts ache with echoes of nourishment. A toddler. An olive-skinned miniature Rhys. Tristan Alaric. "Wolf." Soft baby breath. Pudgy baby hugs. The anchoring images fade.

*No. Don't go. How long have I been here?*

Screaming pain. Rotting stench. Imprisoned. Dark. Cold.

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# Chapter One

*Wetmore, Colorado*

“Daddy, when is Mommy coming home?” Sierra asked, her voice quivering with unshed tears.

“Soon, Baby,” Rhys replied as he prayed his very smart daughter would leave it at that.

“But it has been nine days and you said she would be back in one week. That’s seven days. She’s late!”

Of course she wouldn’t leave it at that.

Now Jonathan Reese intently looked at him for a response. Rhys resettled Wolf on his lap as he snuggled close in his soft fleece jumper. Next, he embraced Sierra dressed in her pony-print nightgown as she cuddled next to him on one side and he placed a kiss between Jon’s accusingly staring eyes—*he really was the very image of his mother.*

“Okay, gang, here’s the deal. We are going to finish reading about the fun of eating green eggs and ham. Then, we are going to read Mommy’s last note to us. Then you three are going to bed. The sooner you do, the sooner Mommy just may come home from work with Uncle Gabe tomorrow. Jon, it’s your turn to read a page.”

Thankfully, the children were falling in with his plan. As eight year-old Jon read about resistance to change in the world of Dr Seuss, his twin, Sierra, followed along ready to dispute any incorrectly pronounced word. Three year-old Tristan Alaric, known as “Wolf”, was sound asleep.

*Where is she?* “She” was Skye, his wife of nine years and a Drug Enforcement Administration consultant. Prior to their marriage, she had been an acclaimed DEA undercover agent. In fact, they had met when she was his undercover bodyguard during a DEA operation in

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Colorado, Peru, and Ecuador. Of course, given her numerous facades and disguises, he hadn't known who she was until well into the most dangerous phase of the operation which included their pseudo marriage, a drug cartel, and an abundance of murderous intents. She had been willing to risk her life for his during the fury of an assassin, but he had thwarted her plans and earned a bullet wound for his trouble.

With a bit of deft computer wizardry, their pseudo marriage had become very real and she had traded her active fieldwork for the position of an "as needed" consultant upon learning of her first pregnancy.

Up until last week, their nine years of marriage was characterized primarily by her prioritizing their marriage and children at their home in Greenwood, Mississippi. Her other activities included limited involvement with the DEA, her part-time professorships at the local colleges, and overseeing her local air charter business, Skyborne.

This all changed last week while he'd been in the middle of a monthly board meeting of his company, Genoreach Technologies, dedicated to research and development of bioinformatic technologies--the mating of biology and information systems--and philanthropic endeavors. The corporate atmosphere of the room was heightened with activity as dark-suited directors and department heads conducted business around the long rectangular cherry wood conference table in the midst of hovering media. There had been journalists present as Genoreach had successfully demonstrated communication with a comatose patient via information systems. The subject of donating two hundred computers to impoverished public schools in the Appalachians and the Mississippi Delta was underway when Gwen, his auburn-haired slim suited secretary, slipped him a note and crisply informed him that Skye was waiting in his office and urgently needed to speak with him. As his extremely competent wife had never visited him in a crisis, his blue eyes widened in surprise and he anxiously raked his hand through the raven thickness of his shoulder length hair. He stood and subconsciously smoothed his tailor-made dark blue suit and burgundy blue paisley tie as he quickly excused himself after placing the reins of the meeting into those of a department head.

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He'd distractedly complimented and assured the corporate sponsors and media as he steadfastly moved through the pressing crowds toward the door.

"Mr Wielde, are there any more micro-computer developments for eliminating paralysis?"

"Mr Wielde, where are you in your claims to eradicate epilepsy?"

The questions continued as he flashed his most gracious smile while never slacking his pace. Now a hand found his in adulation, then a friendly touch at his back in an attempt to gain his attention. Rebecca, a tall red-hair woman with a flawless porcelain complexion stepped in his path. She was dressed in an emerald green power suit that hugged her curvaceous figure and revealed toned shapely legs that stopped toe to toe with the head of Genoreach Technologies. She winked at him familiarly and Rhys groaned inwardly at her presumption of their past intimacy which had been dead for almost 15 years.

"Rhys, is there any truth to the rumors of a merger with Guver Medical? You and I have talked often and. . .intimately. . .about your low opinion of many medical professionals."

Rhys wouldn't let that pass. "Rebecca, my wife has helped me to improve that opinion considerably. You wouldn't know that as I haven't spoken with you outside of a press conference in more than fourteen years." He gave her a dismissing look as he moved past her. She shot him a vicious glare to the muffled laughter of her colleagues. Finally he was out the door and moving through the open cubicles and offices as he greeted his staff and employees along the way.

He entered the massive glass doors into his office suite and noted his secretary hadn't returned. Her two administrative assistants were busily collating copies and fielding calls in preparation for an upcoming Bioinformatics Summit in New York the following week.

"Please hold my calls, Sara," he said to the middle-aged Korean woman as she ended one call and prepared to receive another. He caught her wink just as he entered the heavy wooden doors of his office.

He found his beautiful wife standing behind his oak desk bathed in the South's winter sunshine spilling through the wall-length

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window behind her. She was of Spanish and African-American heritage, dressed in a short black leather jacket, white turtleneck shirt, light blue jeans and black heeled boots. Soft raven curls surrounded the golden skin of her face and fell about her shoulders. She looked at least a decade younger than her forty-three years; however, a consummate actress, she could convincingly portray a teenager or an old gaunt hag with equal ease. Her full lips curved as she smiled down at the picture of their children prominently placed on his desk. There were two other pictures of her flanking those of the children.

"Skye, what is it? Are the children in trouble?" He anxiously closed the door and glanced around the office for a dose of serenity before the storm. There were two stylish overstuffed burgundy and black designer chairs arranged in a corner flanking a low glass aquarium table. Motivational pictures of nature, green plants and state of the art audio-visual equipment were displayed around the room. Briefly, he glanced at the adjacent wall portrait of his parent's wedding just as he circled the desk to move toward her on soft burgundy plush carpeting, his six-foot frame looming over her by five inches.

"They're fine." She'd replied with a bright smile, too bright. He knew she was about to drop a big one on him. They studied one another silently with the bright colorful fish in the aquarium momentarily providing the only movement in the room. Before she could say another word he enveloped her in his arms. Slightly tilting her head back he gazed into her eyes and saw worlds there. There was the fall and rise of his life; love and fulfillment were there. Releasing a sigh of gratitude, he pressed his mouth gently to hers and replenished his soul. Moving his hands to her face, he caressed the soft vulnerability of her slender neck and deepened the kiss. He trailed gentle kisses along her cheek and into her black silken hair.

"Ahhh Rhys." She softly moaned, "I do love you."

He smiled down at her. "You'd be wise not to incriminate yourself with that confession, darling. I'll hold you to it for the rest of our lives," he teased before gazing into her eyes for long moments. "Whatever you are about to tell me, whatever argument or disagreement we are about to have, know that I love you, too. Nothing will ever change that. I'd give my life...again...for you."

