

DESIRE'S STORM

A man with a beard and chest hair is lying on his back on a sandy beach. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. His right arm is raised above his head, and his left hand is near his face. The background features palm trees and a dramatic, cloudy sky with a hint of sunset or sunrise.

Trixie Stilletto

DESIRE'S STORM

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BY

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AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

<http://www.amberquill.com>

DESIRE'S STORM
AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

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Copyright © 2006 by Trixie Stilletto
ISBN-10 1-59279- 636-2
ISBN-13 978-1-59279-636-6
Cover Art © 2006 Trace Edward Zaber

Layout and Formatting provided by: ElementalAlchemy.com

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*Thanks to Lyndi Lamont, Caitlyn Willows,
Lacey Savage, Adrianna Dane and Isabella Jordan
for inviting me into your wonderful group and
encouraging me to expand my horizons!*

She lay upon the clear blue ocean, like a string of pearls on a silk azure sheet. And like the pearls she awaited the pleasure of those who sought her out. For one thing that could never be denied, when you visited Desirata you definitely got what you needed...not necessarily what you wanted.

CHAPTER 1

Greg Voit glared at the satellite phone as if *it* were the root of his problems, rather than the words coming over it.

“What the hell do you mean the sale for the land in the south of France isn’t going through? I pay you huge retainer fees to make sure shit like this doesn’t happen. And why the hell would you wait until I’m three thousand miles away from the nearest internet connection to give me this information? The last report I had when I left Miami was that everything was one hundred percent on track. Losing the deal at this point is not what I call one hundred percent on track.”

It didn’t matter that the connection was fading. Greg knew the man on the other end of the line was afraid of losing his job. He should be. Greg did not get to be the fifth richest man in the world at the age of thirty-eight by suffering idiots lightly. Nor did he get to that position by hesitating when it came to making tough decisions. This wasn’t a tough decision. That didn’t mean it wasn’t making his blood pressure soar.

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"You're fired, Bill," he yelled into the receiver. "Pack your briefcase and get the hell out of my Marseilles office. That's right—today. I don't give a God damn that you're my brother-in-law. Tell Samantha she should never have married an idiot. You're fired."

Greg angrily pushed the button that turned off the satellite phone. He hated being out of contact like this. Why did he ever agree with his mother and her idiotic doctor that taking a month-long trip sailing the Caribbean would be a good idea? He looked off the port side of his yacht. *Great*. As if he didn't have enough to contend with, it appeared there was a storm brewing on the horizon and, even if that didn't come his way, he figured he was at least seventy-two hours of fast sailing away from the nearest port. Damn, how the hell was he supposed to run a multi-billion dollar resort chain if he was out of contact?

* * *

"Princess Alena are you sure this is the one?"

Alena watched as the tall, dark and extremely handsome man threw his phone to the deck and stalked away. Her body knew the answer better than her mind. The man was a walking, talking example of what was wrong with the world today. Didn't he realize family was irreplaceable?

Her people had been guardians of Mother Earth for generations. She had been taught, since she opened her eyes for the first time in her golden cradle, that her mission was to insure the earth's souls get the most from their time on it.

Alena rolled her fingers over the ball of the computer mouse and the large, wall-covering screen split into quarters. The top part still showed live action on the boat. The second quarter was an in-depth biography of the man showing his age, weight, sexual preferences, last physical examination details, and all other personal information, including financial data that spilled over into the third and fourth screens. It was the financial data that gave Alena a hint of what she was

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facing.

She felt the warm touch of her mother's hand again on her shoulder. "Are you sure this is the one?" the queen asked.

"Yes. Don't you see it as well?"

The queen looked deeply in Alena's eyes. "Yes. Then all will be ready at your command. Be aware that once it has started, our law demands we cannot stop it. Keep your heart and soul whole, my daughter." The queen paused. "I wish..."

Alena smiled, sensing her mother's hesitation. "You and father have raised me, given me the knowledge to do what is hard, the patience to stay the course and the love that makes it all come together. This is my destiny."

"I know, dear," her mother said on a sigh. "It's just that you are so very young. I thought you'd have a little longer to learn the ways of the outside world before you had to do this."

Alena stood and quickly knelt at her mother's feet. "I'm ready for this, Mother. I won't let you or our people down. You have my word."

* * *

Greg didn't know what happened. One minute he was ranting at the screw-up in Marseilles while his top-of-the-line yacht performed like the high quality machine it was. The next minute, he and the yacht had been swamped by wind, rain and the largest wave he had ever witnessed. They hadn't stood a chance.

Granted, he hadn't been paying attention, but he'd been sailing since he could walk. The storm had been at least fifty miles away from his heading and the seas had been calm one moment, and upon him the next.

When he finally washed ashore on a pristine and nearly silent island, he didn't know how he'd managed to survive. He took a few minutes, resting on his hands and knees as he coughed and gagged, trying to get the seawater out of his lungs. The thing was, he wasn't

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even sure how long it would be until someone would come looking for him.

Finally, he raised blurry eyes and looked around him. Pristine white sand, with lots of trees and foliage about two hundred yards in from the beach was what he saw. He was struck by the untouched beauty of the land and, from that moment, he coveted it. He looked back to the sea. Hard to believe that only minutes before he had been caught in a storm of biblical proportions because now the sun was shining brightly, the sky was a perfect blue and the water seemed calm as a wading pond—except for the way it crashed heavily a few hundred yards out. There the waves churned with great intensity, then rolled gently ashore. He looked down at his hands and legs—only a few scrapes and bruises. He was lucky he wasn't floating near the bottom of the ocean or breakfast for a shark.

A sound caused him to look up. He shook his head. Maybe he was hallucinating. Perhaps when he'd been thrown off the boat he'd really been killed.

He jumped to his feet and felt his head spin. She was either the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen or he was in the middle of the most fantastic dream he'd ever had.

She was tall—he guessed she'd be only a scant inch shorter than his own six-feet. There was where the similarities ended. Her hair was the truest red he'd ever imagined, and it fell in impossible waves past her tanned shoulders and bountiful breasts reaching the curve of her hips.

Her breasts—oh man, they were something he'd only seen on Hollywood starlets and porn stars. They were huge and perky and almost completely bare. The nipples were partially covered with—this made him blink to be sure he wasn't seeing things—clips attached to a chain leading to some kind of weapon strapped around a tiny waist above a jungle print bottom that resembled a loin cloth in the front. But from the bareness of her legs and hips, he was praying it resembled a g-

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string in the back. He felt a pressure building in his shorts and knew his cock was expanding rapidly.

It was ridiculous really. He'd been to the topless beaches in Brazil and the south of France. Hell, the night before he started his "vacation" he'd been all over and in a woman who had been named the most beautiful model in the world by a major fashion magazine. So it couldn't be a critical back-up of sperm causing his current state of blue balls.

All he knew was he had just survived a freak storm that sank his boat. He was fortunate to be alive and his Johnson was making that apparent in the most obvious way. He was surprised the woman didn't run away in trepidation when she saw the way his ten inches was standing straight toward the sun.

She looked at the evidence of his arousal and her nostrils flared like she could smell the seed building in his testicles. Instead of being embarrassed, he wanted to pull off his shorts and let her ride him like a wild stallion through the blinding white sand.

She held one hand out to him and, like a lamb being led to slaughter, he followed when she turned and walked from the beach into the thick jungle.

