



Adrianna Dane

SEA SENTINEL

EPISODE I

From The Waters

SEA SENTINEL, EPISODE 1: FROM THE WATERS

...Her fingers stroked inside her pussy, driving her passion higher. She remembered the press of a body, but there was something different about it. It wasn't like other men, it was more, so much more. Her fingers thrust slowly in and out while her other hand fingered and tugged at her nipples and the heat throbbed inside her.

She remembered touching a cock, unlike any she had ever felt before, with deep ridges along its length. And she recollected those ridges rippling inside her pussy, bringing her more pleasure than she had ever known. She felt the cock spreading her, the friction as he thrust and ground against her, the pulsing heat of him. She arched, her fingers buried inside her as memory began to engulf her.

Who was it? Why could she only experience the sensations? Why couldn't she see his face? She could only perceive the feel of him, his scent, his strength, cool darkness surrounding them both.

She swirled a finger over her clit, needing the memories. Her body opened to the sensations they invoked. Arching upward, she searched for release, for the moment of rapture she had felt when that cock had pressed deep, pulsing with release as her body wrapped around it, sheathing it with her own wet arousal...

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BY

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AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

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For all the superheroes in my life.

CHAPTER 1

It was too beautiful a night to die. Out here in the middle of the ocean, all alone, the heavy weight of ice-cold water sucked at her, dragging her down, the darkness surrounding her. Her mind remained sluggish from whatever drug they had injected into her arm. A moment more and she would no longer be able to fight its continued drain on her body.

Righting herself, treading the icy cold depths, she looked up at the twinkling stars above her. The moon was a beacon in the night sky, full and bright, looking closer than she'd ever seen it before—or so it seemed. She circled around, trying to make out an indication of land somewhere; there was nothing but darkness. The chill of the water seeped into her bones, numbing her flesh. It was her worst nightmare.

Vaguely, she recalled being awakened from an unnatural sleep by voices. She'd known she was on some sort of boat because of the rhythmic rocking motion and the sound of steady creaking, as well as a

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muffled humming vibration of a motor that she could feel beneath her. Whoever was on the boat with her had stood just outside the door. Unsteadily, she'd risen from the floor, pulling onto her hands and knees, and crawled to the door, pressing her ear to the wood to try to make out what they were saying. The instinct to yell for help was smothered as terror gripped her while she listened to their words.

"We'll wait until we get farther out to sea and then I'll give her another injection, put some weights on her and toss her over. They'll just think she disappeared, and no one will ever be the wiser."

"You sure we couldn't pass her off down south? She could make us some money. I have some connections."

"Nah, too risky. Ole Maxie wouldn't like us taking any chances for small change. If he found out somehow, I don't want to even think what he'd do to us. Nope, I like my skin too much."

Their hard voices grew fainter as they moved away from the door. She blinked, trying to hold back the tears, and the fear. Panicking now would serve no purpose. If she had the least glimmer of a hope to survive, she had to get out of here, and fast, before the engine stopped, and before they came back for her.

She tried the door handle, but it was locked. Then she pivoted around, frantically searching the small room that appeared to be some kind of storeroom. Her blurry gaze raised to study the porthole for a hopeful moment, then moved on, realizing it was too small for her to fit through. Shoving to her feet, she shuffled across the room, her head still spinning from the effects of whatever drug they'd administered.

She'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time and stumbled upon something she shouldn't have. One heard about it happening all the time, but it was not supposed to happen to *her*.

Finally, her gaze landed on a slim-looking iron bar leaning against the wall. It was almost flat, but solid. She picked it up and hurried back to the door, placing her ear against it, listening for any indications that

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someone was nearby.

She looked up as she heard a scuffling of sound above her head, her heart pounding, realized it was the sound of footsteps on the deck above, then returned her attention back to the door.

She pressed closer to listen, but was met with silence on the other side. There was no time to waste. Sliding the slender bar between the doorframe and the door edge, slowly she pushed, attempting not to make too much noise.

Much to her surprise, the door popped open with little serious pressure and only a slight sound of splintering wood. It was a flimsy barrier at best, thank goodness. Reaching for the handle, she cracked it open and looked beyond into the passageway, but the corridor was dark and she could make out little.

What did she have to lose? They were planning to kill her anyway. Gripping the iron bar as a weapon, she slid beyond the doorframe and into the passageway, peering into the darkness.

She was a strong swimmer and had won numerous competitions in high school and college. Her profession as a marine biologist kept her near and in the water on a daily basis. If she could just get to the deck she might have a chance of escaping. Certainly she had a better chance than if she stayed on this boat.

More muffled sounds assaulted her hearing from on deck, reminding her that she needed to hurry. If she could just figure out where they were located and how many of them there were, she might be in a better position to make a run for it. As quietly as possible she headed toward the dark shadow of the companionway, toward the stairs leading to the upper deck. The boat didn't appear to be a large one from the size of this lower deck, so she had an idea whoever had kidnapped her was probably close by. She was going to have to be sure and fast in order to make it into the water before they could stop her. It didn't bear thinking about beyond that point right now.

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Carefully and silently, clutching the iron bar at her side, she made her way up the ladder, pausing at the entrance to peer into the darkness. She squinted, trying to clear her vision, and then refocused. It didn't appear to be a long stretch from where she hovered to the edge and to possible freedom. Could she do it? Her mind and body still felt fuzzy with the effects of the drug. If they caught her she wouldn't be able to fight them off. She had to run, clamber up over the edge, and dive with no hesitation, or she would be lost for sure. And there would be no second chance.

Suddenly the vibrations beneath her feet were gone. Someone had turned off the engine and she knew she didn't have another minute to waste.

The odds were against her, but they wouldn't be expecting it, and taking them by surprise was her best shot. Her chances of surviving the icy depths of the ocean were slim at best. But at least there was a glimmer of hope, more so than if she stayed here. She set the iron bar on the deck. Taking a deep breath and calling on all the strength she could muster, she vaulted across the deck, hauled herself up over the railing, and plunged down into the waters.

As the cold sea consumed her, taking her breath away, she heard voices yelling from above, but she couldn't worry about them now. All her strength must be focused on getting as far away from them as possible before she ran out of air and was required to resurface.

The water numbed her. This wasn't the Caribbean, it was the North Atlantic. She knew there was little chance of her survival, but at least her death wouldn't be at their hands. And maybe it would be just a little justice that they would always wonder if she had been rescued, never knowing for sure if she was dead.

Finally, she had to push upward, unable to hold her breath any longer. Gasping for air as she broke the surface, she used one hand to clear her vision. Treading water, she looked around. In one sense it was

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a relief to see the lights of a boat as it sped away from her and knew it was the one she'd escaped from. Yet in another, she knew what her chances were of another one passing by this late at night. She doubted they were in one of the main shipping lanes, lessening her chances of rescue.

Tilting her head to the sky, she tried to use the stars to determine what she could do. Still her mind was foggy and she had no idea how long she had been unconscious, or where she was now located.

Stupid. If the boat was heading away from her, they were probably headed back to shore. That was really the only sensible direction to go. At least if she got to land, and it didn't matter where, she could find some warmth, people, something. It instilled just a little more hope inside her. She had little fear the criminals in the boat would attempt to find her, so if she just followed the direction they had taken, land had to be there somewhere.

Now, the night surrounded her, the sound of the ocean, the glow of the moon. She could hear the call of a whale echoing in the distance, but there were no shadows indicating the least hint of land, and the boat had disappeared long ago. Her legs were tired and her body numb, as exhaustion overtook her. She had shed most of her clothing almost immediately after she'd surfaced, in an effort to combat the resistance of the water. Now she was more chilled than ever.

She thought of all the things she would miss, of the people who would wonder what had happened to her, who would search for her with no answers to her disappearance.

Her mind wrapped around small, silly things as she tried to convince her body to keep going. It wasn't easy. She thought about the baby seal she'd rescued and wanted to be there to see it released back into the sea after it was healed. Saturday she had planned to polish the light at the top of the lighthouse and to test it to see if it still worked.

She'd only moved in three months ago and she loved living there. It

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was perfect. Unfortunately, it was her walk on the beach that had gotten her into trouble tonight. How could she have known?

Her legs would no longer work and she turned onto her back, floating, to give her a chance to rest as she looked up at the stars. It was a beautiful night, truly beautiful. She had always loved the water, the creatures that lived there, the world beneath its surface. She thought it was a fitting place for her to die. If she had ever wanted to be buried anywhere, she guessed it would be at sea.

Her strength was gone, there was nothing left to fight with. She turned one last time to gaze around her, her eyes filmy, regret filling her. No lights, no sounds of civilization, nothing to give her hope of rescue.

She stopped paddling and slowly began to sink beneath the surface, drifting downward, letting the deadly silence shroud her. Would they wonder what had happened when she didn't turn up for work on Monday?

Panic encompassed her as she struggled for breath, feeling the suffocating waters enter her mouth, her lungs. She craved air, but her limbs wouldn't respond. Already she was dying without hardly having lived.

Those men had thought nothing of taking a life. Her life. How many others had they taken without a hint of guilt?

Flashes of her life swept before her in those last seconds. Panic seized her as she tried to push to the surface, to reach for life-preserving oxygen. Even desperation to survive couldn't help her now. She had no reserves left with which to fight. Painfully, she felt herself falling as though weightless; a numbing, sad unconsciousness began to envelope her and the silence of the waters claimed her.

* * *

A mouth clamped over hers, forcing a huge blast of oxygen into her lungs. Hard arms wrapped around her, pressing hard against her

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diaphragm, lifting and forcing her upward. They broke the surface and his mouth left hers. She coughed and water spewed from her body again and again as hard arms held and supported her. At last, thankfully, she inhaled fresh oxygen into her depleted lungs.

Determined hands held her steady as the last of the seawater was expelled and she took in huge gulps of air. After long moments, just before she was able to try to figure out what was happening, firm, masculine arms turned her, wrapped her within a hard embrace, and her rescuer's mouth sealed over hers again, offering her breath as they dropped beneath the surface and were consumed by the ocean waters.

She started to panic, but he held her anchored against his body as they sliced through the water like a speeding missile discharged from a submarine into the sea.

She breathed his air, tasted him, felt the strange heat of his body, allowed herself to be propelled by him. She couldn't think clearly, had no idea who he was, what he was, or why he had saved her life.

His arms were clamped so firmly around her, she couldn't move her own. All she could do was sense his strength, allowing it to propel her through the water. He emitted a warmth that made her feel cocooned by him somehow. The feel of him was slick, yet hot, bringing her back to life, taking the cold, numbing death from her.

At the moment it didn't matter how it had happened, why it had happened, just that he was here and he had saved her. She closed her eyes and accepted the breaths of life he offered, allowing her body to soften and conform to his, and trying to get a sense of who her savior was.

She had thought at first someone from a fishing boat or a pleasure boat had found her. Obviously, that wasn't the case.

Hard muscle surrounded her, and she felt lean length, rippling heat. His breath now mingled with her own, and a surge of arousal began to heat inside her. She had almost died and now she was alive, breathing,

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and melded to a man whose hard bulge of male heat rested snugly against her pussy, separated only by the wet, clinging material of her panties, and whatever figure-hugging clothing he seemed to be wearing.

She had almost died. She shouldn't be feeling arousal right now. But she did, and it overwhelmed every other emotion at this moment. There was just something about him, about the way he held her, the taste of his breath.

It didn't matter where he was taking her, or what he planned to do with her, but the first thing she wanted to do was feel alive again by fucking him. She wanted that hard cock plunging deep inside her. Common sense had nothing to do with the primitive need to re-affirm the fact that she had been given a second chance at living, and she wanted to grab it with both hands. Whatever it took to get him to agree to the act, she would do it. Stranger or not, she needed to know she was alive and had beat the odds. Somehow. Miraculously. She needed to be close to another human being in the most elemental way possible.

Suddenly they shot up out of the water with a force she couldn't begin to comprehend and he landed with her on solid ground. He lifted his mouth from her lips and she took her first breath without his assistance. She couldn't see him clearly in the murky depths of...wherever they were. His arms unwound from around her and she inhaled deeply, taking in the clean, unusual scent of him, still so close. She was overwhelmed by her close call with death and the fact that she was alive and breathing...something she'd never thought to do again.

He stepped back and she panicked, afraid he was going to leave her. Quickly, she raised her hand to cup his face, to stop him. He stilled as her fingers stroked down across his smooth jaw to his neck, and she gasped as she explored, her fingers encountering the odd ridges of what appeared to be gills, along his neck and abdomen.

She was dreaming, she had to be. All of it had to be some fantastic

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dream, yet she didn't want it to end. He stood granite still as she explored him, his hands resting lightly on her hips. She could hear his raspy breathing as though he were forcing himself to remain motionless beneath her touch.

It didn't matter that she was unable to see him clearly. Her hands cascaded down his chest, skidding across his rock-hard, rippling abs, to encounter stretchy, lightweight material molded across his hips, thighs, and tightly sheathing his cock.

He shuddered as her fingers feathered across the bulge of his compacted, hot erection. It felt hard and firm through the material covering it. Aroused. Did he want her as much as she desired him right now? Had her close call with death affected him as well?

She leaned up on tiptoes, bringing her mouth close to his.

"Fuck me," she whispered urgently, as her hands moved to divest him of the silvery material covering the lower part of his body.

His hands moved to cover them, halting her actions. She reached up and dragged his head downward, pressing her lips to his and sinking her tongue into the moist cavern of his mouth, pushing deeply, passionately inside.

His hands loosened, and she hurried to push the material downward. God, he felt so good, so warm, smooth, and silky beneath her hands. Without breaking the kiss, she hurried to shed what remained of her own sodden clothing. Panties were quickly gone, followed by her bra. Her jeans, shirt, sneakers and socks had been lost in the ocean long ago in an effort to free their constriction. She was almost glad they were gone; it was less for her to contend with now.

She pressed herself closer, need consuming her, rubbing against him. Touching his cock, she was again surprised by the feel of the ridges all along its length. He was hard and ready. Her pussy pulsed with the need to feel his unique length inside her, to feel him rippling against the walls of her vagina. She had a feeling his penis was going to

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make her feel things she had never felt before.

He dropped a hand and she felt him at her slit, opening her, testing her slick entrance. Breaking the kiss, she shifted her stance, widening to allow him better access, and his fingers slid inside her.

“Yes,” she breathed, her hand still feathering over his length, enchanted by the feel of it.

Guiding her, he lay her on the cool, wet, stone floor of what appeared to be a cavern. She didn’t have time to look around; her body was hot and ready, desperate for his attention.

Once he had her flat on her back, he spread her legs wide, splitting her as far as they would go. She shattered as she felt his mouth at her pussy, his long tongue licking her, sinking deep inside her, warm and teasing. His fingers stroked her, circled her clit as he lapped her juices.

The pleasure she felt was too much and she burned for more, to have him inside her, to feel all that rippling flesh buried deep. Yet his mouth continued to work around and inside her, and she felt the tension building, fast and high, like molten lava ready to explode from a volcano.

