



EMPTY
eyes

QUICKREADS

JANET LORIMER



Sue had just come home from work when she heard someone knocking. On her way to the door, she caught herself reaching up to adjust her glasses. It was an old habit. She smiled when she remembered that she didn't need to fiddle around with glasses anymore.

At that moment, the front door swung open. Her husband, Brad, stood in the doorway.

“Brad! What are you doing home so early?” Sue exclaimed.

Brad grinned. “I’ve been home all afternoon. I just dashed off to the store. I have a surprise for you.”

Sue frowned. “Oh, no, don’t tell me I forgot our anniversary!”

“Nope!” Brad crossed his arms over his chest. His eyes sparkled merrily. “Go ahead, you get two more guesses.”

She thought for a moment. “Not my birthday. Not a national holiday. Not—”

“Out of time,” Brad said, “and out of guesses!” He grabbed his wife’s hand and pulled her into the dining room.

Sue drew in her breath. The table was set with her best china and silver. Glowing candles and fresh flowers decorated the center of the table.

“What’s going on?” she asked. Then she snapped her fingers. “Wait! I think I know—you got a raise.”

Brad looked stunned and a bit disappointed. “How did you know?”

Sue laughed. “Just a lucky guess.”

“I made us a great celebration dinner,” Brad went on. “And that’s just the beginning.” He reached in his pocket and handed Sue a brochure.

She glanced at the front cover. *Welcome to the Painted Desert Resort*, it said. *Count on Mesa, Arizona, for fun in the sun!* She squealed with delight. “You already did it? You made a reservation for us?”

“I did!” Brad said, looking very proud of himself.

“After all that nagging—”

“Yeah, well, you *did* keep reminding me,” he laughed. “And I also found this brochure on my desk this morning. So...” His voice trailed away.

“. . . it all worked out perfectly,” Sue finished his sentence.

“Yeah.” He frowned a little. “I still can’t believe I got that raise. Just last week our accountants said we were looking at cutbacks. I can’t figure out—”

“Oh, Brad, I’m so excited. When do we leave?” Sue cut in.

“Friday after work, just as you had suggested. If we get going about—”

At the same time they both smelled something burning. Brad howled as he dove

into the kitchen. A minute later he returned, holding out a smoking pan of badly scorched vegetables.

Sue laughed at his expression. Her husband looked like he'd just lost his best friend. "I'll make a fresh batch," she told him. "And while I do, you can tell me what resort activities really turn you on. There are so many choices!"

Over dinner, Brad asked, "Are you sure you want to go back to a place you've already visited? Maybe we should try a new resort."

Sue looked horrified. "Brad, *no!* When my boss decided to send his employees to this resort, I thought it was a crazy idea. Our company had suffered a lot of losses, just like yours. Then, something changed overnight. All of a sudden my boss said we could use a break. And, hey—he was paying the bill!"

A wistful smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. "Little did I know how good I'd feel. You'll thank me after we've been there a few days."

Brad sighed. "I hope you're right. But I

still think we should have chosen a resort in another state. You know—get some relief from the Arizona heat.”

“There are plenty of things to do indoors,” Sue said. “We can use the exercise room, go see a movie, shop—”

“Aha!” Brad grinned. “*Shop?* So that explains why—”

Sue laughed and threw her napkin at him.



Brad and Sue left Tucson right after work on Friday. As they inched north along the highway toward Mesa, Brad started grumbling. “I was afraid of this. Look at this awful traffic! It’s bumper to bumper.”

“Maybe there’s been an accident,” Sue said. “Why don’t I put in a CD? Some relaxing music ought to—”

“No, no, turn on the radio!” Brad snapped at her. “Find a news station. Maybe we can find out what’s causing this ridiculous traffic jam.”

Saying nothing, Sue sat back and stared

out the side window. After a minute Brad said, “Sorry. I guess I’m just a little on edge. You’re right. I *do* need a vacation.”

Sue didn’t answer, so Brad stumbled on, hoping he’d say something to make her forgive him. “Hey, even shopping sounds good,” he said. “Or maybe I could do what you did and get fitted for contact lenses. It’s pretty amazing that you were able to do that at a resort.”

Sue turned to him with an eager smile. “They have *everything* at the Painted Desert Resort! They’re really big on fitness. They have the most amazing programs and classes and—”

“All of which is added onto our bill at the end of the week, right?” Brad cut in. “But I guess the idea is that you feel so good, you don’t care.”

Sue sighed. “Come on, Brad, don’t be so negative! It’s all part of our stay. We only pay for our meals and our room. Everything else is on the house.”

Raising his eyebrows, Brad looked

doubtful. “You’re kidding.”

Sue shook her head. “I told you—this resort is something very special!”

Brad fell silent, thinking. Sue had tried to wear contact lenses many times. But she could never find contacts that fit comfortably. Eventually, two eye doctors had told her the same thing: The nature of her vision problem made it very unlikely that she could ever wear contact lenses.

And yet she’d gone to the Painted Desert Resort—and in just a week she was wearing contacts! Not only that, her contacts were a special kind that needed to be changed only once a week. She could even sleep with them!

Come to think of it, Brad realized that since she’d been home, he’d never seen her without them. “Are you sure that eye doctor at the resort knew what he was doing?” Brad asked suddenly.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Sue’s mouth tighten into a thin angry line. Brad sighed. He’d done it again. Every time the subject of the resort came up, he tensed.

Maybe it was just that Sue seemed like such a different person since returning from her first visit. But he couldn't put his finger on exactly *what* was so different about her.

By the time they reached the resort, the sun was beginning to set. Beautiful rays of pink and orange light shot up into the sky from behind the rolling purple mountains.

Brad pulled into the parking lot in front of the office. As they climbed stiffly out of the car, he said, "Good thing we stopped for dinner on the way."

The check-in counter was in the main lobby. Brad noticed that the people who worked there were all trim and tan. They wore brightly colored polo shirts and white shorts. The name of the resort was stitched over the pockets of their shirts.

The girl behind the check-in counter greeted them with a warm smile. Brad was struck by her gorgeous blue eyes. They were the color of Indian turquoise. In fact the girl's eyes matched her polo shirt exactly! Brad had never seen eyes of that color. Then he

realized that she was wearing contact lenses.

After checking in, they went to find their room. It turned out to be a whole suite of rooms—larger and far more glamorous than their apartment in Tucson! He gave a low whistle as they walked through the suite. “You could house a small army in this place!” he exclaimed.

Sue laughed. “Well, I hope you didn’t bring a small army with you—because this week is just for us.”

Brad opened his suitcase and began unpacking. He carried his shaving kit into the huge bathroom and put his things in an empty drawer. He called out, “Which towels do you—”

His voice trailed away as he stared in the mirror that covered the entire wall over the sink. It reflected an odd-looking device on the bedroom ceiling. It was about six inches in diameter and had a glowing red center.

“What the—” Brad looked straight up. Sure enough, there was a round black device embedded in the bathroom ceiling, too.