Greg was not a follower. He was not a man who went anywhere without knowing the exact consequences of his actions. For some reason, though, on this beach with all the problems of his business and being lost from civilization, he damned the consequences. He wondered briefly if he'd hit his head on something when his boat sank.

When he entered the jungle, he was immediately grabbed by a hand and pulled down.

"Umph. Wait," he began. He felt something incredibly soft and enveloping. His nose twitched momentarily. It's feathers, he thought. She had fashioned a feather bed in the middle of an untouched jungle. *How amazing is that?*

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Then he couldn't think at all. The beautiful woman was straddling him and rubbing her lower body against his.

Greg knew the science of it. He knew there were certain physical reactions he couldn't stop. He also knew if a man couldn't control himself, he could be controlled by others. That hadn't been him since he'd reached puberty. He prided himself on not only knowing his lovers, but making certain they reached pleasure first. It was the gentlemanly thing to do.

Today, laying on a bed of feathers, in a jungle that seemed suspended in time, with a woman who was some kind of combination Wonder Woman and Jane of the Jungle, he just let his body take control. And his body loved every living minute.

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She threw back her head, arching her neck. At the same time, her hips moved just enough that his throbbing cock slid an inch inside her warmth. He could feel her dampness, her readiness and then he lost it. He moved his hands from her breasts down to anchor her hips, even though she wasn't fighting him. But this couldn't be about letting her have control. He couldn't allow it. This was about mating at its most

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primal.

Greg thrust his hips upward and his cock slid inside her. She was tight, hot, and amazing. When he felt her maidenhead give away, he stilled.

"My God," he cried, "you're a virgin."

"Yes. This is my destiny," she said, leaning forward so her face was next to his. Her lips touched his.

He expected—he didn't know what he expected—but it wasn't for her to grind her mouth against his in wanton need.

"You are my desire. Show me the way home." At that moment, like one of the most practiced courtesans, she flexed her inner muscles and he felt himself grow even larger.

He rolled and now he was on top...and he lost all ability to think. All he could do was take her, possess her in a way that was elemental and urgent. As she shivered and spasmed with her climax, he was able to grasp enough presence of mind to be thankful it hadn't been terrible before his own thrusts became so urgent he thought the top of his head would explode. His cock certainly was exploding in endless jets of semen that rocked him to his toes.

"What's your name?" he asked a long time later.

"Alena," she answered. Her voice was strong, but he didn't detect any hint of an accent.

He ran his hand through her amazing red hair. "Are we alone here?"

"Do you ever not ask questions?" she replied. "Come...there's a nice calm pool not far. We can wash the sea and passion from our skins. It will make you feel refreshed."

She stood and held her hand out to him. Greg wasn't sure he liked not having an answer to his questions about whether they were alone or not. He didn't mind a little exhibitionism, but there was something about being so far out of his element that made him a little nervous.

"Is your house near?" He swatted absently at a bug that landed on

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his chest. His shorts, which he hadn't given a thought to when she was stripping them from him, had handled riding through the stormy waves admirably but they were starting to itch like crazy with the dried salt water clinging to them. He wished he had his clothes—or at least some of them. And his sat phone so he could let people know where he was.

“Don't worry,” Alena said. “You'll be safe here. Nothing can harm you on Desirata.”

He continued to bat at the bugs. Roughing it wasn't his usual style, but he had to admit, there was quite a bit a charm here. Greg watched the way Alena's firm ass swayed as she led him deeper into the jungle. *Yeah, there's charm here all right.* The kind of charm that sent swift, don't-ignore-me messages through his blood and straight to his cock.

Incredibly, he knew he could lay right down with her again in the middle of the jungle and go at it all night. It was incredible because he should have been satisfied for at least a couple of hours after the way she'd taken him past the edge of reason only moments before.

She stopped and pulled on a large vine that trailed down from the tree tops instead of growing up from the ground. For a second, Greg had a vivid remembrance of all those hours he'd spent as a boy watching *Tarzan* movies. Except this was Jane rather than Tarzan. *Oh baby, what a Jane.* He looked again—maybe not even Jane, maybe she was Wonder Woman, rescuing hapless sailors from their doom.

Oh, yeah! He could picture her wearing a form-fitting, strapless red, white and blue suit with the matching boots. *Yeah, boots.* She definitely needs books.

Greg looked down at her feet and suddenly didn't miss the boots at all. Her legs were tanned deep brown and the way her sandals laced up the backs of her calves like a siren from ancient Greece...

He felt beads of sweat pearly on the back of his neck, and his Johnson, which had been peacefully recovering from their jungle interlude, woke up, raring to go. Trying to get his little head off the

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thoughts of pushing her up against a tree and taking her from behind, he focused instead on the vine and the way she was holding it in her hand.

"I hope you aren't expecting me to swing on that," he said. "It may be fine for your weight, but I'm almost twice your size."

She paused. "Have you never taken anything on faith? It'll hold your weight and mine plus much, much more."

Greg shook his head. "I don't think so. Why do we need it anyway? Why not just continue following the trail?"

Alena frowned and moved slightly to the left. She pulled aside a section of a large bush. Greg moved forward and almost pitched into nothing. It was a huge gulley and Greg, who wasn't afraid of heights, almost got dizzy looking down. Worse, the opening between the side they were on and the other had to be almost as wide as a football field.

"God, that's unbelievable. I'd have fallen into that and not even known what happened."

Alena shook her head. "Nothing on Desirata will hurt you. You have to trust your heart and believe."

Greg shook his head even as he smiled. Maybe she was a little delusional. But he didn't want to argue with her. It wasn't important. All that was important was getting to her house and getting help.

"Did you once have a bridge over this?" he asked, still hesitant to trust the innocence in her eyes.

"There has been no bridge," she replied, taking his hand with hers.

"Is there any other way?"

She shook her head and smiled slightly as she pulled him closer to her. He could smell her sweet womanly fragrance mixed with the lingering imprint his body had made on hers when they'd made love. And damn if the imprint wasn't so strong his body was already revving up for a repeat.

"There's no other way. Come now, Gregory Voit. Take a chance.

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There *is* a gambler inside you. There has to be for you to be a success at such a young age.”

Greg frowned. How did she know his name? And his business? Something was not right.

“But,” he began. He lost his train of thought when she leaned into him. He could feel the lush softness of her breasts meeting the skin of his bare chest.

When her lips touched him gently, hesitantly, like the virgin she had been only a short time ago, Greg softened. She deserved to be wooed and courted. It was old-fashioned, but it was the way he was built. He had a second of regret. He should have done this wooing before taking her like a madman. But he couldn't turn back time. What he could do was show her gentleness now.

So he sipped at her lips, sucking the fuller, bottom one into his mouth and licking and nipping gently at it. He knew he was successful because her breathing quickened. He pulled her closer to him, wrapping his arms around her waist. She sighed and tilted her head a bit. It was the perfect movement, allowing him to take the kiss deeper in seconds. His tongue darted out to tangle with hers.

Her sigh deepened and her arms rose to fit around his neck. He thought he could stand like this for the rest of the day, drowning in the taste and texture of her mouth.

The next thing Greg knew, they were flying. Literally. She let one arm leave his neck and grabbed onto the vine. She kicked off with her legs and they were airborne. He wrapped his arms and legs tightly around her.

“Damn it,” he roared when he could speak. “We’re going to—”

“Shush,” she said calmly. “Believe not what your head tells you, but what your heart says.”