And erupt she did, jerking against his questing tongue, rising, feeling, wanting more, so much more.

He moved up her body, licking a path across her mound, circling her navel, across the softness of her stomach, stopping to savor her nipples, the rising, firm peak of each breast. He sucked hard, and she gasped at the sensation. Her fingers moved over his face, his neck, across his shoulders, urging him on, needing him.

She felt the tip of his fierce cock poised at the entrance of her engorged lips. He rubbed it along the needy slit, driving her higher yet again. She moaned with the need for him to take her, fuck her, claim her with that enormous, unusual prick between his legs.

And then he did, sinking and widening her. She felt each ridge as he penetrated her, wanting more and more.

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“Yes,” she cried, “yes, fill me. I need to feel you. Make me feel alive.”

The wide tip of his cock spread her sensitive opening as he surged forward, tunneling deep, claiming the void and emptiness that she had almost descended into never to know this kind of bliss again.

She felt him drive deep and stop. She wound her legs around his hips, pushed against him, felt him burrow deeper still, filling her completely. His mouth claimed her lips, his tongue diving deep into her mouth, branding her with his searing heat. She sucked hard, pulling him deeper inside her mouth.

Ecstasy filled her as he began to move, and the ripples of his cock submerged her into delirium. She fought the waves of lust that consumed her. She felt each movement deep inside, touching nerves she never knew she had, sending fire zinging through her blood.

She pumped against him, and he ground deeper, pulling out, pressing his cock against her clit. The friction drove her over the edge into a mind-blowing climax. Yet he didn't stop. He dropped into her again and again, sending her higher each time with each earth-shattering climax.

Finally, he pulled from her and she cried out, not wanting him to leave her yet. She found she was mistaken as he began rubbing the slick heat of his cock the length of her sensitive, engorged lips. His hands flayed across her skin, sending each nerve ending into overload. She arched upward wanting more.

He buried himself inside her yet again, forcefully thrusting in and out as ripple after ripple of orgasm consumed her, and she clung to him in desperation.

Wrapping his arms around her, he rolled to his back, allowing her to set the rhythm. She rose above him with his cock fully entrenched within her and ran her hands across his hard, rippling abs as she absorbed and imprinted his presence inside her into her mind and

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memory. His contours were so different from hers, from any man she'd ever been with, and the feel of him drove her to erotic distraction.

Slowly, she lifted herself, her thigh muscles corded, dropping over him, experiencing the undulating presence of him inside her as shockwaves ripped through her. Her rhythm increased. She rolled her hips, sighed with pleasure, and built the momentum.

He fondled her breasts, rubbing the nipples between his fingers as she increased the pace. His hands on her body grew more insistent. They moved to her hips, steadying her. His length grew harder, expanding, pushing against her in some strange way. She knew he was close, and she wanted to give him as much as he gave to her.

She heard his groan as he came inside her, felt the pulsing of his beautiful organ as he filled her.

Again, he twisted around and she was beneath him. He pumped into her, rasped against her clit, driving her into another orgasm.

Yet, she knew he hadn't softened after his climax. She still felt his unyielding presence inside her, and again he began to thrust. The hard pressure against her channel had eased slightly, but his stiff male heat had lost none of its steely firmness. He slowed his rhythm to long, powerful strokes of penetration. Lowering his head, his teeth rasped across her flesh and he sucked at her nipples. And she felt the tidal wave build inside her yet again.

He stopped moving and she wiggled her hips. He shifted his hands downward to halt her movements, pressing her into the ground, holding her there.

Sliding his cock ever so slowly from inside her, he stopped when the tip of his sex was poised at her entrance, then stroked it over her sensitized lips. She whimpered as she hovered at the verge of another climax he wouldn't let her have. He kept her poised there, wanting and needing more, yet unable to attain it.

He lowered his head and began to nibble at her ribs, licking and

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sucking her skin, nipping at her flesh, driving her wild as his wonderful tongue tracked a figure eight over her skin.

And then he was there, slamming deep inside her, sending wave after wave of release pulsing through her.

She screamed and arched with mind-blowing pleasure. With a speed she couldn't believe, he pulled out and rammed deep again, grinding against her clit, driving her past reality into a swirling pleasure beyond belief, and the world disintegrated around her.

CHAPTER 2

What the hell had he been thinking? He watched her as she slept, unable to take his eyes off her still form. It terrified him that she'd almost died. If Phyn hadn't warned him, she would be dead.

He reached over to finger a lock of her silky red-gold hair, studying her pale complexion closely. Her skin had a translucent pearly sheen. Exhaustion from her ordeal was evident in every line of her delectable body that was now partially hidden beneath the thick quilt covering her. How could he have lost his self-control like that, knowing what she'd been through?

Elana Del Rio had caught his attention almost from the first moment she'd entered through the glass doors of the Watters Foundation Sea Lab on Fell Island. That moment when his body had tightened with arousal, as though he was any normal man responding to the presence of a beautiful woman, was emblazoned in his memory.

He had been on his way to a meeting with the Board of Directors

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and they'd both entered the main lobby elevator at the exact same moment. How could he fail to miss her sensual energy?

She was a marine biologist and had been hired by the lab to assist with a new project on the study of marine mammal life in the Atlantic. The new study had only been approved and initiated by the lab within the last three months.

As he'd watched, one of her slender fingers hesitated for a fraction of a moment over the buttons before she'd pressed one, then stepped back. Her smell was delectable and sensual in a subtle way. And then she'd turned and smiled at him. More of a grin actually, not a sexual signal indicating interest in a male she found attractive.

He saw excitement in her expression, in the sparkle of her multifaceted eyes with hints of green, gold and blue melding together. Her lips were full, adorably pink and lush. With only the faintest dusting of coral lipstick, they seemed to magnify his desire to find out what she tasted like. His cock had hardened painfully and his gaze had dropped to the badge attached to her gold, long-sleeved blouse, imprinting her name in his memory.

He'd made a point of learning everything he could about her. Even though it was a futile task.

She wasn't for him. No woman was—not with the dangerous double life he was required to maintain. There had been a time when he was wholly human, but that had ended with the deaths of his parents and his own near death experience in the waters of the Atlantic. He was that person no longer, nor could he ever be again. It often surprised him that he'd been able to keep his other identity secret for so long.

A more than superficial relationship with any woman, no matter how much he wanted it, nor how much he would do to protect her, was not in his future. To be associated with him in any way could easily cause her death and, ultimately, his own.

So over the last three months he'd watched her from afar. When

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he'd heard she'd inquired about renting the lighthouse on the mainland, he'd made it happen for her.

He was a fool, but he wanted her to be happy even if he couldn't have her for himself. He liked seeing her smile, listening to her laugh.

Impatient, he stood and strode from the room. Having her here, being so close to her, took more self-control than he thought possible, and he already knew how much success he had with that. He was a loner, would always be a solitary man without ties to others who could be hurt by associating with him.

Passing through the spacious, sunken living room, he walked through the doorway onto the balcony situated high and embedded into the cliffs overlooking the swirling sea. His gaze encountered the high-powered gold telescope resting to the side.

Daily he questioned his sanity, his purpose, and his longing for a woman he couldn't have. But now it was even worse. His cock rested rock-hard against his thigh with no ease in sight.

He looked out at the deep blue sea, the surging white caps of water, and across to the lighthouse. How many nights had he watched her as she moved about her home? How many nights had he wanted to go there, to be with her, to hold her? To make love to her?

He remembered an evening not so long ago, in the dead of night, when he'd seen a light come on in her room. He'd been out here, studying the sea as he often did, watching for signs, open to any call for his assistance. But he'd seen that light, hadn't been able to resist its call, and had moved to the telescope.

It had been hot and humid that night, even the sea breeze had seemed to hold no surcease from the clinging, moist heat. She'd walked out onto the balcony, her white nightgown a beacon in the darkness, turned translucent by the backlight from her room. Such generous, beautiful, feminine curves outlined in silhouette. Her breasts firm and full, perfect for his hands to embrace. The vee at her thighs temptingly

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defined.

She'd lifted her hands to pull the hair away from her neck, and arched into the night. The burgeoning heat of his erection had strained against his jeans, making him more than aware of his attraction for the woman.

He'd slid down the zipper and pulled out the throbbing member needing release, even if it was strictly by his own hand. As he watched her, standing there attempting to attain some ease with the night breeze, he'd slid his hand over the bursting heat of his shaft, over the purple head oozing pre-cum, wanting to be burrowed inside her sweet, hot pussy.

His hips fought for release as his hand moved over his length, the friction of heat driving him, the burn of desire pursuing him. God, he wanted her, like no other woman he'd ever met. When she turned to the side, he salivated at the firm rounded shadow of her breasts outlined by the flimsy material of her gown., Blood pounded in his cock, making him harder, as the need to orgasm gripped him. He could almost feel what it would be like to have her hands touching him, her mouth on his skin.

As he closed his eyes, pulsing desire consumed him. Boneless, he leaned away from the telescope, his mind wrapped around the fantasy of her, legs widespread, cock bursting, his testicles tightening. A rising groan erupted from his lips as release consumed him in long spasms of hot liquid, spurting into his own hand.

He gasped for air when it was over, knowing the ease would not last long. His desire for her never abated, and his fierce erection since she'd arrived on the island was assuaged only temporarily.

Yes, he remembered that night vividly and it had only served to make him want her more, to be there for her, with her. He wanted to keep her near, to have her here with him. He wanted her to know all of him, wanted to pleasure her, to lick every bead of hot moisture from her

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body and to plunge them both into the oceans, driving deep inside her as he carried them away.

The memory of her outlined by the light that night served only to make him more needy than he had been before. Pushing the memory aside, he squinted into the midday sunlight.

Where was his self-control last night when he'd needed it most? When his body was transmuted to that of the water creature he became in the depths of the salty sea—his body altered, powers imbued by the species who had saved his life long ago—he was another being. He had taken her in heat, in terror at her near death, in desire to give her what she needed, what he had yearned for. But he hadn't been a man when he'd done so, he'd been that other being. Yet, without that other being sheathed inside him, she would now be dead and his torment at her loss would have been never-ending.

He wanted to love her as a man, to give her the gentleness she deserved. Yet he'd felt her need to celebrate her survival in the most elemental way. He'd felt her desperate desire and could not have refused her request, had not wanted to refuse whatever form his body took.

But how did he now go back to the way it had once been? Having known her body, drunk of her passion, how did he let her go?

He whirled around and strode back through the living room toward the hallway leading to the hidden elevator that would take him far below the surface of the island. He slammed his hand against the button, then descended to the subterranean cave. It was the place where he had taken her so fiercely, where her scent had surrounded and filled him, her taste an addiction that he wanted to consume again and again.

The door slid open and he walked into the lair of the creature he became in times of need. Phyn bobbed in the pool, greeting him by emitting a high-pitched tone as he entered.

One of the gifts he'd received from the world below the sea was the

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ability to communicate with its creatures.

“Greetings, Sentinel.”

The words formed in his mind, a telepathic connection between him and the dolphin. It was those who lived in the ocean depths who truly represented the sentinels of the sea, bringing him word when he was needed and danger was at the door.

Phyn had sensed his passion for Elana and often had a habit of staying near the lighthouse to watch her. He remained vigilant, swimming particularly close when she would often go out on the end of the pier where her small launch was moored, sit on the end of the dock and gaze out across the water. Phyn listened to her voice, her wandering thoughts, especially when she focused on the sea lab and her musings would turn to Danael Watters, and her secret opinion of the head of the board of directors of the foundation that supported the many research programs at the lab.

He hadn't wanted to know her thoughts. It wasn't right for Phyn to share her secrets with him. But there were times when he'd looked through the telescope, saw her sitting there, and had wondered what ran through her mind. He should reprimand Phyn, but he couldn't help but listen to the revelations, in some way pleased to know the attraction was mutual, even if he did not plan to do anything about it.

He had known she would be passionate and give all of herself when making love. But he'd had no idea how sweet and beautiful it would be to feel her satiny sheath surrounding his forceful desire.

She should have been horrified at his deformities. It had not been a man who had taken her passionate offering, who had opened her to his demands, who had burrowed deep inside to the heart of her.

It had been the sea creature with the mind and desires of the man closely linked with that of the other species that inhabited his body. Yet she had accepted everything he was at that moment and asked no questions.

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He'd wanted to provide her with pleasure, all the rapture she deserved. The want that had built up inside him over the course of three months was laid bare to provide her what she needed.

And when she lay in his arms, unconscious from the overwhelming pleasure, he'd berated himself for pushing her too far, for being the creature and not the man who took her and pushed her to the edges of lustful delirium.

It was not until he'd showered in the fresh, chlorinated water and washed every speck of sea salt from his body that he allowed himself to transmute back to human form.

He had cared for her, then dressed her in a pair of warm jogging pants and oversized sweatshirt with the sea lab insignia and placed her beneath the covers in his own bed.

He liked seeing her there, liked the realization that she looked so right sleeping in his bed. And for an hour he had lain beside her, holding her, protectively spooned around her. With regret he had finally reached into her mind and veiled the memories of making love with the sea creature. He could do no less. He wanted to erase the terror of her near-death experience, but to do that could put her in danger, and when she did awake, she would have even more questions as to why she was here, in Danael Watters' home, in his bed.

He didn't know the identity of the men who had attacked her, and until he did, she needed to remain wary. So he had left her with the nightmare, at least the partial one. Hopefully it was enough to sustain her, to protect her until he could rid her of the danger.

For now, the men who had attacked her probably thought she'd died in the sea, and that was not necessarily a bad thing. It would make them careless, thinking they were safe.

He turned toward the pool, back to Phyn.

"Watch the lighthouse, and the surrounding shore. I wish to know if anything unusual occurs there."

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“Phyn is sorry he did not bring news sooner of your woman’s danger, Sentinel.”

She was not his, but Phyn appeared to have decided otherwise and there was nothing he seemed able to do to change his mind.

“There is no need. She is safe and that is what matters. You have guarded her well, my friend.”

“Phyn will do as Sentinel asks.” He pivoted around, soared upward and then dived beneath the water, disappearing from view.

Danael walked back to the elevator and returned to the surface. He would hear Phyn’s call if something should occur. But right now he wanted to return to Elana. She should awaken soon.

He quietly entered the bedroom and sat in the chair next to the bed. He would never grow tired of watching her. He studied her features, the high shadowed cheekbones hinting at a Native American heritage, the slender lines of her jaw, long, dark eyelashes. Again, he had the urge to kiss each soft speck of skin.

He tensed as he saw her lips part, and her succulent pink tongue darted out to wet her lips. He wanted to lick them, to consume them. He inhaled sharply as she stretched her hands above her head and arched against the bed.

Driving desire consumed him at the unconscious action. His cock hardened and pressed painfully against the zipper of his pants, causing him to shift in his chair. Need rode through him in fierce waves, and it took all his willpower not to climb into that large bed next to her and draw her into his arms, burying himself in her sultry body.