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Skye became quiet in remembering Rhys's prone body after his encounter with a deadly assassin in Ecuador during their only mission together years ago. She'd had no idea just how vital he was to her life until she lay under him, soaking in his blood as he unconsciously shielded her body on the green floral lawn of a spectacular centuries-old mansion in Ecuador. An assassin lay several feet away, his bloody work finally stopped by disguised DEA agents. That event had exquisitely clarified the feelings she had for Rhys.

"Fortunately, you won't have to take such drastic actions this time. I need to pilot a mission to Buenos Aires. I'll be gone for a week. It's nothing dangerous, just an out and back. The kids are out of school next week. Why not take them to the cabin in Colorado for a short vacation?"

Rhys knew this explanation was a pale version of the truth. "Not good enough, honey, give me more."

"You are so demanding, Rhys! I wish you'd confine your appetite to our bedroom!" She moved away from him and stood looking down upon the bright and active aquarium world while pouting in invitation for him to share in her humor.

*There is Jon's face when he demands his way.* Now Rhys was beginning to get really nervous. She was trying to divert him. Redirect his attention. Appeal to his humor and his sexuality. "Again, it won't work. Skye, you haven't been on a mission in over nine years. At your insistence, not mine! You resigned from fieldwork because of the inherent dangers. Have the children slipped in your priorities?"

"Not fair, Rhys! It is only an out and back!" She glowered petulantly, her temper obviously rising at his dogged queries.

"Don't treat me like a stranger, like a person who can't tell when you are blatantly lying to protect me from the truth. Tell me precisely what is going on. What could possibly entice you to set aside all your very logical and sensible decisions to put this life behind you?"

Rhys stalked near her, his voice now a whisper as he reached for her chin and secured it in his right hand. "By God, you had better tell me the truth or I will follow you to the ends of the earth for the answer. And you know I will! But first I'll beat Gabe to a bloody oblivion for allowing you to even consider this lunacy."

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Skye's eyes widened at his threat to the mission and the life of her mentor, boss, and friend, Gabe Kinski, chief of DEA Special Operations. "Stop it, Rhys! You're beginning to scare me," she whispered emphatically, her mouth slightly trembling with emotion.

"Bravo, darling." He smiled mirthlessly, raising an index finger, "One, I know what a brilliant actress you are, and," he raised another finger, "two, you have never been threatened by me in your life. I don't think anyone has ever had the dubious distinction of intimidating you. Enough games, Skye! All cards on the table, face up."

Skye thoughtfully scrutinized him. "Let's take a walk," she said while moving toward the door. Rhys took her hand and led her from his office. From past experience, he knew she sought to avoid the possibility that his office could be bugged. Skye preceded him into the outer office and his secretary looked up and smiled warmly at them, discreetly nodding at Skye. Rhys moved to one of her desktop monitors that visually displayed the boardroom activities occurring in his absence. His protocol and public affairs executives were discussing the distribution schedule and impact of the donated computers while fielding media questions. Rhys smiled at his secretary.

"Gwen, please let the board know I'll be delayed a little longer. My wife's got me on a leash again."

"And I've never seen a more happily captive man. If only we all were so blessed with your distressful situation!" Gwen laughed sarcastically.

She was one of his many staff members who had employed considerable resources and time to find Skye after she had disappeared from Rhys's life nine years earlier while he slowly recuperated from his near fatal injuries. Skye winked at Gwen before leading him to the roof of his building where the shining sun and crisp February breeze did little to thaw the chill of anticipated fear building in Rhys.

Skye walked alone to the edge of the roof and gazed down upon the teeming activities of Memphis, Tennessee. Cars raced on the streets below and people hurried to and from their destinations

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bundled in warm clothing and carrying an array of shopping bags, briefcases, backpacks and packages. Her loose hair wafted on the breeze and her concentrated gaze was steady and unwavering. Rhys knew she had to find her own rhythm and telling. He suddenly felt that nine years of sharing and merging and producing with her had meant nothing; in many ways she was still a very solitary woman. She still held to her inviolate refusal to impart any information to those who did not have a "need to know." He felt both sad and proud of her convictions. She was a good agent, the best. He knew he could trust his life and, more importantly, their children's lives in her hands. There were crises beyond them and bigger than them in this world. He was sorry he could not help her share in these burdens.

"I didn't lie to you, Rhys. There is a situation in Argentina that we can't get a handle on. There are several agents working it. I've provided cultural and intel consultations from the beginning. My role is simply to provide covert air transport."

"Skye, we both know there are plenty of competent pilots who can do this," Rhys argued at her back.

"I need to do this," she emphasized forcefully before softer persistence. "While I'm away, please take the children to our cabin in Colorado." She continued to gaze down upon the Memphis bustle.

"That is the second time you've suggested I take my children to Colorado." Rhys's voice became low and dangerous. He firmly gripped her arm and pulled her around to face him. "Why?" He malevolently demanded, which left her no escape and brooked no refusal.

Before his eyes all her facades vanished. Weariness descended on her and she lashed out. "I wish I didn't have to deal with you; you are wasting my time."

*Stay focused.* Rhys told himself. *This is no act. She is cornered and reacting.* Rhys fixed his gaze immovably on hers and refused the argument. "Again, why have you twice made mention of my children?"

"You've obviously forgotten that they are my children, too!" she bit out.

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Rhys's eyes continued to bore down into her face. She attempted to shrug off his hand from her arm with no success; given her lethal defense training they both knew she merely allowed his gripping hold on her. With her free arm she reached into her leather jacket and extracted a folded sheet of paper. Wordlessly she handed it to him.

Rhys finally loosed his grip and took the offered paper. He unfolded it and found an email message in Spanish signed, "Tristan Alaric." Horror filled his eyes and he found it reflected in her face. She reached into her jacket again and proffered another letter. Rhys snatched it from her and unfolded the missive. Again, written in Spanish, this time signed, "Wolf." Before he could look up she handed him two more messages; one signed, "Tristan Alaric Wolf" and another simply, "Tristan Alaric."

"What is this?" His voice was harsh and cracking.

Skye walked away from him to take up her former position at the roof's edge. "It could be a coincidence, someone who shares the same name as our son. Or it could be my past catching up with me and my son having to pay the price for my sins." The sorrow in her voice was reflected by an escaping tear trailing down her face. After long moments, she continued. "The intercepted email traffic was heavily encrypted; it took the administration quite some time to decipher. The messages merely refer to minor routine drug activity in Argentina and Chile. There is some connection to Argentina, specifically Buenos Aires and Ushuaia, and the Antarctic regions, but we are unsure of what it is. We normally would not even pursue this low level activity. Gabe first noticed the name, that's why he initiated this mission. I am only the pilot."

As Skye gazed over the city she noted the increasing rush hour traffic below and the advancing dusk before concentrating on the man standing behind her. *Please let it go, Rhys. Stop probing.*

"What are you not telling me?" Rhys asked quietly.

Skye refused to answer. She felt him move toward her. She felt him at her back. She expected him to bully her, insist or threaten. He gently slipped his arms about her waist and pulled her close, laying his face tenderly against her head.

"Tell me all of it, Skye," he insisted.

