



## **TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES**

**By**

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Lisa thought he might be the one.

She'd been watching him for several minutes, ever since he'd pulled into the rest area driving that totally fabulous red Mustang convertible.

*Yeah, wouldn't it be sweet to travel around in that thing.*

The man was clean-shaven and probably around thirty years old. He had on dark chinos, a white polo shirt, loafers, and wore expensive looking black shades. His dark brown hair was cropped short. He wasn't tall and movie star handsome, but his cuteness factor went sky high.

After paying a visit to the restroom, the man bought some snacks and a few bottles of Evian. He poured some of the water into a plastic cup and offered it to a panting stray mutt.

*Awfully nice of him.*

When he returned to his car, the man removed his sunglasses and unfolded a map. Lisa decided to make her move.

She slung her backpack over her right shoulder and sashayed over to the Mustang, hoping her too short shorts and midriff top would grab his attention.

The man looked up from the map when she approached. He had dazzling light blue eyes and sported a little gold hoop in his left ear.

Lisa gave him a provocative smile. "Hey there, mister, can I have a ride?"

He listened politely to her explanation. She was a student at the University of New Mexico. Her Escort had finally died earlier that morning. She needed to get to the annual festival in Truth or Consequences, just a few hours south of Albuquerque, and she would definitely make sure he was compensated for his time and effort.

The man nodded. "I'm just traveling at my own pace, following Route 66. I'd be happy to help you out, Lisa."

"Whew! I'm sooo grateful, Mr. --"

"Farris. Parker Farris - from Chicago. At your service, m'lady."

Lisa fell into the Mustang, giggling. "I really hope this isn't an inconvenience for you."

"Not at all." The smile he beamed in her direction literally took her breath away. "In fact, I could use a little female company."

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Parker had known she was the one.

The leggy, top-heavy blonde had been eyeing him ever since he'd arrived at the rest area. She was young and her naiveté had shown through immediately, even though she had tried hard to hide it.

God, how he loved her large, hopeful green eyes. They sparkled like warm emeralds.

The expression in them changed to confusion when he exited I-25 about fifty miles away from the town of Truth or Consequences. He followed the deserted two-lane highway until he found a dirt road to turn onto.

Now Lisa stared at him in silent disbelief, her luminous green eyes full of fear. This sort of thing only happened in the movies - right?

When he stopped the car, she jumped out and ran from him.

They always tried to flee, and they always tried to fight. Sometimes they struggled to the bitter end because they were

supposed to have their whole lives ahead of them. Because they knew they didn't deserve such a torturous death.

And because they didn't want to believe in monsters.

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The eyes had to be removed from his unconscious victims before he strangled them, of course.

Now he had a green pair to go with the midnight blue. He'd been much luckier this year. His last vacation - to Florida - had only resulted in one pair of smoky gray eyes. They were true gems, but he'd hoped to acquire more.

This trip was far from over though. He planned to stay in Los Angeles for three or four days before heading back East via a northern route. Perhaps he would be able find a few more perfect pairs to add to his collection. Again, the biggest challenge would be protecting the organs from damage and decay until he returned home, where they could be properly preserved.

Parker dragged Lisa's nude body deeper into the brush. He never came in his women. For him, satisfaction was achieved by simply staring into their tear-filled eyes during each violation. Like proverbial mirrors to their lost souls, the beautiful orbs reflected all their pain, fear and humiliation -

the emotions playing over and over again for his viewing pleasure.

He removed the duct tape from Lisa's mouth, but left the skinny leather belt wrapped around her neck. It belonged to her anyway. Then he used a gallon of water, poured from a plastic jug, to rinse off his own naked body - along with his latex gloves and the instruments needed for the eye extractions.

He would have to buy more ice for the cooler as soon as he reached Truth or Consequences.

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According to the AAA New Mexico tour book, the town used to be called Hot Springs. Then, in 1950, the citizens voted for a change. They renamed their hometown after a TV game show, and soon started an annual festival - held during the first weekend in May - to commemorate the event.

Parker figured that was the only reason the hot, dingy place was crowded. A lot of the motels had no vacancies.

The scrawny, middle-aged Days Inn receptionist - her ID tag said her name was Lou Ann - gave him an apologetic look.

"They're having a fishing competition over at Elephant Butte Lake this weekend too, you know. That's brought a bunch more people in from all over the state."

Parker shrugged. "Oh, well. I just wanted to spend one night here anyway - maybe pay a visit to the hot springs down by the Rio Grande."

"Hmm." Lou Ann returned his smile. "How would you feel about staying at a bed and breakfast? It's an unusual place - owned by Sheriff Holloway and his wife. They had a couple cancel on them at the last minute. You want me to call and see if the room's still free?"

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The Jailor's Inn occupied a good sized, wooded lot on Main Street. The nineteenth century two-story building had stood unused for two decades after the "new" jail had been built. Then, three year ago, it became a bed and breakfast - a little extra income for the local sheriff.

Parker appreciated the irony of his situation. He would be spending the night in the spacious first floor cell, now refurbished and charmingly rustic.

The chilliness of the potpourri-scented air suited him just fine. White lace curtains covered the small window in the thick stone wall, and colorful, braided rugs were scattered all about the hardwood floor. A queen-size four-poster filled one corner of the room.

The place was downright cheerful.

Parker used the bathroom across the hall. When he returned, he stripped off his clothes and sank onto the soft bed with a sigh. He suddenly felt drained, but that was to be expected after all he'd accomplished that day. He lay back on the patchwork quilt, not bothering to slip underneath it.

He would hit the hot springs on his way out of town the next morning.

His cooler sat on the floor at the foot of the bed, filled to the brim with ice. His Glock was loaded and within reach, hidden inside his duffel bag.

He never went anywhere without his gun. There were just too many sick people in the world.

Parker switched off the bedside lamp and allowed his mind and body to shut down.

It wasn't long before a noise woke him. Sounded like a door slamming. Couldn't be his, though, because he'd locked it.

He opened his eyes. The room was pitch dark.

"Tell him what you did."

The low, raspy voice seemed to come from everywhere.

Parker sat up and reached for the lamp.

The damned switch wouldn't work.

"Tell him what you did." The voice was more insistent.

A meat locker - that's what the room felt like now.

Parker's goose bumps multiplied, even though he knew it had to be a trick. The owners wanted him to think the place was haunted. It was all a publicity stunt.

He wasn't in the mood to cooperate.

"You're wasting your time, and I'm losing sleep," Parker said. "Save the fucking spook show for someone else."

The lamp came on, throwing soft light around the cold room.

Parker was alone. He didn't feel like looking for the wires or microphones that had to be hidden somewhere.

All he wanted was a good night's rest.

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