He wanted to more than he'd wanted anything in his life. Her eyes were open and encouraging. He didn't want to think of himself as a

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coward, but he couldn't look down. He couldn't face certain death. Instead, he kept looking at Alena. At her face, her honest blue, blue eyes.

In what seemed an eternity, but was probably only a few seconds, he felt solid ground under them. Alena released the vine with one hand and hit the ground at an even jog. Greg felt ridiculous with his legs still wrapped around her waist and lowered them until he was standing beside her. He wondered at her lower and upper body strength holding them both on the vine. Granted, he wasn't a hulking guy, but he still tipped the scales at well over one-ninety. She was a tall woman and certainly well-put together, but he wouldn't guess she weighed more than one-twenty to one-thirty.

"That was amazing," he finally said. "But how did you manage to carry us both?"

Alena shook her head. "You ask too many questions. Can't you just relax and enjoy?"

Greg started to give her the standard brush-off line, but something—maybe the unbelievable intimacy they'd shared, maybe the fact it seemed in this paradise nothing more than the truth would do—compelled him to answer her as he never would have anyone else.

"I enjoy nothing but the bottom line," he said. "People are only as good as you pay them to be, and even then, when they get a better offer, they'll screw you without looking back. Enjoyment is for retirement or when you die, which is the same thing."

Alena paused. "You don't believe that, do you? I don't think the world has gotten to that point. What about the joy, the fun of playing? Don't you remember what it was like when you were a child? When the only reason you did something was because it was fun?"

Greg opened his mouth to give this woman some hard lessons about life and stopped. He didn't want to shatter her illusions. He didn't know what her life consisted of here on this island, but it wasn't his place to

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burst her bubble. Let her believe the world was full of goodness and light. Maybe it was on this small jungle utopia.

She started walking. She moved quickly and without hesitation. Greg, at one point, almost had to run to keep up with her. The woman was in superb shape. He thought of himself in pretty good shape for the average American businessman, but soon the sweat was popping out on his forehead, and his lungs and heart were working hard to draw in oxygen.

Simultaneously, he realized they were climbing. At that moment, they broke through the vegetation and Greg's breath was taken from him as if he'd been struck down.

It was as if he were the king of the world and all its bounty, riches and beauty were spread before him. The sea was a deep, luscious blue and the sun hung at the midway point in its descent into darkness, a huge ball of red so true and unmarred by pollution that it was perfect. The sky was reddish orange in a long strip leading away from the sun and nearly touching the water on the horizon.

Red sky at night, sailor's delight, Greg remembered, and wondered how anyone could take anything other than delight in the world that lay before him.

They were at what had to be the top of the island and, after soaking in the view of the ocean in front of him a little longer, he turned to see what else was here.

There was lodging. Greg assumed it must be her house. He gave full marks to the designer for his sense of vision and creative force. It meshed with the lush greenery and plant life that abounded on the top of the mountain as if they had been created together. The building was teak, he was betting, and the roof resembled palm fronds, layered like a jungle hut.

There were stepping stones leading to a porch that encircled the house and more leading down to the edge of the mountain. He

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wondered if the steps would go all the way down to the beach, but decided they didn't because she would have brought him that way.

In those few moments, Greg knew one unchangeable fact. He would have a resort here. Or he'd die trying.

Alena turned and looked at him. "What's going through your mind?"

"I'm speechless," he answered. "Do you live here alone?"

Alena paused. Greg almost missed the frown that flitted across her face because it was gone so fast. "We're alone for now," she answered.

"I was wondering as we were climbing how you didn't get lonely here. Now I know. I've been to the four corners of the earth. Never have I seen anything to match the beauty here."

Alena's smile was pure and lit her eyes from within. "I'm so glad you see it. Come on, let's play."

She grabbed his hand and pulled him forward to the house. As they rounded the side, he saw what appeared to be an all-natural pool. Since they were on top of a mountain, he didn't know where the water came from, but it didn't matter. She was stripping and urging him to do the same. Then, taking his hand again, she led him into the water. It was warm as a bath and was in motion, as if it was powered by whirlpool jets. As Alena led him down the steps, Greg couldn't keep his eyes off her or the view. Both were stunning.

Her body was perfect, Venus DiMilo in flesh rather than stone. Hers was the body of an active, healthy female creature, not the waxed, polished version he'd gotten so tired of lately in his world.

She moved through the water as easily as a mermaid. He smiled at the thought. Perhaps she was a mermaid, without the tail however. He thought of how Tom Hanks had fallen for Darryl Hannah in *Splash*. If Alena had been cast, Hanks wouldn't have survived the encounter because Alena was three times as beautiful as any actress.

The water was warm, heated, he assumed, from the depths of the

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earth. It felt wonderful on his skin and he felt some of his tension ease, as if it had never been a part of him.

She drew him into her arms and he wrapped himself around her, holding her with her legs wrapped around his waist as they floated through the water and the waves, kissing the entire time.

The world spun before his eyes and he knew he wouldn't stop it, even if a chopper showed up promising to deliver him home this minute. Looking into her blue eyes, he felt like he could see to the truth at the bottom of the ocean. He was mesmerized by everything about her. The way the tips of her lashes glinted like gold-tipped wings and the way her eyes laughed with the innocence of a child.

But her body spoke of anything but innocence. Her breasts were truly perfect and he, who had always considered himself a breast man, knew this perfection was as God intended it.

He lifted her higher against him just so he could take one ruby-colored nipple into his mouth. The taste of her exploded against his tongue, and dimly Greg wondered if he would ever want any other woman than Alena in his arms. Then he didn't care when her fingers moved through the wet strands of his hair and pulled him tighter, closer to her body.

Her first time had been hurried, the rush of need overwhelming him and her. This time he was determined to give her everything a woman and man could experience. He was teacher and she was a delightful student.

A stroke of his fingertip across one breast caused the other to shiver and tighten instantly, like they were connected to a live electrical wire.

He wished fleetingly for the clips that had adorned her nipples the first moment he'd seen her on the beach. He thought for a moment. He hadn't seen that outfit since he'd wished it off her. Could this place be magic or was it simply her?

But when the student took the lesson plan in her own hands, any

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thought fled from his mind.

Her soft hands trailed over his nipples and they budded in delight. When she tasted him, using the broad, flat part of her tongue to pull him deeper into her mouth, Greg felt as if she was drawing him from the inside out.

"You taste hot and hard," she whispered. "But so delicious. Is that a product of every man of your world or special to you?"

If Greg could have formed a coherent word, he would have told her anything to keep her mouth moving slowly, delightfully over his skin. But his mind, his strongest weapon, was mush. All he could do was watch as her beautiful red hair followed the path she was working down his body.

He had enough presence of mind to stop her before she worked her way beneath the water, where his cock was straining to its full length.

"Not like that, baby," he groaned as her hand rested on his throbbing tip. "I want to give you the pleasure you didn't have our first time."

She frowned, as if she were having a hard time understanding his words. *Good.* That meant her mind was just as mushy as his.

"I experienced amazing pleasure, Gregory."

Now he smiled, relaxing completely for the first time. "Oh, darling, that was only the beginning."

He made a saddle out of his hands, cupping her buttocks and then back-pedaled them to a ledge and sat. There, he lifted her slightly, until she was aligned above his aching penis. He allowed her to slowly slide over him. She squirmed a bit, accepting his length, and he groaned.