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She was undone! "Gabe insists there is no way a trail could have led to me as all information flows were masked and my role in Peru and Ecuador were untraceable to the DEA. Gabe contends that you are the thread. The retaliation, if this is malignant, is directed at you." Ragged breath escaped from his anguished soul. Skye clutched at his embracing hands and held them tightly. "My primary role is as the pilot, my subordinate task is to identify anyone from our time together nine years ago. I'll be disguised, as usual, and nowhere near the front lines. Trust me, Rhys, to take care of this. Please trust me, Rhys," she begged.

"I trust you," he soothed.

"I need to leave tonight. I'm on my way to the Virginia Headquarters now. I have seven letters for the children to keep them from worrying—one for each day. Rhys, will you please go to Colorado?"

"We'll go tomorrow morning," he agreed.

Skye sighed in relief and collapsed against him surprised at how tense she had been. "Thank you."

In one movement, he turned her around to face him and covered her mouth with a deep kiss that left her soul raw. She felt the raging beast of anger and helplessness and fear uncoil in him as he rained caresses on her face, into her hair and along her neck. His hands roughly pulled her into himself while she whispered words of comfort and assurance. In the midst of their private storm she heard a distant clearing of a throat.

"What?" Rhys barked out the question while never slackening his embrace.

"Rhys, the journalists are ready for your interview and the board requires your actions before adjourning," Gwen crisply responded.

"I'll be right there," Rhys informed her as she quickly retreated from the maelstrom of their unity; he briefly wondered how she knew to find them on the roof. Rhys tucked Skye's hair back and placed his mouth next to her ear.

"If you are not back in exactly one week I will go to Argentina and find you." Alarm chilled through her at the destruction he could unleash on this mission.

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"Please don't--" His look cut off her plea.

It was a look she had never seen in the nine years she had known and loved him. Gently, he smoothed her cheek with the back of his hand and buried his face in her hair while inhaling deeply of her lavender scent. "I love you, Skye. I'll see you real soon," he both comforted and warned before taking her hand and leading her from the roof, down the elevator, and to the glass double door exit of his building. Another branding kiss and she was gone. Deep in thought, he made his way to the boardroom.

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" . . . Thank you. Thank you. Sam-I-Am. The end!" Sierra concluded.

"Very good. You both read so well despite the fact that this book is much too easy for you! I bet you'll win the reading award again this year at school," Rhys congratulated the beaming children.

The fire cackled as a log shifted in the grate. The smell of savory beef stew, fish sticks, and biscuits were still evident after the children had washed and dried the dishes before their story time. They were dressed in their pajamas and cuddled on the off-white oversized couch pillows around their father after having brushed their teeth before story time. Rhys wore burgundy fleece sweat clothes and his bare feet were propped upon an oversized lavender pillow atop the oak coffee table.

"Dad, read Mom's letter now."

Rhys nodded at his oldest son and his breath caught at Jon's focus. *There is Skye bathing him in her love and need.* He banished those thoughts and gently pushed Jon's head back against the sofa pillows. Jon giggled. Rhys reached for the now well-handled letter and unfolded it before reading:

*"To my beautiful angels: Sierra, Jon, and Wolf. Mommy loves you very much. I'm going to tell you a secret. One day you three will be big people, adults, and you will help others to be healthy and happy and safe. You will continue to make God and Daddy and me very proud of you, as we are very proud of you now. Have good and funny dreams tonight and remember to say your prayers because I am praying for you and Daddy. I love you very much! Mom."*

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Rhys held the letter for moments longer at the end and his heart and body ached for her. He lifted his eyes from the letter and looked into the faces of his children. The mood was suddenly somber and the twins' eyes were suspiciously moist.

"Okay, Jon, looks like you have claimed the sofa for tonight. Sierra, do you want to sleep in the loft tonight?" Rhys asked to lighten their moods.

"Daddy, I love living here in the cabin—I'm going to sleep in the loft!" Sierra decreed with excitement.

"Be careful climbing that ladder, honey. Remember your prayers," Rhys reminded her as she headed toward the loft stairs.

Rhys laid a drowsy Wolf on the end of the couch. Jonathan was settling in under the blankets as Rhys sat next to him.

"Dad, is Mom ever coming home?"

"Of course she is, Jon. She would never be happy without you." Jon smiled and reached up to hug his father and they held each other tightly as Rhys kissed his cheek. "Son, I'm so glad God made you to look so much like Mom. You are my special gift."

Jon's smile widened and he lay down as Rhys tucked him in securely. Hoisting Wolf to his shoulder, he carried him into the single bedroom and navigated the oversized pastel pillows strewn on the floor to place him in bed under the lavender silk and crochet quilt.

Next, he climbed the loft ladder and crawled on the cream colored llama pelts strewn on the floor. Sierra lay upon a pile of oversized pastel floor pillows and was covered in a thick cat and dog designed quilt. She smiled widely at him in the small pool of lamplight as he crawled in beside her and pulled her close in for a hug. "Hey sweetie, are you done with your prayers?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Did you remember to pray for Grandma Wiede?"

"Yes, Daddy. Do you think she misses you like we do Mommy?"

"Yes sweetie, that's why she visits us often. But I think she enjoys her friends in Maine too."

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“Daddy, I’ll live with you always so you won’t ever miss me!”

Rhys smiled hugely, praying that she would always feel that way. “Brave Sierra that would make me the happiest daddy in the world!”

Sierra giggled as Rhys squeezed her tightly to him before tucking her in and kissing her goodnight.

After all the kids were settled in, Rhys dimmed all the lights in the cabin and stepped outside onto the deck. Snow still blanketed the ground and winked like white diamonds in the moonlight. The moon beamed bright against the blackness of the night sky and animal cries and activities punctuated the silence. He shivered slightly in the crisp winter breeze of late February and wrapped his arms tightly around his body. He stared questioningly into the starry sky as thoughts leapt unbidden in his heart. *Where are you, Skye? Are you well? Are you hurt? I know you are alive because I can feel you! Your week has expired. As promised, I’m going to find you!*

## About the Author

Jacqueline G. Randolph is an Air Force officer who has served in a diversity of exciting assignments such as C-130 aircrew, with joint missions supporting the DEA, Special Forces, famed 101st and 82nd Army Airborne units, NASA space shuttle launches, and delivering United Nations supplies to war ravaged countries in the Middle East and the Balkans. She has also served as a missile launch officer, assistant professor at two colleges, and as a GPS satellite operator. Prior to accepting a commission in the Air Force, she held positions with the Defense Contract Audit Agency, Federal Aviation Administration, and the National Transportation Safety Board. She holds an instrument-rated private pilot license, owns a property investment business, and dabbles in amateur theater. She enjoys skydiving, rafting, fencing, ballroom dancing, sports car racing and mission trips to Africa, Alaska, and Mexico. This first-time author, whose biography has been included in Marquis' *Whose Who in America* since 2003, holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Accounting, Administration and Commercial Aviation. Her future aspirations include a stint with the Peace Corps, Alaskan bush piloting, wintering over in Antarctica, and a second career as a missionary pilot. Born in Madrid, Spain, she is a world traveler and self-proclaimed adrenaline junkie.