Her eyelashes fluttered, and she squinted up at the ceiling, frowning. Her red-gold winged eyebrows drew downward in a frown. He saw confusion settle in her expression.

She must have felt his presence because suddenly she angled her head toward where he sat and her wide eyes attempted to focus on him. He heard her small gasp of surprise and saw shocked recognition in the

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look she gave him.

“You!” She jerked up in the bed, then winced.

He rose from the chair in a swift motion. “Slowly,” he cautioned.

Throwing back the covers, she slid to the edge of the bed and lowered her feet to the floor. “Where am I? How did I get here?” Raising a hand, she rubbed her temple, then pushed back her unruly hair.

“Give yourself a little time. I know you must be confused. I found you unconscious and brought you here.”

The tender skin of her aquiline nose and her forehead wrinkled as she closed her eyes, and he knew she was trying to remember the events of the night before.

Her lids flew up and she hissed, her hands curled into tight fists. “Someone tried to kill me. I almost died, but someone saved me. I remember his arms, his breath of life. I remember holding onto him as we swam through the water. And then it’s blank. I can’t remember anything beyond that point.” She looked up at him with panic at the heart of her expressive multi-colored eyes. “Who saved me? And how did I end up in the bed of the head of the board of directors of the lab?”

CHAPTER 3

She shook her head, trying to clear her muddled thoughts. Her whole body ached. God, even her pussy throbbed as though she'd had a long night of hot sex. She wanted to press the heel of her hand against her sensitive mound. But she didn't, considering the circumstances. Why couldn't she remember?

It felt as though she was missing something. And, of course, she was, because the last thing she remembered clearly was sinking below the surface of the ice-cold ocean knowing she was going to die. Her hands gripped the sides of the bed and she looked over at the man sitting in the chair.

Tall, broad, and so very intense. Danael Watters, head of the Watters Foundation, the driving force behind the Fell Island Sea Lab where she was employed, looked at her with such heat in the sea-green depths of his eyes. It made her skin burn at the thought of being touched by him.

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But he was the untouchable and she knew that. He was often spoken of in hushed tones at the lab. An enigma, a recluse, as well as a billionaire. His parents had been killed in a boating accident when he was in his late teens, and gossip had it that he'd never been the same after that.

He had been given up for dead as well, until a fishing boat had picked him up two weeks after his disappearance. She read that he had lived with his uncle for several years, gone on to college, and then returned to Fell Island and never left it for any lengthy period of time.

Some said he'd been damaged psychologically by his parents' death and abandonment at sea. Others just thought he was strange and having all that money made him peculiar, sort of like a Howard Hughes type of guy.

The first time she had more than a passing greeting with him had been in the lab. She'd been attending to a dolphin that had been rescued. It had been injured and beached in one of the mainland coves and Danael Watters had been the one to bring it in. That particular afternoon she was alone in the lab and he'd come to check on the condition of the mammal.

Of course, she'd known he was attractive, had been close enough in the elevator that first day to confirm that fact. Before arriving at the lab, she'd seen his picture on more than one occasion in various brochures and newspaper articles, but being that close to him as they discussed the condition of the sea mammal, she'd found herself responding to him in a much more earthy manner.

No way was he in her league, not in any respect. But since that moment, every time he came near her, her heart thundered, her pussy creamed, and she fantasized about what it would be like to have his hands on her body and be in his bed.

Never, in a million years, would she have expected to find herself in that very place.

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“How do you feel?” he asked, his deep, smooth voice expressing concern.

She pushed her unruly hair back from her face. “Like I’ve been run over by a damned truck.”

He nodded. “You were in pretty bad condition when I found you and brought you here. Can you tell me what happened?”

She shifted to her feet, still a bit unsteady, testing herself. Again, she shoved her hair back, knowing she must look a total wreck because she sure felt like one. In normal circumstances she kept her heavy hair in a twist, clipped at the back of her head. Obviously, there wasn’t much she could do about that right now. She refused to cut it into something a bit more professionally manageable, but right now it was just plain aggravating.

“I remember bits and pieces. I think I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.” She rubbed the heel of her hands against her stinging eyes, wondering if they looked as bloodshot as they felt. Holding onto the edge of the bed, she turned to survey the room, trying to get her bearings.

Danael moved closer. “Why don’t we go into the other room where it’s more comfortable? I’ll bet you could use something to eat.”

Turning toward him, her focus shifted from the room to him, and a wave of hot arousal washed through her as she realized how close he had come. Weaving slightly, she had the overwhelming urge to touch him, and tightened her grip on the bed to keep herself from doing so. Her body seemed to recognize him in some odd way. Shaking her head at her whimsical thoughts, she decided it must be the effects of what she’d recently experienced that had her so off kilter. What she needed to do was re-focus away from her attraction to him, especially in this close proximity.

She smiled up at him. “That would be great. A cup of coffee would go a long way right now. As a matter of fact I’m thinking it would help

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immensely. I can't quite seem to get it together just at the moment."

Apparently sensing her weakness, he reached out to encircle her waist, helping to steady her as he guided her into the other room. Big mistake, because uncontrollable desire spread throughout her body at his touch. Inhaling his scent, whatever clarity she'd had for a brief moment seemed to vanish as he guided her toward the door and into the living room. Accepting his touch was dangerous, tempting her to respond in a way she knew she'd be sorry for later.

He led her to a long, tan sofa where she sank down gratefully. "I'll be right back with that coffee and a muffin. Then we'll take it from there. Give yourself a chance to get your bearings."

She nodded and leaned back against the soft cushions. "Thank you, that would be really great. What day is it? Was I out very long?" She started to rise. "I need to call work and let them know what's happened."

A firm hand gripped her shoulder forcing her back down. "I called them for you. You're fine. You need to rest right now. Just sit and I'll get you that breakfast."

She sighed and sank against the cushions. It wasn't in her nature to just sit and do nothing. She was the type of person who was always on the go. This wasn't like her, not at all.

Her head still felt woozy. After he left the room, she turned and stared out the window, which looked like it led onto a balcony. She rose from the sofa, made her way toward the heavy, plate glass door, and stared out at the vista. Maybe a little fresh air would do her some good. She reached for the latch and slid the door open, then walked out into the reviving breeze of salty sea air.

Yes, that helped to clear away some of the fog from her brain. Looking across the expanse of bright blue water into the distance, she saw her lighthouse, her home, and felt a sense of displacement wrap around her. Her gaze turned, following the shore, and she spotted the

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indentation of the cove, not far from the lighthouse. It was a place she often went on her nightly walks. But this time she had almost died.

Catching the glint of something out of the corner of her eye, she turned and her gaze landed on a telescope standing off to the side. Curious, she walked over to it, moved behind it, and gazed through the eyepiece, surprised to find it was focused on her home—on her bedroom window to be exact. She gulped as the realization washed over her as to what that might mean, and her heart thudded in her chest. He was watching her?

She straightened and turned toward the doorway as she heard the clatter of dishes and footsteps just inside. He stepped onto the balcony and her heart shuddered to a halt in her chest. He really was the most attractive man she'd ever met.

Oddly, she felt comfortable with him. It didn't bother her that he appeared to be watching her house, intimate moments in her life. In fact, her pussy flooded as she thought about him watching her and what he might have seen through his telescope. Such erotic thoughts were blazing through her mind right now.

As she waited, he set the tray on a small circular glass table and then turned to her. "Come. Sit. Maybe this will help." He pulled out a chair for her and she walked over and slipped into it.

She felt him behind her, his body heat touching her. His hands seemed to hover above her shoulders before he moved away to sit in the opposite chair.

"It's beautiful here," she managed to say, trying to dispel her other wayward thoughts. "This is where you live. I can't imagine how long it took to build this house, grooved into the cliff the way it is. It really is amazing."

He nodded as he took a sip from the coffee cup setting on the table in front of him, and leaned back in the chair to gaze out over the horizon. "The architect I hired thought I was crazy and at first he said it

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couldn't be done. But I gave him enough incentive to find the right people. I must say, I've been pleased with his efforts."

She liked looking at his profile. They were strong, magnetic features, defined and bronzed by the sun. A firm jaw she wanted to stroke, chiseled lips she wanted to touch. Dark, heavy brows arched above his intense, gold-flecked green eyes and amazingly long dark lashes. And his voice was pure vibrating heat that washed through her like a steady, powerful massage on her senses. She could sit here and listen to him talk forever.

It was strange how she felt this sense of familiarity about him, as though she knew the body beneath the white knit shirt that sheathed his broad shoulders and the jeans encasing his narrow hips and firm thighs. She shook her head, trying to dispel those odd ideas from her mind. That was impossible.

She had fantasized about him on more than one occasion, as many of the female employees at the lab had done, but they had never actually touched. Not until today.

She sipped at the coffee and broke off a piece of the blueberry muffin set on a plate in front of her.

"Can you tell me what happened to you last night?" he asked after a long silence.

She leaned back in her chair; the muffin and coffee had helped to sharpen her mind. "I remember bits and pieces. Around seven I decided to take a walk along the beach before I headed for bed. It's usually quiet around that time, not too many people out. I walked to the cove," she waved a hand in the general direction of where the cove was located, "but someone was there last night. I obviously stumbled upon something I shouldn't have, but I still couldn't tell you exactly what it was."

Looking off into the distance, she narrowed her gaze, trying to remember. Shaking her head, she looked back at the table and found

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what remained of the muffin now laying in crumbs in the plate.

Surprise shot through her and she stiffened when she found her hand gripped by solid heat as Danael's fingers tightened around hers, offering her compassionate understanding. She looked up and met his intense gaze.

"It's all right. You're safe here. Can you tell me what happened next?" he encouraged her.

She swallowed and her stomach churned at the dark memory of the evening before. "There were two men talking. And there was a small motorboat with another man waiting. They had guns. One of the men had his back to me and I could see a rifle slung over his shoulder. I sensed trouble immediately and turned to leave, but apparently I wasn't quick enough." She raised frantic eyes to his. "I couldn't outrun them and they caught up with me. One of them hit me from behind." She raised a hand to the back of her head and winced, feeling the knot that had formed there. "Then they drugged me. The next thing I remember is waking up on a much larger boat and hearing them say they were going to kill me. I knew I had to get out of there. For some reason, they hadn't tied me up, so to some extent, I guess luck was on my side."

"Darn lucky. They probably thought the drug would knock you out until they could get far enough out. You were able to get off the boat?"

She nodded and looked up at him. "I had two choices. Stay there and let them kill me, or take a chance in the ocean myself. At that point, I knew I was going to die one way or the other. However it happened, I wanted it to be my choice, not theirs."

"Did you recognize any of the men?"

"I didn't get a chance to really see them. And I wasn't going to wait around to find out. I just jumped. I thought I was going to die. I knew it when I couldn't get my arms and legs to respond and I began to go under."

Her eyes met his across the table. "And then suddenly someone or

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something saved me.”

“Do you have any idea who it was?”

She shook her head. “None. I must have blacked out again, because the next thing I remember is waking up here. How did I get here?”

“I found you and brought you upstairs.”

Yet watching him, she felt there was more. He was hiding something, but she didn’t know what. Had he been the one to save her?

She looked down at her coffee cup, trying to make sense of what had happened. Suddenly, she felt dizzy and lightheaded, and she wiped a hand across her eyes and shuddered, remembering the cold, dark embrace of the ocean.

Again she was surprised when strong, hard arms wrapped around her and lifted her from the chair.

“You need to rest. You’ve been through a terrible experience.”

Unable to fight the woozy feeling that came over her, she leaned against him and closed her eyes, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“You’ve been very kind, but I can’t stay here. I should go home,” she murmured, resting her head against his chest, hearing the steady beat of his heart. “I’m not usually this weak. I don’t know what my problem is.”

Somehow she knew these arms. How, she had no idea. She also knew his scent and it wrapped around her like a warm blanket, eased her. Her mind felt muddled and thick, she couldn’t get her brain to clear.

“Don’t think about it any more, not right now. I’m taking you back to bed and I want you to rest. We’ll talk more later. You said they drugged you, and you’re probably still feeling some of the effect.”

Taking her back to bed...would he stay with her? Stupid thoughts, really stupid. He was probably right and the drug was still affecting her brain.

He laid her in the huge bed and covered her with the blankets,

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cocooning her in the soft warmth. She opened her eyes to look up at him, still panicked by her near death experience.

“I’m afraid,” she admitted. “What if they come back to finish the job? I don’t even know who they were.”

He leaned forward and brushed a tendril of hair from her face. He was so close. Her gaze centered on his firm lips, so near hers.

“You’re safe here with me. No one’s going to hurt you. I won’t let anything happen to you, I promise. I’ll take care of everything. You just rest and get your strength back.”

Suddenly his lips were fastened to hers, claiming them and his tongue thrust into her mouth, sealing his promise.

Something inside her knew she had tasted these lips before, recognized their touch, his scent. She reached up to cup his face, but he moved away too quickly, standing over her, his expression shuttered as he looked down at her.

“You need to rest. We’ll talk more later. But you’re safe here. No one is going to get to you or harm you.”

She closed her eyes, sinking deeper into the pillow as he silently left the room. Maybe it was the drugs those men had given her, or her close call with death, but she just couldn’t seem to keep her eyes open, to concentrate. She felt so damned fragile right now. It was so unlike her to be this way.

She raised a hand to her lips. It was a kiss, nothing more than that, and she shouldn’t make too much out of it. He had only tried to comfort her.

Turning over, a smile curved her lips. If she thought about those hard lips claiming her, the fleeting, passionate look in his eyes just before he had kissed her, maybe she could keep the fear at bay just for a little while, until she could get her bearings again.

Thoughts swirled inside her head, fear, panic, desire, and passion, just before sleep dropped over her.

CHAPTER 4

He left the room as fast as he could, needing to get away from her, from himself. Quietly, he closed the door behind him. Moving through the living room, he made for his office. The first thing he needed to do was try to find out who the bastards were who had planned to kill her.

Pulling out his cell phone, he called the one person he trusted to ferret out the answers he required. Kace Martin had been with him a long time and now headed Danael's private security force that guarded the island and the sea lab facility.

Kace's story was far different from Danael's because the Sentinel had been there to save him and his parents. His father had been a senior biologist at the facility and at the time there had been quite a bit of piracy in the area. The Sentinel had managed to circumvent one particular raid on the biologist and his family, turning the criminals over to the Coast Guard.

Over the intervening years, Danael had taken Kace under his wing.

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When he'd shown an interest and aptitude in security techniques, he'd arranged for Kace to apprentice with one of the more trustworthy security technicians and had paid for his education as well. He had taken to it like a turtle to the sea.

Kace knew better than to ask Danael too many questions. Danael surmised that he knew more than he admitted about the Sentinel's activities, as well as the identity of the Sea Sentinel, but he never confronted him directly.