"Oh, baby, that feels so damn good," he said.

She bit her bottom lip, as if trying to concentrate. He slid another inch inside her. His vision blurred and, for a moment, he lost his hold on her bottom and she slipped lower on him.

"Oh," she moaned. "Do that again, Greg. Please."

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He complied and let her slide lower. The pressure was exquisite.

"Alena, please, I wanted to go slow this time, but I can't wait. Take all of me. Now..." He was begging and he didn't care.

But instead of giving him what he wished, she raised herself above him so far that only the tip of his cock remained inside her pussy lips.

He started to reach for her when he saw the contented look on her face.

"Vixen," he hissed. "When I can breathe, I'll make you pay for this."

She stopped after she had slid halfway back down him. "Oh, you do not like this?"

He would have hastened to reassure her, if she hadn't tightened her inner muscles at that precise moment, encasing him like the most silken glove.

"Vixen," he repeated. "You're a siren meant to lure sailors to their doom."

She leaned forward and took his lips in another kiss and the movement brought her fully down on his length. He could feel the pulses of his rod, resting deep inside her, touching the top of her cervix. He held still for as long as he could, relishing the feeling of being buried as deep inside her as a man could go and knowing he never wanted to leave. He had found paradise and her name was Alena.

Greg didn't think he could move. His watch had stopped working due to the storm or his battle with the sea, but he didn't think he'd been on the island for more than a few hours. Already he'd had the best sex of his life two times over. His stomach growled.

"We need nourishment," Alena announced.

Greg agreed wholeheartedly.

There was a sound behind him, a whisper really. He turned his head to the left and saw three beautiful people—two men and one woman—all wearing short white robes like sometimes worn at toga parties. The

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three were carrying platters of food. The woman, who was leading the group, leaned down and offered him a cup of something. He looked over at Alena. She was being served by the two men. He felt a flair of something he refused to call jealousy rear its head. It shouldn't matter to him that the two men were built like a couple of studs with the size of their dicks clearly outlined by the clingy material of their gowns. After all, he'd just had sex with Alena twice. If she wanted variety, it should be nothing to him.

He'd played this game many times in the jet-setting world that was his to rule. In fact, his waitress wasn't hard on the eyes. He could have her. Hell, they could have a little gang action.

"I don't share," he said aloud. *Where the hell had that come from?*

No one moved for a moment. The three newcomers stood frozen, as if set in stone.

After a moment, Alena smiled, then inclined her head. "Leave the food. I'll serve our guest," she said.

"But, mistress," the tallest man, who looked to Greg like he was a candidate for a Kentucky stud farm, stuttered.

"No, it's fine, Adonis," she said with a smile and a hint of hesitation. "We'll be fine."

Figured. Studly's name is Adonis. Talk about setting the standard high.

After another pause, the three left almost as quickly and quietly as they had arrived. Greg didn't miss the glare the leader gave him, though.

"I thought this was a deserted island," he said.

"No. I never said that, did I?"

Greg opened his mouth and realized she hadn't. "Okay...sorry I over-reacted. I thought we were alone. When that threesome came up, it was unnerving."

Alena smiled. "I understand. Now, I was attempting to give you

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food. You said you were hungry.”

“Yes,” Greg agreed. “Are they your employees?”

Alena smiled again and handed him a fork, then a plate. On it was a perfectly prepared piece of fish. He took a bite and closed his eyes as the flavors of coconut and some nut mixed with the light flavor of fish and exploded on his tongue. He was ravenous.

“Yes, you could say that.”

“The man, Adonis, called you ‘mistress,’” he persisted after a few bites of fish. He took the glass she handed him to drink from. It was heavy in his hand and black. He wondered briefly if it was some kind of coral and then wondered at the drink inside. It was fruity...he detected the taste of pineapple, perhaps lemons or limes and, from the way it burned a bit on his throat, probably some kind of alcohol.

“Yes, I am their mistress, but here on Desirata that probably doesn’t mean what it means for you.”

“Where exactly is Desirata? There were no land masses on my global positioning unit. As far as I could tell, I was at least fifty miles from anything when the storm hit.”

She smiled. “There are no worries here. No storms. Can you not forget everything and enjoy your”—she paused, as if searching for the correct word—“vacation.”

Greg stopped eating when her hands left the food and moved over his arms. She was right. Even though he hadn’t planned on being shipwrecked, this was his vacation. He couldn’t imagine a more beautiful or interesting companion to spend the time with. Soon though, as her hands and mouth moved over him and sent him flying again, he forgot about everything but the woman who was fast becoming an addiction to him.

* * *

Day fell into night and Greg truthfully couldn’t have cared less. They had moved from the natural pool into her cabin. It was a small

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place, and although it didn't seem to have any modern conveniences, it was far from roughing it.

There was a bed, its mattress softer than any he'd ever experienced. The cottage had open windows with wooden shutters he guessed she'd close when she chose, but tonight were open to the moon-kissed sky and the scented breezes.

When she'd led him to bed, he'd followed, wondering if he had ever felt so rested and happy.

"You know, if I ever get rescued, this would be a great place for a resort. We could make a fortune on it."

"Don't you have more than enough fortune for one man?" Alena asked.

"Baby, you can never have enough money," he replied. "You know a lot of stuff about me? How is that possible? Do you have computer access hidden somewhere here?"

He glanced around her house. It was nice in a remote, jungle way. He smiled when he thought about it. If he did build a resort here, he would have cabins a lot like this one, except with all the modern conveniences. He wondered if executives like himself would pay more to get internet and cell service, or if he should keep it out. He could offer both options. Of course, he would have to put a satellite dish up somewhere.

His fingers itched with the ideas flowing through his brain. He wished fleetingly for the laptop that had been lost with his boat. He didn't want to forget any of his ideas.

"Why would I need internet or anything else here?" she asked, disrupting his train of thought. "Life isn't about those things. It is about love and companionship. About family and honor."

Now Greg knew Alena was innocent and naïve about the way of the world.

"Well, honor is important, but obviously you don't have much

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family or you'd know what a pain in the ass they are."

She frowned. He didn't get the idea that she was dim. In fact, it had been just the opposite. Although it seemed she lived a very simple life, she seemed as sharp as anyone he'd ever met.

"Family is life, responsibility and support. If you can't trust your loved ones, who can you trust?"

Greg smiled. "Perhaps that's the way of your family. Maybe if I met them I'd agree. If you'd met my family, you'd know I'm right as well." He paused. "You do have family here, don't you? Not just your servants?"

"Yes. Everything we need, we have on Desirata."

Greg relaxed. "Great. After we finish here, I'll call and get someone to come out and get me. I'll pay you for your hospitality."

Alena drew herself straight. "I don't do this for payment."

"I didn't mean to insult you. I just want to reward you for helping me, for giving me comfort and a nice place to stay until someone can take me home."

"There's no way for you to get home," Alena said. "There's no way off Desirata."

CHAPTER 2

Greg stalked angrily around the porch. *Marooned. That's what Alena claimed. How was it possible? Why had it happened?*

He couldn't stay here. He couldn't be marooned. How would he survive?

At that moment Alena came out on the porch. Beside her was the man from earlier, the one she'd called Adonis.

"I'm sorry you're upset," she said. "Truly, it's for the best. With time, you'll see what I mean."