**The Deception Series**  
by  
**Jacqueline G. Randolph**

**Deception's Guard (first edition, 2003; second edition, 2005)**

**Deception's Fury (2005)**

**Deception's Legacy (2006)**

**Deception's Bind (2007)**

## DECEPTION SERIES PRAISE

*"Deception's Guard has a... most interesting heroine and hero. Skye and Rhys give the reader danger and romance on a level seldom seen between the pages of a book.*

*Hattie Boyd, ScribesWorld Reviews*

*"Deception's Guard's author teams suspense and romance together in such a way as to leave readers on the edge of their seat.. .her book gets an A+ for being a highly interesting read"*

*Faith V. Smith, Romantic Times and Myshef.com and Bridges Magazine*

*"Is it Possible to Write a Good Novel in Four Days?' When you have completed reading the first chapter, any skepticism you may have entertained has completely disappeared. You are emotionally drawn in and seduced to read this gripping tale of intrigue, espionage, deception and romance."*

*Norman Goldman, TheBestReviews.com and Bookpleasures.com*

*"Readers are drawn in with a winning blend of suspense, romance and intrigue in this compelling literary drama. This is a 'can't put down' novel that this reviewer highly recommends." Shirley Roe, Allbooks Reviews; 2003 Editors Choice*

*Shirley Roe, Allbooks Reviews; 2003 Editors Choice*

*"An exciting book by an even more exciting person. Her boundless enthusiasm for excellence and for life is reflected throughout the novel. To everyone who enjoys or admires the American way of life, this is a must read.*

*Dr William Bell, Delta State University*

*"... I found Deception's Guard to be an above average suspense...fans of military and police suspense will be very satisfied."*

*Tracy Farnsworth, Theromancereaderconnection.com*

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*“Deception’s Guard has a hearty portion of adventure coupled with plenty of romance. The author’s vivid descriptions of the various settings of the book bring the locations and their respective culture alive. . the book is an admirable freshman effort for Randolph that is worth checking out.”*

*Stacey Seay, Rawsistaz.com*

*“Randolph has outdone many major writers in the creation of her two main characters and, especially, her female lead. Skye will become one of your all-time favorite characters! The tone and scenes bring readers into a distressing world and forces them to read on until the heroine allows them to leave...at the end of the book. Her writing is superb, the characters will become your heroes, and you will be searching for the next book in the series long before it is available. Trust me! This author is on the move! Watch her! She is a challenge to many other well-established writers. This is definitely a MUST-READ!”*

*G. A. Bixler, bookreviewers.org*

*“Jacqueline Randolph has successfully captured the intense drama of this type of exciting and suspense-filled novel. Her characters are...believable and endearing. Her writing is clear and colorful...This is a wonderful, exciting and romantic read, and I strongly recommend it.”*

*Nancy Morris. Allbooksreviews.com*

*“Filled with emotion, action, patriotism, passion, suspense, vivid description, and many plot twists and turns. Deception’s Fury is a one-sitting read. Make sure you have refreshments on hand, the house is cleaned and the kids are in bed because you won’t want to put the book down to tend to anything else. Be prepared to be frustrated as the story ends and you long for it to continue – right now!”*

*Dian Moore, Bookpleasures.com*

# Deception's Guard

by

Jacqueline G. Randolph

Currently Available

Book One in the Deception Series

## Prologue

Rhys Wielde paced erratically in his office, strong hands tightly locked behind his broad back. His explosive rage escalating as the full impact of the wrenching betrayals just revealed to him began to resolve in his mind. Genoreach Technology, Inc. was his company, the company he had founded shortly after graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. How dare they? How dare they subvert his company? The sting of the bitter betrayal by those who must be of his trusted associates was nearly incapacitating.

Turning at the end of his circuit, Rhys suddenly looked up and caught sight of a wild-eyed man staring without recognition back at him. The sight of his own reflection in the window startled him. As usual, his thick raven black hair was tousled from the repeated raking of his hands as he habitually did when upset, a sure sign of his barely repressed anger. His well-defined features, set in a deeply tanned face, matched the savagery reflected in his errant hair. His expressive blue eyes glittered with determination, his nostrils imperceptibly flared from the effort of restrained physical violence, and his lips were pursed at the mental images of betrayal that flickered through his mind at lightning speeds. In exasperation he stepped forward and extended his large hands from behind his back and, arms outstretched, he wearily pressed his palms flat against the massive windowpane above his bowed head. Momentarily he assumed a posture of raging defeat as he continued to gaze down through the

wall length window at the bustling business district of Memphis, Tennessee.

As he continued to scrutinize the city 's massing crowds and compression of cars his eyes narrowed in fixation on the dark-suited men exiting his building and inconspicuously heading toward the parking lot within the press of the crowding humanity. They were representatives from the US Drug Enforcement Administration and the Department of Justice. He tightly clenched his hands into impenetrable fists as they exerted dangerous pressure against the glass. With closed eyes, he stood immobile while remembering their chilling detachment while relating that he had been fully investigated by the federal government. Further, he was deemed "low risk" enough to be informed of Genoreach's involvement in industrial espionage and drug trafficking. Momentarily stunned into incredulous silence, Rhys could do little but gape helplessly as the agents continued to explain the purpose of their visit in cold formalities.

According to their DEA investigation, intense research done by Genoreach had escalated the drug war by creating a genetic receptor for all known illegal drugs. The abominable creation was designed to annihilate the biological receptors in the brain responsible for addiction and necessary for withdrawal and rehabilitation. The destroyed receptors are then replaced by artificial receptors incapable of purging drugs and ultimately proving fatal with any attempts to remove the drug or gene receptor from the body, thereby assuring drug traffickers a captive market from the addict, his family, and eventually the government.

The biological development of this artificial gene, appropriately code named Omega for its ruthless capability to irreversibly end one's autonomy, had been positively traced to his company. Further, the DEA's Computer Forensic division had determined that subsequent black market and international cartel auctions and advertisements had been transacted through his company's extensive information systems.

The agents, following through with their devastating allegations, proceeded to demonstrate the methodology of how this potential carnage was accomplished. As proof, they produced confiscated

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demonstration disks, which had been intercepted en route to Cuba and Peru during their Foreign Cooperative Investigation. Given the evidence, Rhys had no doubt the research originated in his company. He disbelievingly loaded the disks into his office computer, which was directly connected to the company main frame, and attempted to trace the data origin. In the short time he had with the agents and their proffered files, he could find no evidence to lead him to the formula's creator. Rhys exhausted all his systems prowess and program machinations until bitterly realizing how efficient an instructor he had been to his research team.

Finally, the impassive agents worked their way around to the main purpose of their visit subsequent to emphasizing the irrelevance of his permission or approval in continuing their investigation. They wanted his involvement and expertise in revealing and prosecuting those disreputable members of his research and development team responsible for this atrocity. Knowing he desperately needed time to absorb these devastating revelations, the agents informed him they would soon contact him for a decision. After efficiently gathering their evidence and purging his hard drive of residual files, they wordlessly departed as competently, expressionless, and slightly menacing as they had arrived.

Rhys resumed his feral pacing while recalling parts of the inconceivable discussion that had transpired.

"Total annihilation of all recuperative brain functions...cartel auctions and advertisements...espionage and trafficking...Genoreach used to create a weapon of irrevocable destruction."

His eyes became the fiery blue of angry flames as the litany in his mind reached a deafening crescendo.

Stumbling back from the window he landed heavily in his massive leather desk chair as the clenching muscular cords of his arm finally gave vent to his frustrated fury with a powerful sweep across the length of the oak desk. Vital files, the customized monitor, his full coffee cup, and all the surface contents aimlessly flew across the room on a trajectory finally broken by the smooth white surface of his inner office wall.