Yes, he would have Kace find out what information he could from the mainland and place several security people around the lighthouse, just in case. He wanted to take no chances with Elana's life.

After making the call, he leaned back in his chair and gazed out the window at the expanse of ocean, remembering that night so long ago when it had been him who had almost died. The night that had changed his life had been dark and windy as an unexpected storm gathered. The pirates had come upon them under cover of the storm. He'd only been sixteen at the time, near the same age as Kace when his family was attacked. He'd watched in horror as the bastards had raped his mother, then killed both his parents and tossed them to the side of the deck.

His father had ordered Danael to stay hidden below, until they had been able to determine who was on the other boat they heard getting closer. If there was trouble, he was to remain hidden no matter what happened. He had bitterly regretted the promise he'd made him at the time.

He remembered the night with vivid clarity, the impotence he had known, understanding that he was no match for the ten criminals that had boarded his parent's boat.

He had done the only thing he could, hoping to at least take some of them with him. While they were above, he'd located a can of kerosene and set fire to the ship. He figured he didn't have a chance in hell of making it off the boat alive anyway. They weren't going to get the boat

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or anything else of value that had belonged to his family to aid them in their criminal activities.

He'd watched as the fire roared into life and swept through the lower deck of the boat. He remembered hearing the yells from the deck, screams and angry commands. For one instant he was happy at the thought he might take some of them with him. They all deserved to burn in hell for what they had done to his parents.

A last ditch ingrained desire for survival had come over him as he began to inhale the thick, dense smoke. Finally, he'd staggered up the ladder and out onto the deck.

The ship was a blazing light in the middle of the dark ocean. He saw the vague outline of the marauder's boat as it propelled away. He would have to get off the ship, but he needed to find his parents first, to see if there was any glimmer of life left, any way to save them.

He found them both bloody and ravaged, and there had been no flicker of life. He remembered sitting there, staring at their faces, seeing the shock and rage forever etched there by cold death. It was a sight he would never forget, and it rode him hard all the years since then.

He'd been unable to move, to attempt to save himself, too overcome with the horror.

And then he had blanked out with no real memory of being saved by someone, or the journey to a world beneath the sea. He remembered waking up in an odd place, his whole body wrapped in bandages.

The newspapers had said he'd been missing for two weeks, but he knew time in that odd place beneath the sea moved differently than it did on the surface and that he had actually been gone a much longer period of time as he healed and became someone, or something, far different than he ever could have imagined.

But he'd made a promise to his parents and to himself. Never again would anyone suffer the ravages of the sea pirates or man-made perils

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in the Atlantic if there was anything he could do to stop them.

Over the years the folkloric legend had grown of the creature who fought the constant deadly danger of sea pirates and drug runners with superhuman powers. There was the odd witness account, but no one knew for certain. The Sea Sentinel was thought of more in the way of a Loch Ness monster, or the abominable snowman...just a legend to cover the lucky escape of a few seafarers from the clutches of piracy and death on the ocean.

There were some who swore by their accounts that there existed such a being, half-man half-sea creature, but few believed it was true.

At first, it had been difficult when he returned to the surface. He had unusual powers that needed to be masked until he could find a way to use them to help people. He'd learned to control the transmutation and it no longer overtook him at odd and embarrassing moments. Instead, he'd gone on to complete his schooling, move on to college, and then he'd returned to Fell Island. He was more mature than his counterparts. After all, he had lived five years of his life that they hadn't yet seen. He had experienced far more than they ever would—both good and bad. It set him apart from them, making it difficult to make close friends, knowing the secrets he had could never be shared with another.

From that day forward, he had accepted the role he'd set for himself when his parents were killed—leading two very different lives. He had not wanted more, had never sought the soft companionship of a woman in his life. He dated infrequently out of social and physical necessity, but nothing long-lasting, where someone would have the opportunity to discover his secrets.

He knew he had a reputation as being an eccentric, a recluse who did not socialize in the mainstream. His family's money and influence made it acceptable to the general public. The position and government connections with the sea lab allowed him greater latitude for his work,

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and he had been fulfilled, or so he thought. He hadn't wanted more, never needed it.

Until Elana Del Rio walked into his life. She made him feel the solitude in ways he had never expected. By giving in to those feelings the other night, he had made it far worse for himself.

The desire for her was now entrenched beneath his skin, a part of him. The touch of her soft, silky skin, the taste of her was now an aching memory etched deeply inside, and one he must find a way to deal with.

His cock had not softened since he'd taken her, and he had a feeling wanting her would never ease completely. He could find a way to have her transferred to one of the government facilities on the mainland so he'd be less tempted and not tested daily by seeing her, watching her.

He could do that. But he didn't want to. Watching her everyday, seeing her in the lighthouse, eased him somehow, made the solitude more palatable in some way. Knowing she was close by and that if he wanted, he could reach out and touch her. If he wanted.

How could he have known that it would not be him who brought her the danger, but the sea itself?

Yet, she had almost died because at the very instant she had needed him most, he had not been there for her. He could never forgive himself for that.

Just to know that she walked some place on this earth had to be enough.

He thought of her now as she lay in his bed, and a wave of primitive possessiveness ran through him. He warred with himself, the creature fighting the man inside. Both of them wanted her—the creature who had taken her, and the man who wanted to have her and protect her.

"Danael."

He stiffened as he heard the telepathic voice inside his head.

"You are troubled." It was the voice of his mentor from below the

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sea. *“Come to us and we will help you.”*

The council elders had appointed Kasipy his trainer and mentor, and he had taught him to use his new powers, as well as offering him even more. He had taught him about love and acceptance.

The Nadiri were very sexual creatures, as well as powerful. Kasipy had taught him to be unafraid of his desires. Only by accepting what he was would he be able to command his emotions.

He shook his head in denial. It had been a long time since he'd visited Nadiriana, the city at the bottom of the sea.

Danael had developed a strong tie with Kasipy during his time in Nadiriana. There was no wrong when it came to need and desire in Nadiriana, only innocence and pleasure.

Kasipy had wanted him to stay, but the Nadiri were not truly his people, and Danael was constantly drawn to the need to avenge his parents' death, to make sure that no other experienced what he and his family had. And he now had the power to make a difference.

Yet even upon his return to the surface, he'd found he no longer fully belonged here, and was now of two minds, finding each day was a struggle to maintain a foot in both worlds. But he had eventually found the strength.

“I cannot return now, Kas, I am needed here. Soon. I will come to you soon.”

He felt the strong presence leave. Kas would never push him, allowing him to make his own choices. Yet, Danael felt a responsibility to him. His life in Nadiriana was so far removed from his human existence here on the surface, he sometimes thought it was fantasy.

Until he would dive into the sea and the fluid oneness would overtake him, and he became almost a part of the water. Then the mind of that part of him that was Nadiri would take the forefront.

Here, as a man, with the human desires always present inside him, he was attracted to and wanted Elana Del Toro. But Kas was a part of

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him as well, and he could expect no human woman to understand his responsibility to both worlds.

It was Kasipy who had plucked him from the sea and spirited him back to Nadiriana. It was Kasipy who had pleaded to the elders for his life and had taken his training upon himself.

Kas had taught him so many things, so much about himself. He had offered him love and acceptance and understanding without judgment. He remembered their last bittersweet encounter just before he returned to the surface. In Nadiriana, five Earth years had passed, and the last two he had spent with Kas as close as two beings of any culture could be. Kas had not only been his benefactor and his teacher, but his lover.

He remembered that last night in Nadiriana. Kas had kissed him with a passion born of impending separation, and Danael had responded in the same way...touching and holding each other in the last hours before the parting, need driving them. His ridged cock had brushed against Kas and he'd felt him shudder with the desire, both knowing it would be a long time before they would see each other again, if ever.

Kas had wonderful, knowledgeable hands, and he'd used them on Danael that night, imprinting his memory deeply. Kas's hands had stroked him to full arousal, until he was hard and rippling with the need to be enclosed in Kas's tight, hot passage.

Kas had sensed his need, as he always did, and turned away, sliding to the watery bed on his knees. He'd turned to look at Danael over his shoulder and Danael had seen the desire mirrored in the dilated pale blue film of his eyes.

"Take me, Danael. I want to remember what it feels like to be tied with you before you leave me."

He went to Kas, stroking his cheeks, pressing between the crease, felt Kas's desire rising. Pulling Kas to the lip of their bed, he began to stroke his cock along Kas's opening, the touch of wet skin on skin.

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Sensitive gills rubbing caused sensation to ripple through his body.

He felt the natural oily essence of his foreplay arousal seep from beneath the ridges on his cock. It would lubricate Kas's opening, and spread over his cock in preparation of the sexual penetration. It contained an ingredient to heighten the pleasure, to ease the passage.

He brushed his fingers over his hard cock, smearing the liquid. As he entered Kas with one hand, he used the other to pet the sensitive scales on his back, making Kas shudder and moan at the sensations.

Danael had no scales as the true Nadiri exhibited, but he knew when he petted Kas it drove him to experience greater pleasure. So, as he prepared Kas to take him, he stroked over his body, driving him to undulate beneath him with the twofold pleasure Danael drew from him.

Finally, Danael removed his fingers from Kas's rectum and centered his cock, pressing firmly, opening him to receive the ridged, glistening member. His movements were slow. He wanted to remember the feel of Kas long after they parted.

Hot sensation fill Danael as he tunneled deeper, withdrew, then pressed inward, watching as Kas's passage parted, accepting the silvery cock deep inside.

When he was fully embedded, he peeled back the scaled sheath and gripped Kas's steely, sensitive penis with both hands.

"Are you ready?" he rasped. Pleasure consumed him at the tight grip of Kas's ass on his length. God, he needed to come, and the poignancy of knowing it could be the last time they shared this closeness made it all the more intense. He wanted to savor Kas's feel, holding off the need to climax. He wanted to experience the sensations, the closeness, the love.

Kas arched against him, drawing his cock deeper, his balls caressing his flesh. "Do it, Danael. Make me yours one last time. I want to remember you inside me."

Danael pulled out and slammed in, his hands pulling in hard strokes

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down Kas's cock. He found the rhythm, fast and deep, time and again, pulling from Kas, giving to Kas, the Nadiri who had accepted him as his own and given him back his life.

He felt the orgasm building, both in himself and in Kas, and he drove faster, harder, deeper. Kas mewled the high pitch of the pleasure tone, and Danael could see his gills gape open, pulling in the air, the scent of their essences.

The throbbing love tone drove Danael's passion higher as he stroked in and out of Kas's passage, felt the friction, his cock spewing more of the oily substance inside him.

And then Kas shouted as he came in Danael's hand, sending Danael over the edge. His semen gushed into Kas. Again and again he continued to stroke Kas, wanting to give him as much of himself as possible. Tunneling his own cock in and out of Kas's now slippery passage, consuming the heated, vibrating sensations, branding his memory with every touch and scent, and taste of the night.

They had slept wrapped in each other's arms that night, kissing and stroking, not knowing if they would ever again share the closeness they had experienced in their short time together.

Danael had understood that when he returned to the surface, it would be a shock to his system. He'd understood the changes that would take place, but he had not realized how much he would miss Nadiriana and ache for Kasipy.

For five years he'd lived as Nadiri, loved and walked among them. Learned to sleep comfortably in the water-filled beds, to consume oxygen from the water, to glide through the water as second nature, passing through tunnels leading from one section of Nadiriana to others. Kas had taught him to communicate on a different frequency with the other creatures who inhabited the sea. Their shared nest had been home to him.

Returning to the surface had required severe self-control on his part.

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To again be human, to live as a human, a much younger one than when he had departed Nadiriana, took all his strength and determination. He'd left a piece of himself in Nadiriana with Kas. Yet he'd taken a part of Kas with him as well.

There were two parts to him—the Nadiri and the human—and the combination made him the Sea Sentinel, a being who saved lives and punished the wrongdoers.

He'd loved Kasipy as a Nadiri, and he cared for Elana as a human, yet he had taken Elana as a Nadiri. The two halves of himself were so seamlessly melded together, he could no longer separate them in his mind as he had once tried to do. Had it been because he wanted to deny a part of himself? Suddenly, he realized that was exactly what he had done. That was how he'd managed to live all these years in the guise of a human. But he wasn't human—not really.

Yet he no longer knew who or what he was, or what he desired. He was not completely Nadiri, nor was he completely human. He had desired both Kas and Elana, and had taken them both. He deserved neither.

Vaulting up from his chair, he strode over to the window to stare out at the sea.

He had a duty to protect the people he loved. He had no choice but to remain alone.

When he had left Kasipy and Nadiriana, he had never expected to return, but there were times when the pull was just too strong and the need to be touched and held by someone who understood his nature and accepted him for who he was drew him back to the city beneath the sea. It had been a long time since he'd visited Nadiriana, and suddenly he yearned for its non-judgmental atmosphere, the peace and acceptance he had always known there, and the safety. He wanted to take Elana there, to keep her safe. He wanted Elana to know Kasipy and the life he had found there.

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Impossible dreams. Nirvana did not exist for him. And it made him feel like he was ripped in half. Elana could not survive beneath the pressure of the sea, and Kas could not survive above the depths of the ocean.

He ran a hand over his tired eyes. He'd made his choice long ago. It was now up to him to stand by it. He must return Elana to her home; he must let her go.

CHAPTER 5

Elana resurfaced through waves of deep unconsciousness feeling slightly more alert than she had been earlier. This time she was alone. Her gaze was drawn to the chair where Danael had sat the last time, and she saw a pile of neatly folded clothing.

Sweeping back the blankets, she rose from the bed and padded over to the chair. They looked like her clothes from her house. They weren't the clothes she had been wearing the night she was kidnapped, obviously. That clothing was probably now resting at the bottom of the sea someplace. She wished she could remember more of that night.

Circuiting the room, she stopped in front of a door and opened it, finding what she needed—a large bathroom that looked like it belonged in a spa. The bathtub was a huge oval black disc with gold accessories and gray marble steps leading up to it. On the other side of the spacious room was a walk-in shower that looked like it could hold a party of people and still be comfortable, again with an array of accessories and

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implements, many of which she had no idea what they would be used for.

With the aches and pains in her body, she decided a long soak in a decadent tub such as this one was the exact thing she needed right now. That and a massage, but that was asking too much, she guessed. Although she knew she wouldn't mind having Danael's hands on her body in that particular manner.

Her fingertips moved to her lips, tracing their fullness, remembering that kiss just before he left her. She knew it had been to soothe her because of her panic over her near-death experience, but that kiss had definitely made her yearn to experience much more with him.

She shook her head and smiled. Regrettably, she didn't expect anything like that to ever happen. Reaching over, she turned on the faucets of the bathtub and then looked around. She doubted she would find any sort of feminine smelling bath oils, but in surveying a shelf near the tub, she did see an array of multi-colored bottles lining a shelf.

Walking over, she examined the various bottles, then picked up one bottle of glowing amber liquid and pulled out the stopper and inhaled. *Mmmmm, that smells nice.* Hints of warm earthy ambiance assailed her.