Greg ran a frustrated hand through his hair. He didn't want to take his ire out on Alena. She probably had never been off this island. She couldn't understand why he couldn't stay here.

"You don't understand," he began, trying to explain the unexplainable. "I have responsibilities. I have commitments. I can't be marooned."

She frowned. "I see. You're worried your family will be upset?"

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You're worried they'll be broken-hearted if they believe you to be lost forever?"

Greg shook his head. "No. In fact, my sister and brother-in-law will be relieved. Now they'll be able to spend all my money without conscience. They'll take everything I've worked for and turn it to dust, while they're going to the next party or following the next ridiculous fashion trend. My company will be broke within six months, eight at the most."

Alena frowned again. She looked at Adonis, who had been standing like a statue by the door the entire time they were talking. He bowed at the waist, turned and left them alone.

"Do you not spend your money on frivolous things sometimes?" she asked.

"Of course, but I have limits. My boat, well, you couldn't have seen it. It was a beautiful piece of machinery. It was my baby. It was hand-crafted by the best boat builders in all of the United States. She was everything."

Alena smiled. Greg was enchanted by the way her lips moved and her eyes lit up like they were glowing from within.

"A sailboat. I love sailboats."

"Do you have one?" Greg asked. If she did, perhaps he wasn't marooned after all.

"Oh, no. Not like you are describing," she replied.

Greg hoped she wouldn't be able to see the distress on his face as his hopes were dashed. "Do you have any kind of transportation?"

"We have no need of transportation here on Desirata," she said. "The island is self-sufficient. We can walk from one side to the other in a few hours."

He shook his head believing more than ever that she couldn't possibly understand his life or his world. He waited for the sense of panic to sweep over him. When it didn't, he turned and looked at the

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woman who was either his salvation or his doom.

"Come, Gregory, don't worry about this now. It is the dawn of a beautiful night in the most beautiful place on earth. Come and watch the moon set over Desirata. I promise you it will bring all you desire."

Greg only hesitated for a moment before taking her outstretched hand. She led him away from the porch and down a lighted pathway. When they reached the end, he looked over the edge of the cliff they were standing on. As far as he could see the ocean was a beautiful, dark, quiet glassy surface. For a moment, he almost believed he could walk across the surface and never get his feet wet. When he felt her fingertips squeeze his, he looked down into the precious face of Alena. He felt a shifting in his chest in the region of his heart.

Maybe being marooned isn't so bad after all.

He pulled her into his arms carefully. This time he had control and he wanted to give her everything he had to offer another person. This was to be romance.

"I need you," he whispered, as his lips settled on hers. He didn't need her answer. He could feel it in the way her body softened against him. She was so giving, so feeling, despite being still innocent.

Before he landed on Desirata, Greg would have called himself jaded. He had become a man who didn't believe in innocence in business or in his personal life. But he knew he held true innocence in his arms now. It was something he didn't want to lose. He waited for the fear to come, waited for the apprehension, waited for the dissatisfaction he'd felt for as long as could remember. He felt nothing except quiet acceptance.

"You have me," she answered, her voice a mere breath against his lips.

He melded their lips in a kiss that held equal parts of desire and emotions that were still very new to Greg. They moved together as if they had been making love for centuries rather than days.

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Each movement was drawn out, not to tease, but to extend their pleasure.

He ran his fingers gently down her neck, taking time to count the growing rush of her pulse in the sweet hollow that dipped right before her breast bone. He rested his lips there as well, enjoying the unique taste and scent of her that he knew was natural, not a chemical enhancement.

She traced the shape of his ears and made him shiver from his head to his toes. Her soft, satisfied laugh warmed him from the inside out.

Then they kissed. It seemed as if they'd mutually agreed that kissing was enough. Time stood still as they pressed their lips together, tongues dancing and dueling to reach every taste and nuance. When finally they eased apart, he felt as if she had seeped into his soul.

She ran her hand slowly down the length of his body, rimming his straining cock just around the top. He returned the favor, fingering the outer lips of her vagina and feeling the evidence of her desire as it gathered there. He dipped his index finger just inside, searching for the nubbin he knew would be pink and swelling in readiness of his touch. He salivated at the thought of sucking her clit and bringing her to release with only the tip of his tongue.

He looked up at her face and saw the desire stamped there. When she licked her lips in anticipation of sucking him off, he felt as if he were going to burst.

"Will you eat me?" she asked softly. Before allowing him to answer she added, "May I eat you?"

"God, yes," he groaned.

Again it was like their first time together. It seemed his thought became a reality in the blink of an eye. Suddenly they were reclining at the cliff's edge in a classic sixty-nine position. He inhaled and it seemed the air was perfumed with her musk. He used his thumbs to spread her open for his deeper inspection. As he had anticipated, her

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clit was pink and had doubled in size. It seemed to be begging for his touch, and he didn't waste a moment before giving into her obvious desire.

"Manna from heaven," he murmured, then promptly lost the ability to think or do when he felt her soft, wet, warm lips circle the tip of him.

Her tongue delved into his slit and he knew she was tasting his pre-cum. She wasn't satisfied with just playing with his tip, though. Soon she was working him like he was a fabulous ice cream cone.

"Uhhm, with chocolate sprinkles on top," she murmured and the vibration of her words against his penis acted like the most intense cock ring he'd ever known. He quivered from the inside out. He raised his head from her pussy.

"Come here, baby. I don't want to come in your mouth," he said.

She shook her head, the silky strands of her hair brushing against his thighs and pelvis like bands of satin.

"I want to taste your cum," she said. "I want to bring you this pleasure."

Her words were the only encouragement he needed. He let her have her way and her way included loving every inch of him. With her tongue and lips and even a gentle nip or two, she sent him flying to heaven and he never wanted to return to earth.

Like most things of the flesh, there had to be an end, but the climb to the summit was ecstasy. He felt the waves of come jerking from him as if he had an endless supply. He felt like he was eighteen again instead of a tired thirty-eight.

When she finally raised her head, he could see some of the evidence of his release on her lips. She licked them and smiled. "That was better than the finest pastry our chef has ever created," she said. "I can hardly wait for seconds."

He laughed and groaned at the same time. "Here's a lesson for you in the ways of men and women," he said. "Unlike the Energizer Bunny,

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I need a little recovery time.”

She frowned momentarily and then smiled. “Ah. The Energizer Bunny. I get it.”

“How do you...” He began wondering how a woman on a deserted island could get a reference to a commercial icon. Before he could finish the question, however, she distracted him.

“Well, perhaps we can make you a little more bunny-like if we provide the right incentive.”

As she reached for him, he grabbed her hand and brought it to his mouth. “No, my dear, as delightful as I’m sure your incentive may be, believe me I need a little time. But...”

“But?” she replied, her smile widening her generous mouth with its naturally pink lips. He swallowed as the memory of that mouth taking him to the hilt threatened to make a liar out of him.

“But, this time is for you,” he finished and pushed her so she was lying on her back. He resumed his position between her legs and finished what he’d started. He had her shivering and stretched taut as a bowstring in a matter of minutes using his fingers and his mouth to bring her to the edge of delirium before backing off just enough to heighten her desire.

“Gregory,” she begged as he stopped just short of her release once again, “please, don’t make me wait any longer.”

So he gave into her demands and sent them both flying.