Surveying the jumbled carnage and visibly shocked by the audible reflection of his raging emotions, Rhys heavily collapsed back in his chair sublimating the savagery of his rage with the certain knowledge that he would assuredly assist in bringing these traitors, these criminals, these murderers to justice; and so very much more!

## Chapter One

*Westcliffe, Colorado*

"Finally," breathed Skye in frustration while studying the confident movements of her assignment, through the lens of her high-powered binoculars, as he emerged from his rustic cabin. Her observation point was an adjacent cabin a half-mile up a sloping hill obscured by the density of aromatic pine trees.

"So this is Rhys Wielde, child prodigy, CEO, philanthropist, dupe, and now vigilante," she cynically whispered her summation while adjusting the focus range for a closer inspection.

He was certainly handsome by the standards of most women, tall, broad shoulders, and a strong muscled chest. The biceps of his arms stood out invitingly under the sleeve of his navy blue polo shirt, as he carried a cumbersome tool kit with easy familiarity. His ebony hair was too long to be conservative. It brushed the lower part of his neck, not quite reaching shoulder length. His smooth skin was sun darkened and she knew from his dossier his eyes were blue.

He had always shunned the public interest and media pursuits, which Skye thought unfortunate as his compelling attraction could rival, if not exceed, any of the current male celebrities touted for their handsome features and appealing physique. He was wearing stonewashed jeans that molded the hard muscular contours of his thighs as his brow wrinkled in scrutinizing the condition of the cabin before settling next to the septic tank. He subconsciously ran his hands through his hair, a habitual gesture that Skye thought endearingly boyish, before confidently opening the toolbox in preparation for making repairs. Lost in concentration, she savored the

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experience of phonetically whispering his name again, "Reese" as she mentally recalled his innumerable accolades and humanitarian exploits.

Genoreach Technology, Inc. was the company Rhys Wielde had built shortly after graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Wielde had been identified and nurtured as an information systems prodigy by defense industries and collegiate institutes from his middle school years. His uncanny understanding and subsequent manipulation of the, then standard, computer complexities fortunately had been channeled positively after his single, astoundingly successful, foray into computer hacking at the age of 13.

The precocious teen had effectively entered several highly sensitive and top-secret military defense programs of government contractors. Neither stealing nor manipulating data, he had merely left a polite email message after each visit; "Have a great day!" After that, he constructed a complex maze of programs, passwords and subroutines calculated to lead the irate recipients of the message to "discover" him in precisely two months time.

Skye had laughed out loud when she had read that part of his dossier. She could well understand this mischievous but honest juvenile rebellion and bravado.

Far from prosecuting him to the 'full extent of the law,' the Defense Department sought to cultivate his abilities and his parents were only too willing to accept the offers of full college scholarships in exchange for his freelance consultation and software development in working with industry security teams in shoring up information systems of government contractors.

In the course of working in these industries, he discovered the scientific and technological advances in mating biology to computers. Rhys reveled in the endless possibilities of enhancing the human condition. Overwhelmingly allured, he had committed his life to creating and marketing opportunities to improve the quality of life for others.

He excelled in earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in Bioinformatics and opted to continue on at MIT for a year longer as

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their youngest research professor. Finally, frustrated with the proclivity of technology and medical industries to proliferate weapons of war at the expense of less lucrative humanitarian advances, he started his own company. A company with a dual mission; one dedicated to research and development but also set up as a philanthropic foundation. Though the youngest staff member, he held the senior information systems position working closely with his team of renowned biologists and computer systems experts in whom he was assured shared the humanitarian visions of his company. His unwavering faith placed in his colleagues made his present situation all the more devastating. He had recently discovered that his trust had been misplaced—someone on his research and development team had betrayed him and the principles of his life's work!

“Great!” Skye thought sarcastically, “There’s nothing like the support and loyalty of one’s friends and colleagues. What a beautiful world we live in.”

His work in categorizing and isolating active brain neurons in coma, cataleptic, and autistic patients had made him a contender for the Nobel Prize several times in past years. It was widely believed his goal of translating this brain activity into interactive language through information systems and, thereby, enabling patients to communicate would finally earn him that coveted accolade. The compassion and innovations of his ongoing economic development initiatives in the Mississippi Delta and the Appalachian Mountains had consistently decreased the poverty and illiteracy statistics in those communities for going on five consecutive years.

In contrast to the high visibility of his professional life, information on his private life was sparse. He deftly evaded personal publicity, always preferring to place his company and staff in the forefront of media feeding. Hence, little was known of this mythic CEO and after 10 years at Genoreach's helm he had yet to become recognizable to the general public.

Skye tossed back the loose curls of her shoulder length black hair, annoyed with its length after wearing it secured during her undercover work in Ecuador for the last two months. Her hands absently caressed the binoculars, coaxing them to reveal secrets about the man restlessly surveying the outside condition of the rugged

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cabin after emerging from his initial hibernation subsequent to arriving in the early morning darkness.

She knew that prior to his establishing a temporary residence in the mountain cabin, personnel from the DEA headquarters had thoroughly briefed him on his role in the international operation to retrieve Omega. He had arrived unnoticed on an early morning flight aboard a DEA jet providing for efficiency, speed, and necessary expedience not afforded by commercial flights. His arrival on the sole runway of the dilapidated local airfield had been purposely planned at night, after which Rhys was provided a blue Ford pickup truck in which to drive alone to the cabin. The late arrival time and vehicle used so as not to arouse local suspicion regarding his purpose in this sparsely populated mountain community.

The cabin had been selected for its isolation in these Colorado Mountains, its rustic exterior concealing comfortably sparse furnishings, animal skin rugs, and Native American decor in keeping with the region's cultural heritage. He had arrived with a simple carry bag and briefcase and quietly slipped into the cabin, not to emerge until his late afternoon decision to improve the outer structure of his transient home.

Standing at the curtained window, wearing a faded turquoise fitted T-shirt, black jeans and worn tennis shoes—clothing selected to minimize attention, Skye suddenly realized that her careful study of this man was rapidly growing beyond what she had afforded her previous assignees. "Dad would just love this," her lips lifted in a smirk as she thought of her father's approval of his oldest daughter "ogling," no matter the professional capacity, a man.

Her father had been a US Air Force aviator—hence her name—stationed in Madrid, Spain, when her mother had captured his heart. Her elegantly petite mother was the only daughter of a noble Spanish family, which endeavored to continue that reign through her arranged marriage into one of the most prominent families in Madrid. The subsequent controversy of her marriage, never officially recognized in Spain, severed her from the rich family heritage of her native country. The loss of which, to Skye's recollection, she had never shown any regret.

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Her tall dark father had unwaveringly bore the equivalent burden of cultural and societal expectations with silent dignity. As part of the heralded rare breed of African-American aviators during the raging warfare of American civil rights, his marriage embittered the majority of factions in his fractured country and served only to fortify his union with his Spanish bride.

Despite their differences of language, culture, and race they had forged a marriage stronger than Skye had ever witnessed. Though she had long since resolved that such intimacy was unavailable to her, she had always been inspired by her parent's relationship. Four children and 40 years later her parents were still deeply in love and carrying on a "torrid love affair" as her mother took great pleasure in describing the affection she shared with her husband.

