

This Month's

# FEATURED FICTION

## Offerings from Georgia Jones

The water was warm. She could feel tiny bubbles clinging to her skin as she plunged below the surface. They tingled like a low voltage electrical charge. She opened her eyes. The water was the bluest she had ever seen. It made her happy and she would have cried, but the need for air pushed her back to the barrier between air and water.

She broke through, face first, into warm, breathable air, squinting against the brightness of the dual suns. They startled her for a moment. Their orange light was foreign. Their warmth gave her a sudden chill.

"Mustn't stay in too long, Miss," a soothing voice said from the side of the pool. She remembered then that she should refresh her sun screen. It wouldn't do to get burned on her first day.

The hotel employees were extremely accommodating; she must be sure to recommend this place to her friends. The smiling young man who had warned her about staying in the pool too long was waiting as she climbed the ladder. He handed her a towel and a tube of sun screen.

"May I help you with that, Miss Wendt?" His question could not be mistaken for a come on. It was polite, but warm; nothing more. She was not used to being waited on and it made her a little uncomfortable. He nodded graciously and walked away without waiting for an answer almost as if he had read her mood. She towed herself off, applied the cream, and laid down on a comfortable chaise.

Taweena Wendt was happy. She had never been so happy. The warm suns cooked into her skin and warmed her heart. She lay there for a long time in a perfect alpha state. When the young man came to warn her that it was time to turn over, she did as she was told, hardly opening her eyes as she shifted position.

After a while, though, she started to feel small demands from her body. A stiff muscle told her that it was time to shift her leg. She moved it, but it wasn't comfortable anymore. She twisted her hips impatiently. She thought she heard a bug buzzing and waved her hand in front of her face. Taweena was beginning to feel aggravated when the young man appeared at her chaise again.

"Can I get you something, Miss Wendt?" His soothing voice and presence brought her back to a pleasant mood of comfort.

"What would you suggest?"

"Why, it's your vacation. Anything you want should be yours."

She smiled at his naivete' and ordered a lemonade.

The other people sitting around the pool echoed her contentment. They didn't seem to be getting the same solicitous service the young man was lavishing on her, but they looked happy all the same. A middle aged man returned her assessment with an appreciative smile. There was nothing suggestive in his glance. It was more like the look of someone greeting the Thanksgiving turkey than a look a man might share with a woman. It made her uneasy.

She couldn't remember why she had chosen this hotel and the gap in her memory disturbed her.

The young man was back with her drink. "Are you enjoying the Shang Hais Hotel?" He asked. "Most of our sweepstakes guests say it is the best resort they have ever been to."

Sweepstakes? Had she answered one of those ads? If so, there would be a sales pitch in the afternoon. The thought brought a feeling of distaste. No. She remembered, or it came to her, or he said. She had won this vacation!

"It's YOUR vacation, Miss Wendt," he said again before leaving her to relax with her lemonade.

Taweena usually spent her vacations with her sister, Roweena, taking care of her three children. It was a change for Taweena, who had never come close to having children of her own. It gave Roweena, who complained of her burden at every opportunity, a respite. But most of all it made Taweena feel needed. She liked the feeling and hoped someday it would be a more permanent one. She felt just the tiniest bit guilty about leaving her sister without a babysitter this vacation.

The afternoon softened the suns' orange glare and they became soft silver spheres. Their warmth was comforting, and she yawned contentedly and nodded into another short nap.

Inside her sleeping mind she could see a presence, a hand moving through her body shifting her awareness. This hand moved confidently, as if it already knew her deepest self, but it was impatient with what it found there. She watched in calm amazement as love, self doubt, and guilt moved aside like damp snails, sticking stubbornly to her inside self, and then the hand grasped something. It swept the other feelings aside as it wrapped its long fingers around what it had been looking for and pulled.

She woke to a rumbling in her stomach. The suns were low on the horizon, a romantic pink now, and still warming the air. She looked around at the others on the

patio. At least they weren't all in pairs, she thought.

Taweena had never had a long term relationship with a man, one that would accustom her to being escorted wherever she went. But she wanted one. She knew she shouldn't feel that way. She did not need anyone to validate her existence, after all. Still, she still felt uncomfortable going into a restaurant alone.

"It is your vacation?"

She was startled by the voice at her elbow, and turned abruptly. At first she did not see him. She was laying on a chaise, and he was stretched out on a towel on the ground to her left. He sat up.

"It is your vacation?"

"Well, yes, it is."

"Ah, then, you must be with friends."

She was not following the conversation exactly. She was lost in the deep gray of his eyes. "No," she said.

"It's your vacation, and you are alone? Oh no!"

She wondered if he was mocking her. He had a slight accent, an exotic twist to some of his syllables and it was hard for her to determine the nuance of his words.

"But, no, you mustn't! We can be friends?"

"Yes," she said.

He was tall, with the most wonderful eyes, and the softest accent. Those were the only things she could describe about him. Taweena and this gray-eyed dream became immediately inseparable and those were the only things she saw, or knew, or cared to know about him. If she had dreamed him, it was her most brilliant dream ever and she did not want to wake up.