* * *

The days fell into a routine. Gregory learned that Alena wasn’t alone with her servants. There was a small village nearby. That she was their queen or princess was obvious from the first moment, as the villagers treated Alena with a respect worthy of a leader. More, they showered her with love. By being with her, he received some of the same adoration.

After the first week, he began to go with the village men to fish and

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hunt. The fishing party, which consisted of men and women but not Alena, would trek inland through the forest, swinging back across the treacherous ravine down to the beach where they would fish. It seemed the sea provided with them plenty of lobster, clams, oysters, bass and other sea creatures, including turtles.

Greg also learned the jungle was a utopia of plant foods. The people were friendly, helpful and happy. They treated him like he was king to Alena's queen.

He leaned back against the post of the porch on the hut he'd shared with Alena since his arrival and watched the orange glow of the sun slowly dip toward the sea.

He was tanned, relaxed and in better shape than he had been in his life. Even though he was helping these people with their everyday duties, he felt as if he was missing something.

He sensed Alena's arrival before he heard her.

"What're you thinking about?" She slid her arms around his waist. He felt the shape of her body pressed against his back and knew the tingle that ran down his spine in anticipation of the pleasure they would soon again share would never dull over time.

But he was closer to her than anyone he'd ever been with in his life, so lying wasn't an option.

"I miss home," he said.

She moved so she was facing him, leaning against the porch railing. "I see. You miss your apartment and your cars? Your possessions?"

He tucked a strand of her beautiful black hair that the wind caught and sent across her satiny jaw behind her ear before answering.

"No. Not at all, which surprises me. I didn't think I could go without my phone that did everything except think for me, my hourly text updates and calls from my assistant."

She looked solemnly into his eyes as if not quite believing his words. "So what about home do you miss?"

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"I miss the challenge of running a multi-million dollar company. I miss the very thing I was trying to get away from when I took my boat on my trip."

She smiled. Greg thought he detected a hint of sadness.

"You've made a difference here. I know our little island isn't the same, but the people respect you and they listen to your advice."

Greg pulled Alena close to him and hugged her tightly. "I know. I think I have helped. I know when we built the irrigation canal from the spring into the village center it means things will go a lot easier for your people."

"Yes. I've wanted to do something like that for some time, but was still studying different designs and plans," Alena said.

"Of course," he replied, wondering where she got the designs. He hadn't seen anything even close to modern technology. Heck, they didn't even have electricity on the island. Instead of asking, he continued on the subject of irrigation. "All the hotels I've built in the last decade have needed plans for everything. Many were in remote places with no amenities. We built or shipped in everything from the pipelines to conduit, everything. So I have a little bit experience, even though I've never had to actually build the stuff myself."

"You did a great job," Alena said. "I'm also impressed with the way you organized everything. I can see how you built your family business so big. You're a natural leader."

Greg smiled. "Yes, but I'm not a beloved leader like you are. These people adore you. They'd be willing walk across hot coals or lay down their lives for you."

She frowned. "I would never ask that."

"Of course not. They know it. That's what makes the respect and love they give you so unique."

"They're my family," she replied simply. "I love and respect them as much."

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Greg nodded. "I've seen that with my own eyes."

She waited, as if thinking he was going to say more. When he didn't she asked, "Are the challenges of running your business the only thing you miss?"

"Well, although I've seen definite advantages to bathing under a waterfall or in a naturally heated sauna pool, I miss modern conveniences."

Alena nodded. "So you said before. Your cell phone and world wide web."

He chuckled. "I knew the internet was everywhere, but I didn't think you'd know about it here." When she didn't laugh as well, he tried to coax a smile another way. "And you're forgetting...most of all I miss my high definition television."

She was silent for several minutes. He didn't know why but he felt as if he had disappointed her some way.

He sighed. "Believe it or not, I miss my family." There, the words were out. He couldn't believe he'd said them. More, he couldn't believe he meant them.

"The family that has let you down so often?" Alena asked.

Greg ran his hand through his hair. In the short time he'd been here, it had grown unruly. But it felt natural.

"They haven't let me down so much." He spoke slowly, trying to find the right words to let her know his feelings.

"I see. Why don't you start by telling me about them?"

"Well, my mother raised my sister and me alone. My father died when I was thirteen and left a mountain of debts. I don't know how she managed to keep us going until I got my first job working as a bellhop when I was sixteen."

Alena nodded. "She must be a very strong-willed woman."

"Yes, yes she is," Greg said. "I've forgotten about that because it seems all she cares about now is shopping and driving me crazy to get

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married and have a houseful of kids.”

“Well, I don’t really understand the shopping,” Alena said, “but I imagine wanting your child to be happy and with a family is natural for a parent.”

“Yeah, well, she has the first part. My younger sister, Samantha, is married,” he said. “They don’t have any kids. Yet.”

“Is this sister’s husband the one you fired from his job?”

“Yeah. Bill’s his name. He’s an idiot.”

Alena nodded. “I see, and you don’t suffer idiots lightly, do you?”

“No. Not really, but one thing I can’t fault is he really loves Samantha. You can tell it just in the way he looks at her.”

“Oh, then it’s important to keep them together, right? I mean your sister’s happiness is worth more than one more hotel or resort.”

“Certainly. I just wish she was working for me instead of him.”

Alena shrugged. “So suggest a switch. I bet your sister would enjoy it. She’d also feel like you valued her opinion. This business is a family thing, right?”

“Of course. If something were to happen to me, my mother and sister would get everything.”

“Don’t you think they know that? Don’t you think they feel as strongly about making it a success as you do?”

Greg frowned. “I’ve never thought of it like that. I always just assumed they’d be content to just live off the fruits of my labor.”

Alena laughed. “Oh, Greg, how silly. Do you think the woman who raised you would raise such a daughter? Women that strong don’t tolerate idiots either—even if they’re blood relatives.”

Greg was silent for a moment. “You may be right.”

Alena nodded. “I’ve never met these extraordinary women, but I know how I’d feel in their places. I’d be as determined as you are to keep this business vital. It is the family legacy and legacies aren’t to be taken lightly. We fight with every ounce of our strength to keep them

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strong.”

Greg smiled and pulled Alena into his arms. “You’re right! You’re absolutely right. I don’t know what’s going on now, though. They haven’t had any contact from me in two weeks.”

“Will they be worried?”

“Oh, yes,” Greg said. “I was supposed to be gone for thirty days, but I promised my mother I’d check in at least once a week since I was sailing alone.”

A pensive look passed over Alena’s face. “I’m sorry—” she began.

“Don’t be sorry. You didn’t cause the storm and the wave that sank my boat. They probably can trace my last location from my sat phone conversation with my brother-in-law. They’re probably doing a search even now.”

Alena shook her head. “It’s highly unlikely they’ll find you.”

Greg frowned. This woman whom he was coming to care greatly about was an amazing person. She cared for her people and led them with flawless ability. She was also amazingly naïve about the ways of the world and the influence a family as rich as his would wield.

“Oh, I’m sure they will. They’ll use every scientific search and rescue option known. My mother will have called in a few favors on Capitol Hill and they’ll have the satellites combing every inch of the earth. They can find the butt of an ant with some of those machines.”

Alena shook her head again. “No. They’ll think you are truly lost.”

He started to reassure her again, but stopped. How could he explain to someone like her what the civilized world was like.

“I’m sorry, Greg. My mother warned me about this, but I was certain that all would be all right.”

He felt a sense of unease move down his spine. “What do you mean your mother warned you? I didn’t know your mother was here.”