It was from her mother that Skye had mostly inherited her features. She'd worked hard in maintaining her voluptuous figure, which a college boy friend, whom had majored in Latin American Studies, had once compared to castanet wielding Spanish señoritas seductively beckoning the lusty blood of conquistador admirers. Back then, she had been irritated at what she thought was false flattery. Now she took pride in maintaining one of her major assets as an agent. Her physical strength, unrelenting endurance, and attractive body had often been the deciding factor in numerous escapes from potentially lethal situations.

Her piercing brown eyes framing a sharp, aristocratic nose were a definite inheritance from her Spanish mother. Her sensuously generous lips were the only hereditary concession from her African-American father.

Skye felt that it was her mother to whom she could attribute her unconventional career choice. Theatrical and daring, Rosita Mathews had ensured that her children were imbued with her native Spanish tongue and that they fearlessly embraced life with independence and determination. In admiration, Skye indulged in both her mother's love of the theatre and her father's aviation prowess.

After earning degrees in Latin American Studies, International Relations, and Commercial Aviation, she had sought a career in which to use her eclectic education and theatrical interest.

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It was during her college years that a recruiter from the DEA first interested her in law enforcement. Shortly before earning her second graduate degree, she was given an interview by Gabe Kinski, chief of DEA Special Operations. In addition to being her boss and mentor, in many respects he was her closest friend.

He had discussed the varied missions of the administration and how her diverse education, skills, and ethnicity would serve as an asset. She had been mesmerized with the endless adventures of bringing criminals to justice. Since being hired on with the administration, her classic Latin looks coupled with her command of the Spanish language, perfect mimicry of dialects, theatrical realism, and her pilot skills had resulted in her being highly regarded as a field agent by both the DEA leadership and her colleagues, especially within the offices of Central and South America in which she was assigned.

Hence, it was a rare occurrence that Skye should find herself enmeshed in a domestic operation with not a hint of Spanish speaking peoples or the trappings of a Latin American environment.

Her current assignment of guarding Rhys Wiede, founder of Genoreach Technology Inc., had all the makings of a challenge. Protecting Rhys, who had unwittingly become enmeshed in a high stakes and deadly drug trafficking operation, provided her with the opportunity to hone her deception skills as an American, as opposed to her expertise as a Latin American.

Skye pulled a crude wooden chair to the curtained window and lowered her hips heavily into the seat. The sparsely furnished three-room cabin boasted a crudely built bed with a colorful earth toned quilt and matching shams. The windows were curtained with Native American designs and woven rugs covered the bedroom floor and adorned the walls.

An efficient bathroom with a narrow shower stall, a living room cozily furnished with a wood burning stove, animal skin rugs, and wall hangings completed the decor. A nice enough cabin, but not home. She sighed deeply while thinking of how she had looked forward to spending several recuperative weeks at her personal cabin in Wetmore, 25 miles east of Westcliffe, after having spent two months in South America.

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Establishing an identity and operation base in Ecuador had been challenging. Given the continuing economic upheaval and border disputes, Ecuadorian President Arcon had requested US assistance in providing contingency plans. The DEA had inserted her into the country to make the assessment of how to proceed in garnering details of drug activities associated with the Ecuador-Peru border skirmishes.

Skye had opted to establish a role in the country's entertainment society as a nightclub singer with a temperamental nature. In choosing this identity, she was made privy to information provided by her underworld and government patrons. As bartenders the world over are aware, the relaxed atmosphere of entertainment clubs often produce instant trust and camaraderie which Skye had used to her advantage. She was just beginning to make very useful contacts when Gabe had recalled her.

Alas, 'the best laid plans of mice and men...' are so easily disrupted by the administration. Gabe had met her at the airport in Miami, Florida upon her return from Ecuador. While they had waited for her luggage to appear on the baggage claim carousel, Gabe had provided a pre-briefing on her current assignment.

"Skye, I've assigned you to a quick and easy assignment in Colorado. An ideally isolated location since you've already requested time off for some rest and relaxation at your cabin and to visit your parents in Denver. As a matter of fact, I especially chose Westcliffe, Colorado for the operation base to accommodate the vacation plans of my best agent." Gabe concluded with an impressive show of sincerity accompanied by his warmest look of admiration.

She'd favored him with a withering look mindful of their crowded surroundings before informing him that his Irish gift of the blarney was well and truly transparent even as she acquiesced in undertaking the assignment and preparing for another round of her life's adventures.

"Well he looks fit enough, I wonder if he is also a runner in addition to being into weight lifting," Skye mused in attempting to fill in the knowledge blanks on Rhys that had been omitted in her perusal of his dossier and briefings from the administration headquarters.

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Suddenly, Skye's shoulders stiffened as she noticed a blue sedan, from a distance of two miles winding a path on the dirt road toward Rhys's cabin. The front of his cabin faced the road and Rhys was just now hauling a tool kit from the septic tank at the side of the house to the back of the cabin.

"Could be anyone, maybe someone's lost," she hoped as the sedan continued toward the cabin. "Get back in the cabin!" Skye muttered the command with heightened emotions hoping Rhys would somehow receive the warning telepathically.

Incredibly, he blithely continued his ministrations to the back of the cabin's exterior oblivious to the potential danger as he deeply concentrated on his task.

"Does he think this is a Boy Scout camping trip? So much for giving him the code name cougar," she bit as her irritation mounted. Rhys's code name was an additional security measure of cloaking his identity in the event the operation's radio transmissions were intercepted.

The sedan was within firing range now and still Rhys remained absorbed in repairing the outdoor septic tank, his hair sweat dampened from his exertions.

"You idiot, get some cover!" she desperately whispered, her voice rising as she reached for the radio and called her security backup, "Tom, ID on the blue sedan?" The inquiry taking on the edge of a command as she instinctively began to reach for her weapon in preparing to join Rhys at his cabin.

"Negative on the ID. We're locked on the vehicle," was his distracted reply,

Skye knew Tom's team were expert marksmen and wouldn't hesitate to obliterate the vehicle and its occupants at the first sign of hostility.

"Why doesn't the cougar cover?" she petulantly queried, the commanding tone less evident now as she moved into the open doorway of her cabin flexing her legs for the sprint down the slope.

"Negative reply, we're still locked," Tom replied, cryptically. From his cold tone Skye could tell he didn't want to be further distracted, as he concentrated his instincts toward the highly probable attack.

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Skye held her breath and moved quickly downward through the tight concealment of the trees as the sedan leisurely passed the house, the conversing elderly occupants filling Skye's binoculars lens never gave any indication that they had noticed Rhys and his tinkering behind the cabin as they continued down the road.

"Tom, apparently this assignment needs watching from a little closer proximity – I'll execute!" Skye informed her colleague in a tone less brusque than she intended as she retreated back to her cabin after watching the billowing dust from the retreating car's wake dissipate on to the road.

"Roger that!" Tom rejoined in a heartfelt sigh.

*Rhys could be dead right now, his body riddled with bullets or gaping from a mortar silencer.* Skye angrily exhaled as the mental picture assailed her senses and affirmed the potential deadliness of the administration's operations.

Though, she had every confidence in their ability to protect him, Rhys's lack of good sense and situational awareness angered her. Her irritation was compounded with the fact that her excessive reaction went beyond what she had ever felt for her past assignees. Her seething intensified at that realization.