She turned back to the tub and poured some in. Immediately, a multitude of bubbles began to form. Again, she surveyed the room as the tub filled and located some large, fluffy beige towels and a matching robe. She walked over, chose two towels and pulled the robe from where it hung on the back of the door.

Inhaling the fragrance, she realized the robe must belong to Danael. She could smell his lingering scent on the material and she licked her lips, remembering his masculine taste.

Finally, returning back to the tub, she shed the sweat pants and sweatshirt, checked the temperature of the water and then slipped into the tub. *Oh, that feels good, really good.* She leaned back against the rim and allowed her body to soften and absorb the wet heat of the

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water.

Her mind wandered as she lay there, remembering, traveling through her thoughts, trying to understand everything that had occurred.

Suddenly a spasm seemed to rock her and she shuddered with pleasure, as though someone had tapped a tuning fork, and ripple after ripple echoed throughout her body. Some speck of memory shot through her of being filled by a cock that wasn't human, yet pleasuring her so deeply she spasmed with the phantom of an orgasm just at the mere thought.

Her eyes shot open, her body trembled as the odd sensations passed through her. The flash of memory was gone, but the vestiges of desire still clung to her. What was that?

There was something there, some glimmer of a heated encounter that settled just below the surface of conscious memory. Her hands slid along her body, over the firm mounds of her breasts; her nipples twisted into tight nubs as the sensual echoes washed over her.

She leaned back, wanting that memory to fully reveal itself. Who was it who had given her so much pleasure? And it was pleasure, because the way her body was responding said it couldn't be anything else. Closing her eyes, she leaned back and allowed her hands to stroke over her slippery abdomen, down across her stomach to her mound, and then she slid two fingers into her pussy, trying to revive that fleeting speck of memory and bring it back to the surface of her mind.

The lingering scent of the bubbles whirled around her and through her, reminiscent of—something, or someone.

Her fingers stroked inside her pussy, driving her passion higher. She remembered the press of a body, but there was something different about it. It wasn't like other men, it was more, so much more. Her fingers thrust slowly in and out while her other hand fingered and tugged at her nipples and the heat throbbed inside her.

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She remembered touching a cock, unlike any she had ever felt before, with deep ridges along its length. And she recollected those ridges rippling inside her pussy, bringing her more pleasure than she had ever known. She felt the cock spreading her, the friction as he thrust and ground against her, the pulsing heat of him. She arched, her fingers buried inside her as memory began to engulf her.

Who was it? Why could she only experience the sensations? Why couldn't she see his face? She could only perceive the feel of him, his scent, his strength, cool darkness surrounding them both.

She swirled a finger over her clit, needing the memories. Her body opened to the sensations they invoked. Arching upward, she searched for release, for the moment of rapture she had felt when that cock had pressed deep, pulsing with release as her body wrapped around it, sheathing it with her own wet arousal.

She tried to stifle the moan of pleasure as she exploded at the fragment of intense erotic imagery, pulsed around her fingers, spilling her orgasm into the pleasurable figment of a memory tinged with erotic sensations.

Elana dropped back into the water and slid her fingers from her pussy, shuddering with one final spasm.

Had it all been just a dream? Her overactive fertile imagination taking over? Was her clouded impression that of the man who had saved her from drowning?

It was gone, the memory dissipated, yet her body still pulsed, still remembering the presence and power of a cock like no other inside her.

She sank beneath the water, submerging herself into its moist, soothing blanket of warmth. Maybe she was trying too hard. The vague recollection would clear and return, just as this fragment had appeared, if she didn't try so damn hard to remember it. But there was something, she knew it, something important from last night that was blanked out, but it was something seared into her unconscious, and eventually she

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would uncover it.

Finally, feeling clean and refreshed, she rose from the tub and wrapped the towels around her. Once dried, she wound one towel around her hair and dropped the other, donning the robe.

Walking into the bedroom, she stopped abruptly.

Danael was standing there, looking more attractive than a man should, particularly when a woman was standing there half-naked.

“Hello,” he said and smiled, his eyes roving over her.

She felt a tingle of recognition race through her. “Hi, I hope you don’t mind. I really needed a bath. And I feel so much better.”

“No, no. I would have suggested it, but you were so exhausted earlier, I thought you needed sleep more than a bath.”

“Thanks. I am feeling better. I’ll just get dressed and then, if you can arrange it, I guess I better be getting back.”

His eyes darkened as he looked at her. “Tell you what...you get dressed and then we’ll talk. Dinner is almost ready. Are you hungry?”

Suddenly she realized exactly how hungry she was as her empty stomach rumbled. “Yes, as a matter of fact I am.”

He smiled. “Good, then take your time and whenever you’re ready come on out and we’ll eat. There are some things we need to talk about before you think about going back to the lighthouse.”

“All right.” She nodded. She wasn’t really in any particular hurry to leave just at the moment. Things would go back to normal, and she’d probably never see him again, at least not in any intimate fashion, like this. “I won’t be long.”

“As I said, take your time.” He turned and left the room, closing the door softly behind him.

Elana turned back to the chair where her clothes rested. She had forgotten to ask him how they’d gotten there. She could ask him about it later.

She dropped the robe to the floor and began to dress. Then she

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returned to the bathroom to dry her hair.

Peering into the mirror, she looked for signs of her narrow escape from death. Other than being a little pale, she didn't think she looked too much the worse for wear.

A tender spot on her arm had her rubbing at it. Pushing back the sleeve of her shirt, she examined the skin and noticed a small puncture mark. She shuddered at the thought that it must be from the injection one of them gave her while she was still unconscious.

Swiftly, she turned away from the mirror and the painful recollections. A darkness seemed to descend over her as she realized those men were still out there, possibly waiting for her to resurface. What was she going to do? She hadn't even gotten a very good look at them in the murky evening light.

She hurried out of the bathroom, switching off the light as she left, not wanting to be alone right now.

As she stepped into the living room, she could smell the fragrant scents of dinner. Danael appeared in the doorway, looking wonderful and domestic with a dish towel in one hand and his white shirt sleeves rolled back, exposing his tanned forearms. Her stomach fluttered, but this time it wasn't fear that caused it.

He smiled and her heart stuttered, yet warmth invaded her, making her feel not quite so alone.

"I hope you're hungry."

She nodded. "Yes, I find that I am."

He walked over to her, raising a hand to cup her face, studying her closely.

"Are you all right? No one can get to you here, you know that."

"I know. It's just that—well—I guess whatever drug they gave me is wearing off and it's all so frightening. I don't know who those men were and I wouldn't be able to identify them if I saw them." Her gaze searched his. "What if they come back? What if they realize I didn't die

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out there?”

He dropped his hand, sat down next to her, and encircled her waist, hugging her close. After a moment, he stood and offered her a hand, then guided her into the dining room.

“I managed to accomplish quite a bit while you were asleep. I sent some of my security people over to the lighthouse and down to the cove to look for any clues.”

He seated her at the table and she looked up at him. “You did that?”

He sat across from her. “You didn’t think I was going to let you go back there without making sure you’d be safe did you?”

Elana shook her head. “I guess I didn’t think. I lead a pretty quiet life and this is something that’s just so out of my league.”

He leaned over and lifted the lid on her dish and her mouth watered. “My security people will watch for any signs of intruders. No one has been to the lighthouse. I sent one of my assistants in to get you some clean clothing. I hope what she brought back was all right.”

Elana nodded. “She did great. I wondered how my own clothes had gotten here. Thank you for thinking of it. I’m sorry to put you out this way.”

His dark eyes lasered into her. “You are not putting me out. I’m glad I’ve been able to help you out in your time of need. I wouldn’t want anything to happen to you, Elana. We’ll find the men who did this. Until then, I want to make certain you’re safe.”

He did make her feel protected. As she gazed into the green depths of his eyes, all she could think about was making love to this man, feeling him against her skin, touching him. She didn’t know where that other memory came from, but she’d fantasized about Danael since she’d first come to the sea lab, yet had always known he was out of reach.

To be sitting here at this dinner table with him across from her, to have felt his lips on hers, to have tasted him...it felt like a dream. Yet

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on some level she knew it was real, and that if he hadn't directly saved her life, he had been instrumental in taking care of her from that moment on.

He might have a reputation for being reclusive and odd, for demanding the best of the employees at the lab, but he was also a gentle and good person. And she was definitely attracted to him in ways she shouldn't be. Technically, he was her employer and it wasn't very smart of her to even be considering any other kind of relationship with the man. Yet she couldn't help being drawn to him.

She lifted her fork and turned her gaze from the mesmerizing impact of the sizzling green of his eyes.

That other mental image again surfaced. Who was the man who haunted her thoughts? Someone had made love to her the night before, but why couldn't she visualize him? She wanted to remember. She knew it wasn't one of the men who had kidnapped her because her sense was that it occurred after she had jumped from the ship and it had not been rape. And whomever it was had saved her life and brought her to shore.

Closing her eyes, she inhaled deeply and that only served to disperse the mental image. Opening her eyes, she stared down at her plate.

Suddenly, her life had become so very complicated and she wasn't sure how she was going to cope with it.

CHAPTER 6

He was playing with fire and he knew it. He should take her back to her home tonight. He put security in place to protect her and he shouldn't keep her; the temptation was too great.

Yet as he watched her standing at the iron rail of the balcony, he couldn't help wanting to be just a little bit selfish, just for tonight.

He'd built this house after his return from college. It was his retreat, his fortress, his home, the only place he could be himself, where he had combined the elements of his human life with that of the Nadiriana culture. It was the only place he felt comfortable. He'd never brought another person here.

Elana thought she put him out by sleeping in what she assumed was his bedroom. He'd had the main part of the house structured as any home on the surface would be and there were times he used the bed she slept in. But more as a remembrance of his life before the change had taken place.

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Those years in Nadiriana had altered him forever, and below the facade of the human house were the rooms fashioned after his nest dwelling below the sea. They were the rooms that brought him comfort, where he spent most of his time. It was the remembrance of the simple, peaceful existence of the Nadiri that made all of this bearable. It was the human need inside him, the blood of his true people, and the desire to help them, that kept him here.

The Nadiri had always made him feel welcome. They had saved his life, gifted him with the abilities to help his own people. For many years he had felt no longer a part of the human half of his spirit, yet he couldn't bring himself to give up this world completely. Something inside him wouldn't let that happen.

He longed for the wisdom of Kasipy, for his acceptance of all of who he was. But Kasipy couldn't survive here in this world; he belonged in Nadiriana. Danael had returned there twice since his return to the surface and Kas had always accepted and welcomed him, made him feel a part of something he couldn't feel back on the surface.

He had limited his visits because the urge to stay there, the need to share his life with someone, was stronger each time. He'd never found another to fill that void as Kas had always done. But as he now looked at Elana, he began to wonder if there was someone who could accept both parts of him here in this world.

She'd allowed the Nadiri in him to make love to her and had seemed to revel in it, never looking at him in horror, but rather in pure, unadulterated lust. Could she possibly understand his secrets; could he trust her?

She turned and the breeze pulled at her hair.

"This is so beautiful here. I can understand how you wouldn't want to leave it."

"Can you?" He walked toward her and sifted his fingers through her silky hair. "I've never shared my home with anyone else. You're the

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first guest.”

He saw the surprise reflected in her multi-faceted gaze; her eyes were like a prism of color, reflecting varied intense shades, blending one to the other like a bright rainbow.

“No one else?” She seemed to lean unconsciously into his hand, rubbing her soft cheek against his palm.

What would she do if he should suddenly revert to the sea creature right now? Would she be as accepting of him without the haze of certain death clinging to her?

He raised his other hand to cup her face and drew closer. “No one else,” he confirmed as his gaze centered on her lush lips, then swooped down to claim them, unable to resist.

She allowed him to savor her taste and he couldn’t help himself, he needed her. No one on the surface had ever tempted him as Elana Del Rio. Something about her called to the soul locked inside his body. He’d fought it for so long and had been reasonably successful in maintaining an emotional distance from her.

But she had already accepted the Nadiri that was a part of himself. Could she now accept the man? As a man he wanted to know her, to be with her.

She accepted his touch as eagerly as she had done the night before. Yet he had taken the memory of the creature from her, afraid she would be horrified at the knowledge she had let some other being entrance into her beautiful body.

He released her, afraid of pushing her into something she didn’t truly desire. She was his guest and, as much as he wanted her, he could not let her think she must pay for his hospitality with her body.

He saw the question in her eyes, the blush of color in her cheeks. He turned his gaze away to look out to sea. “You’re the first person I’ve trusted to be here with me.”

“You’re a very secretive man, Danael.”

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“Is that what people say?”

He heard her soft chuckle. “Well, that’s one of the things they say.”

He smiled. “You’re very tactful.”

She moved away from him and walked toward the gold telescope setting to the side. As he watched she ran a slender hand over the smooth surface.

“What do you look at, Danael? Who do you watch?” she asked softly.

Something told him she already knew where it focused. He walked over to her and put his hands on her shoulders, and she leaned against him. He could smell her subtle feminine fragrance. He leaned down to nuzzle at her neck and felt her shudder in response.

“Who do you think I watch?” He pushed the collar of her shirt away to graze his lips across her collarbone. Yet it wasn’t enough, and he began to unbutton her shirt, needed to reveal more of her succulent flesh to his perusal.

“You’ve been watching me,” she gasped out as she arched against him.

“Yes,” he rasped as he pulled the shirt from her arms, baring her to the night breeze. Looking down, he saw her nipples were puckered tightly. He reached around to cup her breast, heard her hiss and then moan. He firmed his grip and teased her beautiful, dusky nipples, then slid his hands downward across her ribs to her abdomen.

“Why, Danael? Why have you been watching me?”

His hand unfastened the closing of her trousers and slid the zipper partially downward. “Does it bother you that I watch?”

She shook her head. “It should, but it doesn’t. What do you see when you watch me?”

He slid a hand beneath the hem of her panties, felt her hot, satiny skin, and moved downward, sifting through her silky curls, across her engorged wet lips. She gasped as he entered her, and he heard her catch

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her breath as he slid two fingers deeply inside her slick, warm channel.

"I see temptation when I look through the scope. I see beauty and perfection."

"Oh, God, Danael. I want you."

"Are you sure?" He slid from her opening, not wanting to part from her, but needing to regain some semblance of composure. "I want to make love to you." He couldn't deny it, he needed to have her, to be inside her. Right or wrong he needed her tonight.

"I don't have a telescope," Elana said, "but I watch this island every night, wanting you, knowing it could only ever be a dream. I shouldn't, but I can't help myself."

He understood only too well because he felt the same. He turned her toward him and looked down into her beautiful, dilated gaze.

"I don't know that it can be more than this one night, Elana, but I want you more than I can say. I need you. Are you really sure you want me to make love to you?"

She clasped his face with her hands and brought his head down to her. "If I realized nothing else last night, it was how fleeting life can be. I don't want to waste a moment. Please make love to me."