“Of course. She was one of the ones who served us on your first night here. And my father as well. He’s the one called Adonis.”

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Greg ran his hand over his face. "Your mother and father saw us..."

He could tell Alena was trying not to laugh. "Naked? Yes. I believe they know what people do when they make love. Although it can be done with your clothes on, it's usually much better without them."

"But I was thinking you wanted to do a gang thing," he muttered, remembering how he'd been thinking he could fuck the woman.

Alena's soft, husky laugh sent chills of desire running down his spine. "Oh, my," she whispered. "I didn't realize. That's why you said that bit about not sharing?"

"Yes."

"I thought you might be jealous." Alena ran her hands up his back and around his waist. "I thought having multiple partners is a man's fantasy."

"Some men maybe," Greg admitted. "Not this man."

Alena nodded. "Loyalty is an admirable trait, don't you think?"

"Yes," Greg agreed, without hesitation.

"Do you think it's important enough to overlook other flaws?"

Greg smiled. He didn't have to be astute to gather which direction she was heading. "Like someone being incompetent in their job?"

Alena smiled broadly. He was lost momentarily in the way the moonlight's gleam lit her wonderful eyes.

"You're very astute for a stubborn, hard-headed businessman," she said. "I realize it isn't any of my business, but I'm sticking my toe in it anyway. I don't know your brother-in law. Perhaps he deserves your wrath. But is there no other way for you to allow him to save face? Is there no other job he'd be able to perform to your standards?"

Greg paused. "No. I don't know. Maybe," he finally said.

She smiled again. "Maybe is good enough for now. Come, let's go to the pool. I have need of some of its soothing massage."

Greg grinned. "The pool massage or mine?"

Alena grinned. "Yours, of course. Yours."

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* * *

The days continued and Greg grew stronger in his feelings for Alena and her people. Equally strong was his own sense that he had to find some way off the island. He had to put right the mess he'd left his family in. He frowned, then smiled when the idea hit him. If he could get off the island, he'd go back and fix things. He'd turn over the everyday management of their interests to Samantha. She'd earned it and would probably do a better job than he had lately.

He'd turn the financial side over to Bill and maybe let his mother take over the promotion department. She had a knack for it and had been very instrumental in helping him set up things in the early days. The last ten years he'd assumed she didn't care, had wanted her to enjoy the spoils. Now he realized, he may have effectively shut her out of things in his attempt to let her relax.

Then, when everything was set, he'd come back here and make building the resort he'd dreamt of a reality. It would be a win-win situation. The resort would give the local people a steady employment source and, if they used the latest in building techniques and focused on making sure they didn't adversely impact the environment, they could keep Desirata pristine.

"I need to get off the island. As soon as possible," Greg said aloud.

Alena turned toward him. "To make things right with your family? To show them how much you need them?"

He nodded absently, but spoke some of the thoughts racing through his mind out loud.

"I've got such great plans for Desirata. We can build an exclusive resort. I'm seeing twelve to twenty high-end bungalows. It'll be a place where our guests will receive their every desire, their every need attended to. It'll be great."

She was silent for another moment. "That's what has you so desperate to get off Desirata? You want to go back and build another

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resort your world doesn't need?"

"Hey, honey, I told you from the first. This is me. This is what I do. This is about family. Yours and mine. I want to secure their future. Hell, I want to secure our future. You know, we've made love many times in the weeks I've been here. Not once have I used protection." He placed a hand on her flat stomach. "We may have already started future generations. I want everything to be perfect."

Alena's face changed in a matter of moments. She swept her arms out much like he'd seen the Wicked Witch in the Wizard of Oz do on television as a kid. Suddenly the wind kicked up and the leaves in the trees over their heads began to swirl madly to the ground. If the wind was getting angry the look in her eyes was far past that.

"I had hope for you, Gregory Voit. Great hopes. I thought once you glimpsed paradise, you'd be able to change. I can see I erred. You'll never change. Money is your talisman and your compass. So be it."

With that, Alena threw out her fisted hands and opened her fingers. A black dust pulsed from them and suddenly Greg was picked up as if he weighed no more than a feather. His vision blurred and everything went dark. The last thing he remembered was hearing thunder and what sounded like crying.

When he awoke next, he was on the deck of his boat. The sun was beating down on him and he could hear the sound of a voice coming over the water. He raised his head and saw a helicopter hovering to the port side and a fast-moving navy cutter coming up on him.

"Mr. Voit, this is the United States Navy," the voice boomed. "Prepare to be boarded."

CHAPTER 3

Greg adjusted the necktie, feeling unbelievably confined by his clothes. He missed the toga and sandals that had been his daily wear on Desirata. More, he missed being able to go to sleep at night under a dark, star-filled night with Alena wrapped securely in his arms and her scent floating through his senses. He closed his eyes and he could see her, feel her. His hand fisted because he knew she wasn't really there. Was, in fact, the doctors and scientists claimed, a figment of his imagination.

According to all the reports from the navy—hell even NASA had shown him a satellite picture of the southern Pacific—there was no Alena, was no Desirata. There hadn't been any land within a thousand miles of his boat in any direction.

The facts were unarguable. He had hallucinated the whole thing. His doctors said it was normal. After all, he had been floating aimlessly in the ocean for seven days. The experts speculated that somehow,

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during the storm, he'd been hit on the head. It was a miracle he hadn't been thrown overboard and drowned.

Of course, after the first three weeks of such kind support and wise council, Greg had learned to just nod and smile. He knew what had happened. It didn't matter what the facts said.

He knew.

He knew Alena and her people existed, as did the perfect paradise that was Desirata. He also knew because he had fallen short, because he hadn't been man enough to admit the truth to her, she had banished him back to the sea that had spit him out. He was fortunate she hadn't let him die.

He turned and looked out the window of his one hundred forty-second story office overlooking the Hudson River.

He knew something else. He would spend the rest of his days trying to prove Alena wrong. He would spend the rest of his nights longing for her warm, gentle caress.

"Greg, did you hear what your sister asked?" His mother's voice was low. He could hear the tension and the worry in her voice.

"What? Yes." He smiled at her, Sam and Bill, all seated at the large conference table in his Manhattan office suites. "I heard. This is an amazing job and the most thorough plan for a resort we've ever had. You are all to be commended. The Voit Lodge will be worthy of its designation as the new flagship of our chain."

He saw the relief on the faces of his family and felt some of his pain recede. His family. Before Alena, they'd been more pain in the ass to him than anything else.

Now, though, they were worried about him, and they had supported him completely. Even when he told them today about his plans to turn over the business to his sister and husband and search for Alena.

"I feel like I can leave tomorrow and everything will be okay," he said.

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"Greg, are you sure you shouldn't take someone with you?" Samantha asked.

His mother nodded.

"I agree with Samantha. Greg, please don't go alone. Take Bill with you."

Greg shook his head. "No, Mother. I'm not certain how long I'll be gone. And Bill needs to be here for Samantha and their child."

He paused and smiled at them all. "I know I haven't been the best brother or son in the world, but I do want you all to know that I've always loved you. I haven't said it or shown it to you guys nearly often enough, and for that I'm sorry. I think maybe I forgot that love is what makes family your port in any storm."

He stood and smiled again. "I don't know when I'll see you all again, but I promise to call when I can. Don't worry and remember I'll always love you."