Taweena Wendt entered the dining room on his arm. She relaxed her hand on his arm, loosely, loosely lest she be thought too demanding. She wanted to throw herself at him, hold on tight, forever. Romance novels had been Taweena's training ground, since the age of ten. She knew you did not get a man like this without overcoming a myriad of obstacles. Yet here she was, walking into the dining room, her hand lightly touching his arm. There had been no obstacles. It was too good to be true, but she was not going to examine it too closely. She had never been so happy in her life. She beamed up at him but it was herself she was feeling, how casually she walked, head high. She felt beautiful and she knew that it showed. The others in the room smiled appreciatively at her.

They won the dance contest. She, Taweena Wendt, had won a dance contest. Wait until she told them about this back home! It was a wonderful day and a wonderful night. The entire resort seemed to be supercharged with her energy.

Each day there was Mr. Gray Eyes and a new young man to see to all of her needs, as solicitous as the one the day before. She water skied, snorkeled, danced, and ate. Her tan deepened and she bought a revealing dress at the hotel shop. The bill never arrived at her room. Taweena ran out of adjectives to describe how happy she was.

The only thing that broke her spell of happiness was the orange and silver, and pink hues of the suns. Two orbs was the right number, but should they both be in the sky at once? Whenever such thoughts came to her, there was always a young man to bring her something delightful or to otherwise distract her. It was true that something about this vacation was... well, just wrong. She could not remember any sweepstakes.

She was reminded regularly that this was her vacation, but was it? She had not made any plans. She did not remember packing. Yet she slipped into life here as easily, as readily as she dove and splashed in the amazingly blue water.

Her doubts did not matter. There was her beautiful companion, and the attentive service, and she was doing things she had never done before. Still...

She was in the pool, drifting between her concerns and the pure joy of the blue water and the orange sky when her young man of the day came to the edge of the pool.

"I'm sorry, Miss. It is your vacation, but the manager..." His voice trailed off in despair.

"The manager would like to see you."

In spite of the warm water, the look on his face gave her a chill.

So, it was all over. It was not her vacation after all. She took the towel the young man handed her, noticing that he was not as carefully solicitous as before. Taweena practiced her denial speech in her head. This could not be her fault. She did not even know how she had come to be here. No one could blame her. But they could, and they probably would.

She was desolate.

As she made her way past the tables, chaises, and towels toward the managers office, she felt that everyone was watching her. They all scowled. They had been happy before, just like her, but now it was all over. She had been found out. She returned their censure in her mind.

It was not her fault!

She was ushered past the registration desk to the heavy door of the managers office, open for the first time during her stay. Through the doorway she saw a small, but imposing figure dressed in a dark suit. He was standing rigidly behind the almost bare, shiny surface of his desk, a funeral director gesturing her to sit in front of the void which separated them. She chose to stand.

"This must stop, Miss Wendt."

"We have done everything we can to make your visit a happy one, and yet you continue to think these negative thoughts. This is our vacation, and you must stop this fretting before you ruin it."

Taweena stared at him, blankly. She had done nothing incorrect. What did he mean "our" vacation? She heard whispering from outside his door.

"Is there something more we can provide you?" Her young man had quaked at the mere mention of the manager, but he seemed to be pleading with her. "You have an unusual capacity for what you call happiness, Miss Wendt, Taweena, and a desire to be needed. Is there something we have done wrong?" He held his hand out in a gesture of willingness. The fingers were long and she imagined that she could see the strength in them. This hand was familiar.

The sound outside the door increased until it became a full complaint. It was her fellow guests.

"I see," she said at last, and she really did.

There is a price for everything. She had almost been convinced that all of this was free. It was not, of course.

Appreciative smiles greeted her as she walked back to the pool, relaxed now and happier than she could imagine.

A few days later, the light from a single, yellow sun splashed weakly across her desk. It was a warm, familiar light, but it made her homesick for the twin suns of her vacation. Taweena found that her tan looked oddly orange and covered up as much of it as she could. And, now, she sat alone, in her long sleeved blouse, with the high neck, alone and watching the excitement around a nearby desk.

Stacy Martin was showing off her ring and babbling about her wedding plans. Bob Landers and Ted were still at their desks, pouting because each of them had hoped to win Stacy's affection. Mr. Cameron, Stacy's boss, buzzed around her like one of the office girls, or like the father of the bride. They were all so happy for her—all except Taweena. She felt empty inside, used up except for her memories.

She closed her eyes, tight, shutting out the sounds of the celebration. For a moment, her skin tingled like a charge of low voltage electricity. She did not dare open her eyes, but she wanted to see the blue water and the orange suns. Something like joy

began to move through her. And then she heard a low, excited laugh, Mr. Cameron.

Taweena looked around her. She was sure that she could feel joy, if only there was someone she could share that feeling with.

*Excerpted from [Write What You Know](#) by Georgia Jones.*