He needed no second request as he swooped her up in his arms and carried her inside the house, striding toward the bedroom.

Carefully, he laid her on the bed, then removed her shoes and divested her of her trousers and shirt.

"So beautiful," he said as he leaned down to place a kiss at the center of her abdomen. His tongue tasted the concave of her stomach, then he traveled upward over her ribs, to her full breasts, savoring her flavor, the texture of her skin.

Her fingers sifted through his hair, encouraging his exploration of her body, arching upward.

While his mouth traveled across her skin, his hands smoothed down along her legs, opened her for his attentions, the inner softness of her

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thighs exposed. He felt the moist heat of her pleasure as his fingers danced across the surface of her exposed mound, felt her silky texture, damp with need, urging him onward.

His hands and mouth changed places as he kneaded the flesh of her breasts. He clamped down on her pussy, tasting her creamy essence, lapping at her desire. His tongue found her needy clit, hard and engorged. He sucked it deep into his mouth, swirling his tongue over it, heard her whimpers become deeper, more needy.

He released her hard, pink nub and sank his tongue between her fleshy, silken lips into her hot, wet vagina, felt the pulse deepen, felt her climax throb through her, as her body tightened all around him.

“Oh, God, Danael...Danael, please, I need you to fuck me. I need you inside me. Please,” she moaned.

Slowly, he pulled from her, divested himself of his clothing, pulled a condom from the drawer, and sheathed himself before coming to her.

He didn't want it to be as he'd taken her the night before—half man, half Nadiri—purely animalistic. He wanted her to know the human pleasure, to be loved as she deserved to be loved.

Slowly, he entered her, felt her heat glove him tightly. His hands gripped her hips and he looked down to watch as her body accepted his smooth human presence.

It wasn't the same primitive drive, it was a need to love her, to feel her pleasure, not just take her. The warm friction of her feminine heat closed around him, driving him higher toward the abyss of his own need.

Her flesh sweetly enclosed each inch as he pushed deeper, opened to accept him, and he felt the willing grasp of her body as she took him balls deep within her.

He paused, reveling in the pleasure of being so entrenched inside her, feeling her pulse around him. This was the mating of humans, that side of him claiming civilization. He reveled in the moment. For the

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first time in a long time, the feeling of rightness as a human claimed him, drenched him with the pleasure of intimacy with another human.

He undulated inside her, wanting to give her as much pleasure as possible. The men and women he'd taken to bed over the years since he'd returned to the surface had strictly been about sex and nothing more. But this was so much more than sex; it was about souls touching, bodies combining to become one, needing to meld, and the rightness of contact with another.

Slowly, he began to thrust, and she met each of his movements. Her hot, sweet responses drove him higher. He claimed her mouth as he drove inside her, their dance becoming more frantic, faster, harder as they both reached beyond for the shattering of stars.

He drank of her scream of completion, relished it as his own seed spurted forth in answer. His arms wrapped around her slick body, trying to blend them as one—one orgasm—one pleasure—one body.

Suddenly, it was primitive, the primitive claiming of one mate for the other, the need to brand, to mark her as his and only as his. He drove deep inside her and her legs wrapped around him in acceptance. A powerful surge of possessiveness enveloped him as she clung to him, allowing the waves of emotion to wash over them.

For long moments they lay that way, their bodies linking them as one, and then finally, with regret, he slid from inside her, drew her up beside him, and pulled the blankets over them.

He drew her close as she drifted off to sleep. He was going to have to let her go. He had no choice. The only way to protect her was to separate from her. He could not expect her to accept what he was and the danger associated with him. He would use his connections to find her a position with one of the government agencies he worked with on the other side of the country, far from Fell Island.

His life was too complicated, his emotions not wholly human. He could not have turned away from her this one night, but he knew he

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teetered at the brink of destruction if he attempted to pursue the relationship. Much as it had been with Kas. Kas had wanted him to stay, to be a part of his life, and had offered him a devotion and acceptance he could never find anywhere else. But the needs of his human side wouldn't allow him to stay with Kas. Even so, the presence of the Nadiri would not allow him to claim Elana.

Here he was with another he could love and who he knew would love him given half the chance. And again, he would walk away. He was destined to be alone. He knew it and had accepted it for what it was.

His arms tightened. How was he going to let her go? How could he let love walk out the door a second time? But to let her into his complicated life would put her in even more danger than she was right now. He couldn't take the chance.

Tomorrow he would send her back to the lighthouse, and his security team would keep her safe. He was only ever meant to experience happiness at a distance. These last few days were but a taste of the dream he was not meant to have, and he had to be firm. Too many lives depended on his attention to duty. He had no choice but to let her go.

CHAPTER 7

Upon awakening, she found she was alone in the huge bed. This time she remembered everything that had happened to her the night before. Danael had made such beautiful love to her, she knew it was something she could never forget.

Slipping out of the bed, she donned the robe from the night before and padded into the living room and surveyed the room. She looked toward the balcony and saw him standing there.

Sometimes when she looked at him, he seemed so alone, so remote, even when she saw him at the lab surrounded by a group of people. There was something about him, some barrier he kept in place that seemed to keep people out of his personal space.

But last night those barriers had dropped and he had allowed her to move as close as anyone could get to another individual. For her it had been so beautiful. But what about him? What had he felt? Had it been just another one-night stand for him?

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Taking a deep breath, she walked across the room and through the open door to step out onto the patio beyond. He must have heard her because he turned around and leaned his hip against the scrolled railing.

His eyes surveyed her as she stood there at the doorway. His expression was veiled, emotionless, like cool, glittering emeralds, as he studied her. It was not the look she wanted to see and it made her uneasy.

“Good morning,” she said and offered him a small, nervous smile.

“Good morning. Are you hungry? I’ve kept a plate warming for you in the oven. And the coffee is ready.”

He moved toward her, then veered around her as though afraid of touching her. She turned and trailed him inside.

When they arrived at the kitchen, he motioned for her to sit. He picked up a potholder, then leaned down to pull the plate from the oven and placed it on the table before her. He walked to the counter and poured two cups of coffee, then came back to sit at the table.

This silence, his attitude, made her stomach tighten, and she quickly picked up the coffee cup and took a quick gulp.

“I’ve made arrangements for you to return home today.”

It was the death knell she had expected, yet had hoped not to hear. His comment was like being drenched in ice cold water. She blinked and stared at him, unable to think of something to say, some quick, light retort.

They had just made passionate love mere hours ago and now he was sending her on her way.

She took another gulp from her coffee cup, trying to equalize her emotions, to cover her feelings of regret. She looked at the table, down at her plate, anywhere but at him. What did she say to that?

“I see,” she finally answered, her voice quiet. At last gaining control of her emotions, she looked up at him. “When should I be ready to leave?” She rose to her feet, hoping that he was unable to read the

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pain swirling inside her. If he wanted her gone, then gone she would be.

He also rose to his feet and they stared at each other across the table, the air around them thick with tension. She had the feeling there was so much that was not being said.

“You have to go.”

A spasm of pain ran through her at the words. “Yes, so you said.” Had he felt nothing last night? Had she imagined it all?

She straightened her shoulders and whirled away, intent on getting away from him before she lost the bit of control she maintained.

She almost made it. His hard grip on her arm halted her, but she couldn’t make herself turn around.

“It’s not what you think,” he said from behind her.

“And what do I think?” It was difficult to make herself utter the words around the tight ball of unrequited longing lodged in her throat.

She attempted to move forward, to get away from him, but his grip tightened on her arm, halting her escape.

“Being with you last night was like nothing I’ve experienced with a woman before. But my life is complicated and I can’t let you be a part of it.”

A flash of anger shot through her and she ripped her arm from his grip and turned to confront him.

“Do you think I’m weak, Danael? That I might shatter at the least obstacle?”

“No, of course not. But there’s a part of my life you can’t possibly understand, a part of *me* that can never be changed. Not even by a woman as special as you.”

She shook her head. “I don’t get it. Why did you make love to me last night? I thought it was a mutual attraction on both our parts.”

“It was,” he asserted. “Very much so. But it can’t continue. It can’t happen again, no matter how much you or I might want it. I have

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commitments, and they're dangerous. I won't draw you into them."

"Very well. You want me gone, I'll be ready within the hour. I'm not going to change your mind. You and your secrets and your complicated life are safe from me."

Without allowing him to say another word and making it all that much worse, she hurried into the bedroom, closed the door and as quickly as possible dressed and prepared for her departure.

When she was ready, she strode back out into the living room. He was waiting for her, his eyes dark and a worried expression on his face.

She straightened her shoulders. "I'm ready to go. Thank you for your assistance in helping me the other night. I'm sure you saved my life." She could only hope the swirling emotions inside her were well-cloaked by her self-control.

He took a step toward her, then halted, shoving his hands into his pockets. "The launch is waiting at the landing below. It will take you across to the mainland. You'll see my security people around the lighthouse. They're in place for your protection until we can get this all sorted out."

She nodded, but said nothing. What more was there to say? They had been as intimate as two people could be, yet he was sending her away.

He pulled his hands from his pockets and moved toward her, about to place a hand on her shoulder, but she flinched away. She could not bear for him to touch her right now. It was too painful.

He dropped his hand and instead walked toward the far wall, near the kitchen and pressed a button. A door skillfully hidden within the wall slid open. She walked toward it and they both stepped inside. It was an elevator that apparently would take them down to where the launch awaited her.

As she waited for it to descend, a sense of déjà vu spread through her, making her shiver. The first time she had seen him was in an

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elevator when she'd first come to the lab. Would this be the last time she'd ever be this close to him?

When the door opened, they stepped out into the brightly lit morning. Again, he stopped her from hurrying out along the dock to the waiting boat.

Gathering her courage, she turned to look up at him. This was the last time she would share this type of intimacy with him—she saw it in his eyes and regret filled her for what might have been.

"If you need me, turn on the small beacon light at the top of the lighthouse. I'll see that help gets to you as quickly as possible."

"I'm sure that won't be necessary. You've said you've placed security guards around the house. I expect I'll be quite safe. Besides, I don't think that light works anyway."

She felt his hand tighten. "I had it checked yesterday by one of my own people and a new switch installed in the house. It works. If anyone gets past my security team—"

She pulled her arm from his grasp, unable to bear the closeness any longer. "Don't worry about me. You've done your duty to one of your employees. More than anyone should expect. I'll be just fine." She stuck out her hand. "Good-bye, Danael, and thank you for everything."

As she watched, he stared down at her outstretched hand. She saw a flare of emotion pass through his expression. Before she could react, his arms enclosed her against him. His lips swooped down on hers, searing her with a passion so filled with desire she thought she would shatter.

As fast as he claimed the kiss, he released her and stepped back.

"Take care of yourself, Elana."

She blinked and tried to catch her breath, attempting to gain enough composure to respond. "Y-you, too, Danael."

Keeping her back straight, she pivoted around and walked toward the boat. If she looked back she didn't think she'd be able to leave, not

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without begging him to think about what he was doing. And that was something she could never do.

* * *

Three days later Elana stood on her balcony staring across the expanse of water to Fell Island. It was almost as if it had all been some kind of weird dream.

The people she worked with had apparently been told she was down with a case of the flu, thereby making it unnecessary to field any uncomfortable questions. There would be no more solitary walks on the beach, at least until they caught the people responsible for her kidnapping.

This morning the head of security had sent her a note asking her to come to his office at the end of the day. He wanted as much detail as she could remember about the assault in the cove and for her to describe the boat she had been on before she managed to escape. She'd spent two hours with him and was now exhausted after trying to remember the details he wanted to hear from her.

There was so little she could tell him. It had been evening, and when the men had gotten close enough, it was from behind. Then she'd been knocked out and drugged. Trying to describe the boat presented the same problem, because her only concern had been to find a way off of it. Everything she remembered was more shadows, like she'd hovered on the fringe of a nightmare. Probably the effects of whatever drug they had given her. Nothing was very clear in her memory. Except that she'd known she was going to die. She'd heard the men's voices through the door, but she doubted it was enough to be able to identify anyone.

She hadn't been much help to the head of security. He also seemed quite interested in the identity of the man who had saved her. Unfortunately, she had even less details to give about him. She could see the disappointment in his face, yet he didn't push her to try to

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remember, simply encouraged her to contact him if anything should come to her.

She had seen Danael once during that time, from a distance and only in passing. It hurt to know he could dismiss what they had shared that night so easily. But should she really be surprised? He was sought after by some of the most beautiful women in the world, why would he feel compelled to settle for an unknown scientist employed at the lab?

Shaking her head, she turned and walked back inside. It served no purpose to dwell on what might have been.

Elana went to her room and prepared for bed. As she slipped on her nightgown, she heard an odd noise. Tilting her head, she listened more intently and heard something like glass breaking. It definitely came from somewhere within the house.

Her heart thumped in her chest. If it was one of the security guards, they wouldn't need to be sneaky about entering the house; they would just ring the bell or announce in some way that they were there. No, this was someone different and she knew whomever it was probably was after her.

Quickly pulling on her robe and tying the belt, she eased open the door to her room, then stepped into the hallway. She had nothing to use as a weapon. Her best course was to try to make it out of the house.

Peering down the stairway, she couldn't see anyone lurking nearby. There were no shadows to indicate movement. Perhaps they were now in the kitchen at the back of the house, which meant she had a chance of making it to the door. Slowly, and as quietly as possible, she tried to make her way down the stairs to the front door. If she could get outside, there was a good chance that one of the guards watching the house would see her and come to her aid.

Descending to the main floor, her breath a prisoner in her chest, afraid to make a sound, she sprinted to the front door, flipped the bolt and turned the knob.

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Thinking she was home free as she opened the door, she was stopped in her tracks as a firm hand slammed the door shut, grabbed her arm, and twisted it behind her, sending a shattering pain through her arm and into her shoulder.

She inhaled, preparing to scream, but another hand flattened harshly across her mouth, choking off the sound. Frantic with fear, with her one free hand she searched for the light switch she knew was close by. The body pressed close behind her attempted to drag her away from the door, and she resisted with everything she could, knowing that her life depended on being able to locate that switch. It was her last hope.

Her nails dug into the wall, seeking its location, determined to find it before it was too late. At last her searching encountered success and desperately she flipped it upward, hoping it was the right one, before she was dragged across the entryway and into the living room.

Fighting against the hard arms trying to contain her movements, the hand at her mouth stifled her muffled screams. She tried to move her head, to loosen the grip of the man in an attempt to make some sound of alarm. Finally, she managed to move it just enough, and bit down hard, repulsed at the taste of tobacco and sweat, yet determined to fight for her freedom. She heard an angry yelp from behind her as the hand was yanked away from her face.

She wasted no time and screamed as loud as she could, hoping it was enough, just before the man holding her whirled her around and backhanded her, throwing her across the room. She landed hard against the side of the couch. Pain lanced through her entire body and the taste of her own blood filled her mouth.