She continued to ponder on the apparent oblivion of Rhys's actions. Didn't he realize the type of desperate personalities who dealt in the lucratively crippling business of drugs? She imagined that his anger at his colleagues only extended to the boundaries of a professional disagreement as to the direction of his company.

With certainty, she knew that the involvement of ruthless Latin American drug lords and US underworld criminal activities ensured the danger to Rhys's life. His opposition to their greed and inhumanity guaranteed that. Skye knew that the numerous agents hidden in the forested mountains were vigilant in assessing any unexpected activity as hostile. As innocuous as the elderly couple in the sedan appeared to be in their enjoyment of a mountain drive, they could have easily been assassins prepared to eradicate Rhys's life as if he had been nothing more than a bothersome insect.

She hoped that his overconfidence did not come from a belief that his time-delayed programmed message released within his company

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would not be intercepted before the following day. The odds were that the message had already been intercepted before its programmed release, setting events in motion that the administration had prepared for by way of contingency planning. Doubtless, he just couldn't imagine his "trusted colleagues" murdering him.

Sighing heavily, she retrieved her binoculars and resumed her watchfulness at the window. Skye wished she could tell him that the extent of his colleague's involvement was now negligible, as their skill and expertise had been fully exploited. They had performed their task and were expendable. Even now, his staff members could be dead, unless they had possessed enough survival savvy to ensure their indispensability until financially compensated.

As Skye intensely studied Rhys surveying the mountain range and surrounding hills, she felt sadness for him. The betrayals he had suffered at the hands of those he trusted were inconsequential in comparison to the probable menace awaiting him in the days ahead.

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Impenetrable night had begun to blanket the mountain range, when Skye silently changed into black body molding clothes and secured the ebony shimmer of her shoulder length hair into a cotton head cap.

Since that episode several hours earlier she had made the decision to insert herself closer to Rhys without revealing her purpose. She no longer felt confident that guarding him from a distance was the wisest course.

While reviewing her small arsenal of weapons she briefly reviewed the plan developing in her mind to share Rhys's cabin the following evening, before focusing on her present intentions. She retrieved her 9mm pistol from her carrying case, checking the chamber and safety clip before smoothly placing the menacing steel into her shoulder holster with practiced ease. The weapon was bulkier than one she preferred to carry; however, tonight she felt a need for the comfort of the added lethal weight.

Silently she slipped lithely from the cabin and soundlessly drifted down the half-mile slope toward his cabin. She made a stealthy

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survey around the perimeter before returning to his bedroom window in which the only illumination of the cabin showed. She adjusted the secured ear insert of a receiver tuned to a transmitter she had previously placed in the cabin. The transmitter was capable of picking up the slightest sounds within its walls. She pressed against the outer wall of his bedroom, beneath his window and waited for his lights to extinguish.

The wait gave her time to reflect on her life and, most especially, her parents' expectations. Skye suppressed a smirk with the thought that her parents would wholeheartedly approve of her current nocturnal activities. They made no secret that they had eagerly hoped at her present age of 34 she should find a husband and endeavor to provide them with those duly owed grandchildren. Her two brothers and sister had since taken that path, falling nicely into her parents' script. Apparently, her nuptials and subsequent producing of progeny was the grand finale.

*Too bad they'll never understand that my life is completely unsuitable for 'home, hearth, and husband'.* Sadness descended upon her as she remembered the many debilitating relationships, which had brought that fundamental truth home to her. Just as quickly, she dismissed the longing with a whispered prayer of thanksgiving for the idyllic life of adventure and travels she enjoyed and to which she was so well suited.

The sudden blackness of Rhys's bedroom brought Skye out of her reverie. She caught herself caressing the lethal weapon holstered at her breast. She rose, slowly and stealthily, in the crisp night breeze, and moved, keeping in rhythm with the swaying of aromatic pines and aspens, until she finally stood in the shadows of his window. Stealthily peeking through the exposed sliver between the curtain and window edge, she looked into the room.

"At least he had sense enough to close the curtains," she complimented backhandedly as she scanned the contents of the room and finally rested her widened eyes on the occupant as her breathing increased.

Rhys laid on his back, sprawled nakedly on the bed, his covers in disarray. She couldn't tell if he was asleep, the sparsely covered dark hair on his chiseled chest rose and fell evenly as if he had found

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temporary anchorage within the eye of a storm. The full moonlight spilled indiscriminate rays through the scant lightweight of the curtains, the spotlight revealing the disheveled condition of his hair splayed on the pillow and his eyes gazing up steadily toward the lazy oscillation of the ceiling fan. One powerfully built arm lay across his forehead. The taut cords of his forearm moving in response to his hand bunched in a fist, as if in rage or deep reflection. Seeming to sense her speculation, his hand unclenched and languidly began a soothing rub of his muscularly sculpted chest.

Skye's throat tightened. Suddenly she began to feel heated and cursed the black pants, sweater, and cap, which she was convinced were the source of her present discomfort. Skye couldn't comprehend any other explanation for the temperature change. She removed the cap and tucked it into her pants' waist and shoved the cuffs of her long sleeved sweater up to her elbows. As if experiencing the same vortex of discomfort, Rhys's apparent agitation continued as he raised both hands up and over his head to grasp the headboard.

The movements further defined the magnificent contours of his body. Skye silently cursed herself for her unprofessional attitude in being magnetically drawn to the muscular attractiveness of his body. She impatiently swiped the gathering beads of perspiration from her forehead with her sweater sleeve before continuing her scrutiny with renewed determination.

Attempting to get back on her professional footing, she assessed that his apparent good physical condition would make it easier for them to accomplish an escape, if necessary. At least she would be unhampered by his being overweight or physically unfit, as characterized by the majority of men his age.

She mentally offered kudos to Rhys Wielde for his physical fitness and health at the age of 37 years. Good – a cool, detached, professional assessment! A self-congratulatory smile tugged the corners of her mouth upward as she enjoyed the cooling pine-scented breeze lightly rifling through her hair in support of her victorious return to equanimity.

Suddenly, in one lithe movement, Rhys rose from the bed and impatiently moved toward the window. The rippling of muscles in his thighs drew her attention to the proportions of his potent

manhood as a few quick strides brought him to the window. Skye was instinctively driven downward from the window edge in a silently languid collapse by his sudden advance.

For long moments, she was aware of his presence at the still curtained window. Skye neither moved nor barely breathed, as she seemed to sense in him a palpable frustration and yearnings to accomplish his purpose. He stood immobile at the window scanning the horizon and pressing one open hand flat against the glass as if to communicate his feelings. Finally, he moved from the window and collapsed carelessly back onto the bed.

Irritated at her uncharacteristic reaction of sexual arousal, Skye greedily filled her lungs with the refreshing mountain air while mopping her moist face with her cap. After one last look of assurance that he was safely in bed, she slunk noiselessly toward her cabin in clothing drenched from her perspiring body as the litany, "Limpid and passionless he is not," accompanied her erratic heartbeat.

# Deception's Legacy

(Sequel to Deception's Fury)

by

Jacqueline G. Randolph

Available Summer 2006

Third in the Deception Series

Rodrigo Alejandro Tenorio walked quickly down the streets of Seville, Spain. He turned a corner through the picturesque views displaying white-washed houses in the Barrio de Santa Cruz opposite the castle walls and the floral beauty of the Murillo gardens. Just as he arrived at his destination, he heard the pealing bells of the Seville Cathedral, the third largest in the world after St. Peter's in Rome and St. Paul's in London. He knocked briskly on the door of the stately mansion. While waiting for an answer, he looked around him in appreciation of the estate's beauty.