“Bitch! You’ll pay for that. You escaped once, but that won’t be happening again.”

She gasped for air, attempting to steady herself. How was she going to buy enough time for Danael to arrange for help to get to her? It was at least a twenty-minute trip across the bay; the police station wasn’t

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much closer. She had to buy time somehow in hopes that it would be enough. Was it too much to expect that she would survive a second time?

CHAPTER 8

It had been difficult for him to let her go, but he knew he'd made the right choice. It was better this way.

Danael sat hunched over in a chair in the caverns beneath the cliff, having just returned from his nightly circuit of the waters, watchful for signs of anyone in distress.

He turned to look around the enclosure, at the pool, and the surrounding evidence of his habitation in this section of the island, below the surface.

There were several chambers attached to this one, rooms he had turned into a model of the nest he'd shared with Kasipy. He'd never been wholly comfortable in the ultramodern rooms above ground. It served to keep up appearances and he had tried to adapt to his human life when he'd returned.

He looked down at the transformation of his body—the delicate webbing between his toes offering him more mobility in the water, the

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gills located at his thickened neck and defined abdomen, and the rippling ridges protruding over the surface of his cock. The full-blooded Nadiri had a sheath of scales that enclosed their penises. Kas's penis was particularly sensitive when exposed during sex or when Danael serviced him with his mouth. Kas would utter the love tones in a particularly melodic pattern. Danael had never found music that matched the beautiful love tones of a Nadiri in passion.

But for Danael, who was only part Nadiri, there was no scaled sheath. His cock exhibited the ridges making him neither human nor Nadiri, a mutant, alienated in many ways from either race.

It had been dark here in the pool chamber when he'd brought Elana here, and there was no way she could have clearly seen the creature who had taken her.

He had too many secrets to allow her to become a part of his life. Yes, it was much better this way.

He ran a hand through his wet hair as he stared at the light reflected on the water.

This pool led through a long tunnel to the open sea. In the chamber next door that he used for sleeping was a recessed, narrow enclosure that was his bed. It was layered with soft spongy, moist material that he had harvested from the ocean floor and about an inch of water, just enough to cover the bottom. There was a warming unit attached, which kept the enclosure at a temperature for comfort while sleeping. It was as close as he could come to the living nests back in Nadiriana.

He missed the simple beauty of the culture and the peace of living with the Nadiri. He should go back for a visit, get away for a while and let things settle here. He leaned back against the chair and closed his eyes.

Tomorrow he could call and arrange to have Elana transferred to another facility. It was for her own good, as well as his peace of mind. And it would probably be safer for her in the long run.

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There was still no sign of the men who had attacked her, and he was uncomfortable with her staying at the lighthouse even with the security in place. He had wanted to keep her here, but that was an impossibility. Eventually, she would have questioned certain peculiarities about the house and about his habits. Her presence would demand something he could not give her.

“Sentinel!”

Danael straightened, alert to the urgency in the call from Phyn.

“Hurry. The woman is in danger.”

He vaulted to his feet and grabbed for his suit, quickly donning the skin tight aquamarine pants and waist harness containing his unique weapons.

“Where is she?”

“They came by land. The light, Sentinel. The light.”

He ran and dove into the pool, using his powers to slice through the water at a superhuman speed. Dammit, he should have been more observant rather than wallowing in self pity.

At this speed, even Phyn could not keep up with him. It felt like hours before he made it to the mainland shore, slowing as he came closer.

He arrowed down, turned, and sliced up through the water, soaring high into the sky, and landing lightly on the balcony of the second floor. Crouched low, he listened for voices, but heard nothing from inside.

Centering his thoughts, he unlocked the glass doors, slid one open, and stepped inside, cautious for sound or movement. His altered state allowed him to breach the darkness within as the transparent film covering his dilated eyes enhanced his vision far beyond that of normal humans.

Scanning the room, he quietly stepped inside and moved to the door, listening. Now he could hear muffled voices coming from

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somewhere inside the house. Cautiously, he opened it, stepped into the hallway and stopped, trying to determine the exact location the voices were coming from.

He stiffened when he heard a female voice he recognized cry out, obviously in pain, and he knew he couldn't wait one moment more. He streaked down the stairs, a blur of motion, his instincts and responses magnified.

He could smell the evil as he entered the room, knew which forms it emanated from, and launched himself at them, driving them to the ground. They wrestled impotently, trying to free themselves from his hold, yet he was the one with the power far beyond theirs.

He grabbed the weapon one of them held and threw it across the room. Then he yanked free the small ball of silver net secured at his waist, tossed it upward where it unfolded, expanded, and dropped to envelope the two intruders, winding tighter and tighter to bind them securely so there was no chance of escape. Immediately, they lost consciousness.

Pulling the silver rope from his belt, he bound their legs securely. They were going nowhere—certainly not in the immediate future.

He rose up and his frantic gaze circled the room. She was standing backed against a wall, her eyes wide with fear, her face marked from the savagery of her attackers, blood dripping from her mouth. Instinctively, he moved toward her, yet stopped several feet away afraid, knowing that the light in this room would reveal that he was no ordinary man.

Keeping his hands to his sides so as not to frighten her, he tried to calm himself. He wanted to hold her, to make sure she was all right. He wanted—so many things that were not his right.

She stared at him and he saw something in her eyes.

“The police will come and take them away, find out who they are,” he said in a deep, guttural voice. “You should call them. I’ll wait until

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they arrive.”

“It’s you,” she whispered. “You’re the one who saved my life.”

He nodded; there was no point in denying it.

“I thought you were like those urban legends—not real. You’re the one they call the Sea Sentinel, aren’t you? You save victims from the sea, fight against the pirates and the drug runners.”

Again, he nodded, his eyes never leaving her face, watching intently for any sign of disgust at his appearance.

Her eyes darkened with something far different. “You’re the one who made love to me that night. I remember now.” Slowly, she stepped away from the wall toward him.

He stiffened, fearing the revulsion he knew would eventually come into her eyes.

She stepped close to him and reached up to touch his face. He flinched at the action. She hesitated a fraction of an instant and then touched him. She slid her hand along his jaw, downward over the gills so obviously defined along the column of his thickened neck and shoulders, down his arms.

“Why did you hide this from me? Did you think I would fear you?”

He saw the questions in her eyes. Questions he couldn’t bring himself to answer.

“You made me forget you, didn’t you? Yet the memory wouldn’t go away completely. I felt you in my dreams. Did you know that? I thought it wasn’t real, that nothing could be as wonderful as the sensations I experienced when the echoes of those moments surfaced. I thought I was losing my mind.”

How could she be saying this? He was a creature—a mutant that was neither man nor Nadiri. He had fucked her like a primitive savage that night, unable to stop himself. Yet she spoke to him with such a loving voice now. How could that be?

“You’re mistaken,” was all he could think to respond. He turned

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away from her, from the temptation to take her in his arms, cleanse her wounds, peel the clothes from her body, and again lay claim to her. Again, the danger had almost taken her life and he wanted to feel her passionate response, maybe for the last time, before he let her go.

Determination driving him, he walked over to the phone and placed the emergency call to the police. It would force him to leave before he did something they would both regret.

“Danael.”

He stiffened at the one-word utterance, but he didn’t turn around. He didn’t dare.

“Do you think I don’t know? Is this why you sent me away? Because you were afraid I would discover the truth?”

“You’re mistaken.”

“No, I’m not. Once I saw you again, like this, my memory returned. You tried to make me forget that night, those wonderful moments we shared, didn’t you? Do you really think that it matters what form you’re in, that I wouldn’t recognize your touch? You can’t hide the essence of who you are from me.”

He turned back to her then. “You have no idea what I am. It would be dangerous for you to have anything to do with me.”

A small smile flitted across her lips and her expression softened. “We can’t always choose the person we fall in love with. Your—situation—certainly poses a challenge, I’ll give you that.”

“You’re wrong. You have no idea. It’s so much more complicated than that.” His body was already hardening, instinctive vibrations of the mating call running rampant through his system. If he didn’t get away soon, he would be unable to control it. His cock rippled in need, in determination to mate with her, drive into her.

He backed away, fearful of the call from the deepest well of his savage nature. He wanted to throw her over his shoulder and take her back to his cave. Literally. To hell with the rest of the world.

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He couldn't do it. He had responsibilities. And he couldn't protect her and attend to those as well. Not without putting her life in danger if there should come a time when his enemies discovered his dual life.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "Well, maybe that's not totally honest. I would be a fool not to be afraid in some way, but I'm willing to take the chance. You're worth it."

"I'm not willing to. I can't take the chance someone will come after you to get to me."

"One of those men," she pointed to the two unconscious bodies enclosed within the silver net. "He worked at the sea lab in my department. I expect he recognized me in the cove that night, and knew I had survived when he saw me at the lab."

The information took him by surprise. Employees at the lab were thoroughly vetted, their backgrounds checked minutely. Some of the work at the lab was extremely sensitive and they could take no chances on information leaking out. How had someone gotten past their security measures? For that matter, how had they gotten past his guards here at the lighthouse?

"I could help you, Danael."

He shook his head. "No. That isn't going to happen."

He saw her straighten her shoulders. "I'm not a coward. I *can* help you. And don't even think of trying to erase my memory again. That's just plain wasn't right."

He wanted to smile, but forced himself to remain expressionless. He so admired her determination, her courage. But then he'd already known she was brave when she'd tried to save herself the night she'd been kidnapped. She had fought hard to survive. Even when she thought there was no chance, she hadn't cried or panicked.

No, this was a woman with a strong heart and mind. If he could have had any woman at his side in this life, she would be the one he wanted.

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He heard the sirens in the distance indicating the sheriff would be there shortly, and it was past time for him to leave.

“Tell them what you know when they arrive.”

“I will. This isn’t over.”

He sighed. She certainly was tenacious. “It has to be.”

“Don’t you dare erase my memory. Actually, it didn’t do any good anyway, and you know it.”

Then he did have to smile. “You’re very determined and apparently have a very strong mind.”

“Very,” she agreed. “And I repeat, this isn’t over.”

He turned away before he touched her as he wanted to. “It is. It has to be. Good-bye, Elana.” He walked toward the door.

“I’ll keep your secrets,” she whispered. “You can trust me.”

He stopped without turning. “I know that, my dear.” Then he raced up the stairs and back to the balcony. Looking down at the swirling sea, he forced himself to dive back into the waters. As it closed over him, he felt the pang of regret for the loss of his humanity, for not being able to give her what she deserved.

But his was a life dedicated in such a way he could not offer her what she needed and deserved. She was a woman of deep, strong character and of vibrant passions. Whether creature or man, he wanted her as deeply as any being could.

He sliced through the water, going faster and faster, trying to outrun the memory of her eager responses to both the creature and the man. That she had realized he was both and still wanted him was a surprising turn of events.

But this was his domain and she couldn’t become a part of it. The sea was a jealous mistress and suffered no foolish whims within her embrace. He had to remain firm in his decision.

CHAPTER 9

She sat on the balcony, looking out toward the island. He hadn't returned to her after the police left with their prisoners, leaving the silver net and rope discarded on the floor of the living room.

Apparently the local authorities knew more about the legendary Sea Sentinel than many others, and these were not the first criminals who had been left for them neatly wrapped up in a silver fishing net.

She fingered the netting resting on her lap. It was made of an odd material she had been unable to identify. It looked delicate and almost ethereal, but she had learned that it was far from being what it appeared.

When Danael had used it on the men and bound them, it had immediately rendered them helpless in some fashion. But like the Sea Sentinel himself, whatever properties it held were locked into its fabric, and manmade technologies of today were unable to identify its elements.

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But that wasn't what was important to Elana. It was Danael and his hidden role as the Sea Sentinel. In one sense, he'd trusted her not to reveal his identity, but obviously he didn't trust her enough to return to her.

The men the police had taken away were charged with attempted murder, among other things, and were now safely locked behind bars. She had gone to the police station the next day to give her statement. She discovered they had found quite a bit of evidence supporting the fact that they had been involved in drug running, and she was pleased to learn the police had confiscated the boat the criminals had used to kidnap her. Eventually, she would be called to testify at their trial.

Although she knew there was much more to the story, she had learned little more than that from the officer who took her statement. He'd told her it was still an ongoing investigation and he couldn't share any more details with her. She had to be content with the fact the men were behind bars for now.

As she'd been about to walk out the door of the police station, she'd almost bumped into Danael as he was entering. For long moments they had stood there in the doorway, staring at each other. She'd felt the force of his presence. He'd lifted a hand and she thought he would touch her, wanted him to. Her body had responded immediately, attuned to the need to be acknowledged by him.

The desire she saw for a fleeting moment was quickly mastered. He dropped his hand to his side, breaking the link, quickly moving past her without saying a word. For her, it had been a painful encounter, causing a ripping ache deep inside her.

Yet, still she waited and hoped for more. She had returned to work the day after the incident. Occupying her thoughts with research and analyzing data was the best thing for her right now. Gossip was rampant about the employee who was now in the custody of the police, and many of her co-workers were curious about what had actually

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transpired. Of course, there were rumors that the fabled Sea Sentinel was involved somehow.

In one sense, it had been fortunate she bore the physical wounds of the encounter. She hid behind them, telling everyone it was too painful to discuss and besides it was an ongoing investigation by the police and she really couldn't discuss it.

Danael had not tried to contact her directly at any time during the weeks since then.

Until today.

She had arrived at work and found a confidential envelope on her desk. Nothing could have shocked her more than the contents inside. She'd stared at it, unseeing, for long moments, unable to comprehend that it was his intent to send her away.

How did she fight this? She had gone through the day in a haze of disbelief. Trying to get to him, to talk with him, demanding answers was like trying to breach security around the President of the United States. His barriers were that secure. Trying to meet with him at the office would take an Act of Congress to get past his assistants on the best of days. The fact that he was obviously trying to avoid her made it that much more difficult.

There had to be a way. She simply would not leave without confronting him face to face first.

Getting to his compound was no more feasible than attempting to breach his office. Security around the perimeter of the whole of Fell Island was absolutely grid-iron secure.

In one month she was due to report to a government facility on the west coast, far away from Danael Watters and his secret identity. It was cloaked as a temporary assignment, but she knew better. He was determined to try to force her out of his life and he certainly had the power to make that happen.

There must be some way for her to get through to him. For a short

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time they had touched on such a deep, intimate level. How could he deny it? He had to know she accepted him no matter what form he chose to appear to her in. She wanted him both as Danael and as the Sentinel, and it was not a matter of being drawn to some larger than life image for the excitement. She wanted *him*. All of him, whatever that meant, whatever sacrifice it required on her part.

But how did she make him understand that? What he did was dangerous and she knew that. She understood it. No one ever said life would not be complicated.

When she thought of him, all she could remember was how alone he seemed to be, never connecting with another human being in the intimate fashion she had connected with him. If she didn't breach the walls he had built around himself, he would always be that way. And she didn't want him to be alone. He didn't deserve that.