The home was surrounded with an intricately designed wrought iron gate. Within the gate, a courtyard of bright floral painted tiles and two massive water fountains surrounded the imposing home. The face of the mansion bore statues of angels and saints carved into the stonewall exterior. Potted fusions of colorful flowers spilled from the balconies of every window.

The door opened and a Spanish domestic woman greeted him familiarly. Rodrigo returned her greeting warmly as she escorted him into the sitting room. The room was richly lavished as was the décor throughout the house. Heavy ornate furniture carved in the Moorish style dominated the room. Rugs of burgundy and blue and gold adorned the floor and matched the brocade curtains and wall hanging.

A young woman silently closing the door behind her skipped lightly through the doorway then rushed excitedly to Rodrigo. She

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embraced him passionately. "Querida!" She sighed and devoured his mouth hungrily. "I must appear at the bullfight procession so I will leave in a few minutes. I thought to have missed you. Why are you so late?" she demanded while holding him close.

He apologized and blamed his wealthy uncle, a prominent architect from an old Spanish dynasty who never missed the opportunity to criticize his nephew's nightly activities in the city. Rodrigo had been seen in the city gambling houses and sports car racing tracks, worse yet, he'd been suffering losses; specifically to his amour's guardian who so happened to be his uncle's bitter rival.

*So much the better for me,* Rodrigo thought pleasantly.

He pulled the young woman close and inhaled deeply of her floral scent--it reminded him of his mother's lavender scent. Her clear olive-skinned complexion and black hair were flawless. She wore combs and a flowing lace mantilla in her hair. She was draped in a traditional gown of white and burgundy with a low neckline, flounced and ruffled skirts, and huge puffed short sleeves. An ornate fan was conveniently attached to her skirts for easy access. She was lovely in her Spanish traditions.

"Promise me we'll spend the day in Rhonda tomorrow," she demanded.

He raised her delicate palm to his mouth and kissed her wrists. "For you, Carmen Isabella, I promise."

She smiled at him. "You are so handsome. My guardian must consent to our love." She threaded his thick shoulder-length black hair through her fingers, caressed the strong lines of his face with the same coloring as her own, and gently touched his full masculine mouth. "I love you, Rodrigo," she whispered seductively.

The old butler shuffled loudly into the room. His clothes were ill-fitting on his stooping body and his gray, full hair framed the abundance of wrinkles which wreathed his face. It was a mystery as to whether he either couldn't hear or simply didn't understand Spanish and it was a wonder to all as to why he continued in employment. Carmen Isabella ignored him as did all the family and servants.

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He had arrived here last week with Carmen Isabella's cousin, Rosita, who was apparently several family lines removed and who she had previously not known or met.

Carmen Isabella was quite sure about the time of their arrival as the day prior, Rodrigo had captured her heart with the simple presentation of a rose after she had exited from the Arena during the opening procession of the bullfights. He was courteous, passionate, handsome, and had a wealthy family. It was a puzzle as to why her guardian objected to him.

Now her cousin, Rosita, entered the room. She was a large heavy woman in her sixties with darker skin than most Spaniards, owing to her hard years of labor in the grape fields of Andalusia in southern Spain; so she had told them. She wore a magnificent gown of the palest green that emphasized her huge bosom and, unfortunately, her large figure. The unattractive color of her bright red hair was upswept with several two-prong combs. She held herself stiffly regal as if pretending pompous arrogance as she swept into the room and sat with a straight back upon the sofa.

Carmen Isabella reached up and engulfed Rodrigo in a crushing hug before whispering seductively in his ear. "There's more of this for you in Rhonda tomorrow," she promised before he kissed her passionately in response.

"I can hardly wait."

Carmen left the room and the old man shuffled to Rodrigo to offer him a glass of wine. Rodrigo waved him away dismissively, irritated with his doddering senility. The woman, Señora Rosita, stared at him from her stiff position on the sofa.

A fleeting thought passed through his mind that his grandmother's name was Rosita, a beautiful Spanish woman who looked very much like this woman but with none of her arrogant affectations. He shook his head at the two pathetic characters. He wondered if they were longtime lovers and cringed at the thought. *God forbid that those two should ever create any children!*

The door opened again and Carmen Isabella's guardian entered the room. Señor Luis de Silòe was a grossly fat man who studied the tall young handsome man with contempt. "So you owe me a considerable sum. How do you intend to repay it?"

## JACQUELINE G. RANDOLPH

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“As my uncle knows nothing of the debt, I’m prepared to work for you in exchange for repayment.”

Senor Silòe laughed out loud. “What can a pitiful worm like you contribute to my wealth?”

“I understand you need laborers in your Malaga factory,” Rodrigo suggested.

Señor Silòe watched the young man thoughtfully and a strange expression crossed his face, frightening in its intensity.

“Yes, my son, you can work for me on two conditions.”

“They are?”

“First, you stay away from my ward, Carmen Isabella. Second, that you comply with my...demands.”

“What is the job?”

“You’ve suggested it yourself. Work in my Malaga factory; at the lowest level so that it will take you the maximum amount of time to repay me.”

Rodrigo shrugged indifferently and stole glances at the butler and Señora Rosita, both of whom wore expressions of boredom and disinterest.

Señor Luis de Silòe moved closer to Rodrigo. “Aren’t you curious about my demands?” he asked then grabbed the young man with clammy hands that held him in a vice of steel.

Immediate alarm coursed through Rodrigo as he struggled to extricate himself from the stronger man.

Señor Silòe threw him to the floor and pinned him face down before ripping Rodrigo’s shirt from his body in one swipe. The grossly fat man pounded Rodrigo’s back with alternating open hands and fists with bruising strength. Then he licked the red welts and forming bruises with sloppy drooling wetness.

Rodrigo realized he was in the literal grip of a pervert and began to struggle in earnest. His back ached and he knew he would be badly bruised. He felt Rodrigo grab the back of his pants and yank them downward. With real fear, Rodrigo struggled to kick and buck the

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large man off him then he heard him grunt once before slumping over him with a great weight.

“Tristan, are you all right?”

“Wolf, baby, it’s Mom.”

Rodrigo knew he had obviously passed out and was in the grip of a terrifying nightmare. He was actually dreaming that his parents were in the middle of his very first DEA undercover operation. The great weight was lifted from his back and he painfully turned over onto his back; his abused back ached from the carpet fibers.

He noticed Señor Silòe now passed out beside him with a syringe still stuck menacingly in the great folds of his flesh. He turned his attention to the old decrepit butler who was indeed referring to him as “Tristan” with a voice remarkably like his father’s. Señora Rosita was hovering above him and referring to him as “Wolf” in the manner only his mother could affect. His parents were at their home in Greenwood, Mississippi; in America! This was a fact that he prayed was still a fact. He didn’t answer the pleas of the butler and the Señora for fear his nightmare would prove true.

“He didn’t hurt you, baby, did he?”

His worst nightmare was true.

“Mom and Dad. What are you doing here?” he asked in whispering disbelief. Then he was yelled in fury and anger and bitter disappointment.

“What are you doing here!”