Nor did she want to remain alone. She had waited all her life to connect in a soul-deep fashion with another person, and Danael happened to be that person.

Suddenly, she rose to her feet and looked out toward the island, remembering the telescope on his balcony. How long had he been watching her during the months she'd been here? Was he watching her even now? She tingled at the thought that at the very moment he could be watching her.

Was there a way to get through to him without actually being in the same room? She dropped the silvery net onto the floor and stepped back toward the sliding glass doors.

Were his eyes upon her? He was more than other men, had abilities others did not, and she knew they were connected on some other level beyond the physical. She felt it in her heart, in her soul. Could she make him accept that special connection they had?

Might he have telepathic abilities that would allow her to reach out to him? Could there at least be a one-way line if she sent her thoughts

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out to him. If she couldn't get to him, could she make him come to her instead?

Danael.

She sent the thought across the wide distance of waters separating them. Her hands rose to the buttons on her shirt.

Danael, I love you.

She pushed the words from her mind, out to him. The only sound she heard was the roar of the waters below her, the sigh and surge as though a living, breathing thing. If only it would bring him to her.

She allowed the shirt to slide from her shoulders.

See me.

Her hands dropped to unfasten the front of her trousers. The pants fell to the ground and she stepped out of them.

Don't let what we have go.

She unfastened her bra and let it slip away, felt the moist ocean breeze feather across her skin.

He had taken her from the waters, saved her, claimed her, branded her in ways she could not begin to understand, and she could not let him turn his back on what they'd shared.

There was a reason her life had been spared, not once, but twice, and she knew what that reason was, more surely than she had ever known anything in her life.

Her panties drifted to the floor, leaving her naked and wanting. Lifting her hands, she cupped her breasts, feeling the heavy ache, hissing as she brushed her thumbs over her tightly pebbled nipples.

Oh, God, she wanted to feel his mouth on her body.

Licking her lips, she dropped her head back and closed her eyes, seeing him in her mind, half man, half creature, shifting back and forth as he claimed her. She tugged at her nipples, felt her juices surge and drip from her pussy.

He had protected her in the water, breathing life into her, keeping

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her alive. A hand slid down across her ribs, gliding over her belly to press against her mound.

She remembered the feel of him inside her when he'd first taken her, the rippling ridges driving her crazy, and how she'd surged against him in primitive celebration of life.

It was ecstasy, Danael. Do you hear me?

She swirled a finger around her engorged clitoris, swept two fingers across her swollen lips, and finally pressed deeply inside her needy vagina.

Yes, Danael. I know you're out there. I know you're watching me. Come to me.

She pushed deep inside, twisted her nipple with her other hand, undulated, calling to him with her body.

A tingle began at the base of her spine and heat radiated upward. Her eyes flew open and she stared across the waters.

He was there, watching her, she knew it. She slid her fingers from inside her and brought them to her lips as she gazed intently across the waters. She sucked and licked at her fingers, then arched her neck and drew her wet fingers slowly down the column, knowing full well she could be enticing the beast even more than the man, yet unafraid. He'd saved her life and she belonged to him, with him, and she had to find a way to make him see that.

Come to me, Danael or Sentinel, I belong to you both. I love you and accept all of you. Deny me if you can, if you dare. I am your woman and I shall not deny you.

CHAPTER 10

He lay in his nest below the earth trying to sleep in the cushiony bed, but unable to get his mind to settle. He'd met with the police chief, and the men who'd kidnapped and tried to murder Elana would be sent away for a long time.

What he didn't like was the fact that they had given up very little information about who they worked for. He also didn't like the fact that the security people he had placed to guard Elana had been dispatched so easily. Three men had been killed, and something told him their killer had been neither of the men who had eventually gotten into the lighthouse. Someone else had been with them that night who had not been caught. Someone was still out there.

He'd put in place additional security measures at the lighthouse. He couldn't be with her, but he planned to make damn sure she was safe as long as she was here.

The information he discovered tonight was what really concerned

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him. He had gone to the apartments of the two men and sifted through their belongings, had discovered a laptop hidden beneath the floorboards at one of the apartments and brought it back with him.

After breaking the password to get into the computer, he discovered some very interesting information. And something that put him on alert.

These men had an obvious connection with Captain Maximillion Plunder, and a more evil man Danael had never encountered. He ran an illegal organization that was more powerful than the political government of a small country. And as of yet, Danael had been unable to touch him.

No wonder the criminals wouldn't talk. Plunder's control stretched a long way around the world. It had been Plunder who'd been behind the deaths of his parents and it was Danael's mission to take him down if it was the last thing he did.

After he'd obtained as much information as he could from the computer and printed it out, including contact names and addresses, bank account information and the like, he'd put it in an envelope addressed to the police chief and sent it off, keeping a copy for himself. He would get it to the right people and then Danael would institute his own investigation into the power behind the drug runners.

He'd come face to face with Plunder and his first mate cum lover, the sea siren, Lorelei Laverne, only once. And that one time had almost cost him his life. It had certainly changed it forever. But he would never forget what either of them looked like standing over his dead parents. Plunder with his dark, swarthy build, thick black beard, and ice blue eyes. Laverne was a greedy siren of the sea, with long, bright red hair, pale skin, a curvaceous body, and amethyst, hard eyes. No, he would never forget the evil they had exuded.

One day he would find the location of their hideout and put a stop to the drug running, pirating, and abductions they orchestrated once and

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for all. But at least for now, he'd managed to halt a small part of it.

"Danael."

He stiffened, shocked by the sound of the voice in his head. It wasn't Kas. His voice was low, quiet, almost a whisper. This one was feminine and seductive, threading through his body, driving straight through his blood.

Again she called to him and he knew it was Elana. He tried to fight the effects of her voice, but it was no use. He rose from the bed and took the elevator up to the main part of the apartments above.

The deep, sensual tenor of her voice drew him like a magnet to the balcony overlooking the sea. He moved to the telescope and what he saw caused a sharp jab of want to throb deep inside.

Sonofabitch! She had no idea what she was doing. He had used all his self-control to stay away from her, and here she was enticing him, trying to draw him to her in the most blatant way.

Damn her brazenness. It was obviously he who needed the protection, not her. As he watched her through the telescope, his cock hardened with a painful need, the ridges rippling rhythmically with demand.

He had forced himself to remain in his Nadiri form as a deterrent to go to her, reminding him of what he was and that he couldn't have her.

Now here she was taunting both the man inside him as well as the creature. Naked beneath the moonlight, forcing him to acknowledge her. And her call was worse than any sea siren's song to sailors at sea.

Because he'd taken her that one time, that first night, as the Sentinel, he had bound them in some way. Many times he heard voices in his mind, but tonight hers was as clearly heard as Kas's when he called to him through the distance separating them, reminding him that he was not alone.

What had he done? The longer he watched her, the more intense the need became. He felt the primitive desire of the mutant begin to build

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inside him, a haze of need settling over him like the mists upon the water.

“Do not deny yourself, Danael. You need her. She has become a part of you already.”

Kas.

He owed something to Kas as well. Kas, who was part of that other world, and who could not be a part of his human world. He already felt he had betrayed him. Should he compound it, cause Kas the pain of knowing he took another into his heart and into his bed?

“Danael, do not feel guilt. You love us both and there is no wrong in that. I would not wish you to be alone in the surface world. To deny either of your natures, to deny this woman you love is to deny a part of yourself. You are both Nadiri and human, so much more than either alone. There is no betrayal. I will always be here for you when you need me. You must embrace both your natures. You are the Sea Sentinel, one of a kind like no other. Your needs are more powerful, more potent, than those of either race, blended into one unique being. When the time comes, she will understand that. You must take love where you find it.”

He shook his head in denial. It wasn't right. He did love them both. He had taken on a duty to protect those around him. He shouldn't want both of them so fiercely.

He'd tried to blend back into his human existence, but he certainly had never expected to find love in the bargain. He still wasn't sure it was possible.

Was Kas right? She beckoned to him, to both parts of what he was. Pushing the telescope away, he dove over the side of the balcony and into the sea. He could have waited to allow himself time to transform to his human appearance, but the temptation, watching her through the telescope made waiting an impossible feat, taking more superhuman strength than he could exert right now. Besides, Elana needed to be

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reminded of exactly what she tempted.

He sliced through the water, soared high into the night sky and landed on her balcony in front of her temptingly naked body.

She gasped and stepped back.

“Danael.”

He crouched before her. “Do I look like a human? It is not Danael who comes to you.”

She shook her head and he saw the highlights in her hair flash, making it snap and sparkle, silken tresses he longed to touch, yet he didn’t.

“You came. You heard me,” she said in wonderment. Then she straightened her shoulders, thrusting her breasts temptingly toward him, studying him as he stood before her.

He hadn’t even bothered to put on clothing before coming to her, and he saw her eyes widen when they settled on his burgeoning, silvery cock.

Slowly, she reached out to touch him. He hissed sharply when her fingers played over the surface of his cock, oils of arousal already seeping from beneath the ridges. Her hand clasped him more firmly as her gaze rose to meet his.

“You made love to me the night you rescued me. I wanted you to. I didn’t turn away from you then, nor will I now. Whatever form you choose to take, I find you beautiful and I want you.”

She pressed against him with her warm, silky flesh, touching each ridge that marked differences in their bodies. She reached up to kiss him, to lick at the rim of his lips and to press her tongue deep inside.

He tasted her and, finally unable to resist, he wrapped his arms around her and lifted her. Her arms rose to encircle his thick neck as he carried her inside. The primitive, unbridled creature taking complete control.

“I’m ready for you, Sentinel or Danael, whichever you prefer.”

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He wasted no time in spreading her out on the bed and pushing deep inside her slippery, hot channel. The ridges of his cock made his possession of her so very tight and snug. He heard her moan and press closer. She wrapped her legs around him, driving him deeper.

“Yes,” she gasped, “I remember how good you felt inside me, how fast I came beneath you.”

Her words drove him to retreat and thrust. The rippling of her body surrounded him, accepted him, pleased him. He drove harder, faster, filling her, feeling her.

Taking her was so different from what he’d shared with Kas, yet still so right and so perfect. Her body enclosed him, her slippery heat consumed him, and he felt her orgasm washing over him.

He sucked at her nipples, tugged, and felt them bead tighter in his mouth as he kneaded the full globes with his hands.

“Yes, make me come, Danael, please. I need you,” she screamed.

He felt her spasms and knew his own climax was close.

The fan of his cock filled every crevice of her channel, then his seed flooded inside her, pulse after driving pulse. He lowered his head to claim her mouth, her pleasure, demanding her acquiescence.

For one moment he paused and then he began again, his stamina superhuman. Yet he knew from that first time, she could meet his every demand, every spark of desire, and she did just that as she thrust upward, undulating her hips against him, urging him on as though knowing exactly what he needed, what he had to have.

He pulled from her and flipped her to her belly, then pulled her to her knees. There was no assuaging the sexual needs of the Nadiri once it claimed him.

Spreading her legs, he thrust deeply inside her wet vagina, feeling her expand and embrace him all in the same breath. He reached around to cup her breasts as he pummeled inside her, driving her to yet another orgasm, and another.. Her voice rose in a high, keening tone, one that

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fanned his desire, driving onward, deeper, higher. His own climax built inside him.

Long moments later, he cried out as he orgasmed a second time and they both fell forward onto the bed. He exited her body and turned her toward him, brushing back a lock of her sweat-dampened hair. A smile spread across her lips.

“One of these days I want you to fuck me out there.” She waved a weary hand toward the balcony.

“In the sea?”

“Definitely in the sea. I have a feeling it will be amazing.”

He ran a hand along the curve of her hip. “You take a great deal for granted. You shouldn’t have done what you did.”

Her eyes slitted open. “You left me little choice. You were going to send me away.”

“You aren’t safe here.”

She raised herself up onto one elbow to look at him. “I’m as safe here as anywhere. I can help you. I want to be with you. No matter what. I came this close to dying and if it weren’t for you I would be dead.”

“I don’t want your gratitude.”

“That’s not what I mean.” She rolled away from him and stood. “I mean we’re all living on borrowed time. I can’t begin to understand your life and the danger you put yourself in every day, the challenge of balancing two separate selves the way you are doing. I don’t expect you to share everything with me...well maybe that’s not true. I don’t expect to learn everything tonight. I’ve loved Danael Watters for a long time. I don’t know very much about the Sentinel except for the stories, but I’m willing to learn and to try to accept that there are two sides of you.”

He shook his head as he stood. “You have no idea what kind of person I am.”

She walked toward him. “Don’t send me away. Please. I know you

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feel something for me as well.”

He clasped her hands. “You ask a lot, Elana. You’re asking me to put your life in jeopardy. It’s one thing for me to do what I must with my life, but this—”

“I have a mind of my own, Danael. Let me make my own decisions. You’re not responsible for what I choose to do with my life. Let me choose.”

How could he resist her? He bent closer. Maybe, for just a short time, he’d let her stay. Let her remain close by. It had been so long since he’d been able to share his life with anyone without being afraid of them discovering who he really was. There would never be another Elana in his life, he knew that. Would it hurt to have some happiness for just a little while?

Finally, he nodded.

Her grin was infectious. She reached up to wrap her arms around his neck. “You won’t regret it,” she whispered in between the kisses she feathered along the gills at his neck—just before she claimed his lips.

He lifted her against him and walked toward the bathroom. A shower and then he was going to make slow, passionate love to her as Danael Watters, because he wanted to lay claim to her in every way possible. His duties as the Sea Sentinel would claim him again tomorrow night, but tonight was for loving his woman.

ADRIANNA DANE

Theresa Gallup uses the pen names of Tess Maynard and Adrianna Dane. Theresa has been writing since the age of 10. A legal secretary for 30 years, she is currently working on another erotic romance, as well as a full-length romantic mystery/suspense. She has been married for 30 years and has three grown children (a daughter and twin sons), and is a new grandmother.

Writing as Tess Maynard, her first published short story appeared in the ezine, *The Whispering Forest*, in January of 2004. Writing as Adrianna Dane, where adding sensual heat to romance is her motto, *Esmerelda's Secret* was her first foray into the erotic romance genre.

Having traveled and lived from the East Coast to the West Coast, Theresa receives inspiration for her stories from a variety of sources, including music and poetry, and her tastes are eclectic.

For more information about current projects, visit Theresa's websites at www.tessmaynard.com or www.adriannadane.com.

* * *

***Don't miss No Choice, by Adrianna Dane,
available at AmberHeat.com!***

Back in high school, Ginnie had dated both Mason and Derrick, two best friends. She had loved them both equally...deliciously...separately.

But rather than make a choice between them and take a chance on destroying their friendship, she had chosen to leave town.

Now, her old Mustang has broken down in front of the garage they own and she's going to be confronted by a choice she couldn't make all those years ago. Ginnie is also about to be faced with an unexpected revelation—one that could change everything and offer her a chance to snuggle into the very position where she truly yearned to be...

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