He left the office and hurried to the executive elevator that would take him to the roof and the waiting helicopter. It would be a short flight over to Kennedy. Then he would take the corporate jet to Mexico, where his boat was awaiting the trip into the Pacific. He had charts, the latest in navigation equipment, back-up guidance and power systems. He wouldn't return until he had found Desirata. He wouldn't return without Alena.

* * *

"Mother"—Alena came into the palace carrying a sheath of papers—"we got the numbers back on the bid to put in a new irrigation system for Desirata."

"Thank you, dear. Please come and sit with your father and me."

Alena looked up and saw her parents were seated on the couch in their joint office. She hesitated. She had a suspicion her parents were going to try and get her to tell them her feelings. Again. They'd been over this a hundred times since she'd banished Greg from the island.

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She was tired of fighting them about it. It had been her decision. It was one she didn't regret.

She ignored the voice inside her calling her a liar and walked forward confidently. She would rebuff them again, with care, but she would make clear she wasn't going to change her mind. Desirata and she were better off forgetting Gregory Voit existed.

She sat in the empty plush chair at the end of the couch and started to speak.

"Excuse me, daughter, but don't say one word. I have something you need to see," Adonis said.

Alena remembered Greg had thought he was to be some part of group sex plan. He certainly was virile enough. She had never told her parents Gregory's thoughts. She didn't think they would be embarrassed. In fact, she thought they would get a kick out of it. She sighed as she felt the longing move through her heart. She couldn't think about Gregory. She couldn't think about sex with him. She couldn't think about the taste of him. She wouldn't think about the feel of him thrusting deep inside her as she tightened around his amazing strength.

Alena was so wrapped up in her thoughts of Gregory that she missed the look her parents shared.

Her father pressed a button on the remote and a large-screen television slid into place on the wall. Within seconds, there was a picture on the screen in 3-D perfection, a boat gently rocking on calm seas. It was as if they were hovering overhead. Alena could smell the sea, feel the caress of the warm wind against her skin.

She recognized the boat immediately. It was Gregory's. She caught her breath and felt her heart speed. Was he there?

After an agonizing second, he appeared on the deck. He was tanned, fit, if a little thinner than when she'd swept him aside. As the view moved closer, her gaze hungrily swept over his face. There were more

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wrinkles under his eyes and around his mouth. *Had there been that streak of grey in his hair at his temples?* She tried to take in everything, to overlook nothing. This was like a dessert buffet for a sugar-starved woman. It couldn't last, but she needed to have something to hold close, to keep her warm on the long, lonely nights she knew would be her burden for the rest of her days.

Gregory raised a pair of high-powered binoculars to his eyes. He looked port and starboard. He scanned bow and aft. He repeated the searching for endless moments. Finally, he lowered the binoculars. It was as if someone had taken all the strength and vitality from him. He fell to his knees, raised his head to the heavens. The picture zoomed closer. She saw huge shudders of his body, saw the tears coursing down his face, felt the cry in his soul as if it were her own.

"Father," she finally was able to choke out from behind the huge sob caught in her throat.

"This is your destiny, my dear. You knew it when you decided to play God. Now you see what your actions have done—"

"Adonis," her mother interrupted.

"No," he stormed at her. The sound of his voice was so loud it shook the walls of the palace. Alena knew it could be heard in the village below them. Adonis was known throughout Desirata as having a boisterous temper that was all flare but little heat.

And her mother was known equally for being able to soothe Adonis' most savage tantrum with little more than the shrug of a shoulder.

"No, she must see what she has done," Adonis said. "She can't treat a man grown, a man used to leading thousands, like a boy still in knickers. She deceived him. She didn't give him all the facts, but expected him to take everything on faith. Bah, faith. Where was her faith? Where was her logic and reasoning? If I'd been here before she started this, I would have forbidden it."

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Alena felt the tears drying as the heat of her own temper began to build. Her mother shook her head in warning. Alena almost ignored it, eager to vent her own pain on someone convenient.

Instead, she glared once at her father and turned away. She heard a loud sigh and felt her tears again slipping down her cheek. She knew her father was struggling with his sorrow at yelling at her. She was struggling too—with the fear her father was right. That she had tried to play God and in the process ruined her chance of finding her destiny and her heart with the only man she'd ever loved.

"My darling Alena," her father said. She felt his touch on her shoulder. "I'm sorry I yelled."

She sniffed, trying to hide her tears from him. She wasn't a child. She was a woman grown. A woman groomed to lead her nation. There was no place for tears.

"You don't have to apologize. You're right," she said. "I can see now that you're right. I just thought I could convince him to change his ways."

Adonis sighed. "I know, my darling, and it's not your fault. As I've told your mother a million times over the years, men and women think differently. What you did made perfect sense...if you'd been dealing with a woman. But in a man, it was doomed from the start."

Alena nodded. "So how do I fix it?"

Adonis smiled. "That's my girl. Never run away from a fight."

Alena smiled and felt a lifting of her spirit like she hadn't since she'd had to banish Greg from Desirata. "No, I won't be running. Not anymore at least."

Adonis clapped his hands. "Great. Let's finish watching the show."

Alena almost protested. Now she knew she was going to get Gregory back, she wanted to *do* something, not just sit around and watch as Greg wandered around the ocean.

"Patience, my little pusservin'," Adonis said, using the pet name

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he'd called Alena when she was a young girl in pigtails. "Watch a little longer. I think you'll see why in just a few moments."

The view on the screen zoomed closer and suddenly audio started. She could hear the sound of the waves as they rocked against the hull, the wind as it moved against the riggings holding his sails fast. Then Alena caught her breath. She heard his voice. It was so low at first she had to strain to hear.

"Alena." Her name was a sob that tore her heart. "Forgive me. Come to me. Rescue me from myself."

Then Greg fell to his knees and cried out his sorrow and need.

Alena turned to her mother and father, tears streaming down her face. "I know the rule—once banished from Desirata, a person can never return. I agreed to it when I started the quest, but I can't live with that decision."

Her father had a solemn look on his face. Her mother was smiling through her own tears.

"Well, what do you want with all your heart, my daughter?" Adonis asked.

"I want to go to Gregory. I want to apologize. I want to show him that I love him. That he belongs as part of our family, my family."

Adonis' frown turned to a smile.

"Well, all you have to do is ask," he declared, then wrapped Alena up in his arms in a huge hug. "Now, daughter, come because we have much to do. Know when you leave, you'll always be welcome back here on Desirata. You and your mate. Your mother and I have chosen to stay apart from the world. You, as our legacy, have the power to do what your heart tells you. Live in his world, live in ours. Be the living bridge between them both. You are the future of both worlds. Make it count."

By the time Adonis was finished with his decree, both Alena and her mother were crying tears of joy. Alena sniffed back the last of them

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and smiled at her parents, who had given her everything she needed. She would do nothing to let them down.

“Thank you, Father and Mother. I’m ready,” she said, kneeling at her father’s feet. She felt the caress of his palm on her head and a rush of power. Then everything went black.

* * *

Greg didn’t know what made him look over on the deck. He didn’t think his ship had moved since the sea was as calm as a sheet of glass. All he knew was something felt like it had touched his spine. Only one thing in his life had made him shiver quite that way. It was the way Alena touched him when they made love, her fingers trailing down the lines of his spine.

He’d been so miserable, sailing almost in circles trying to find Desirata. His family, still vocally supportive when he made his nightly calls to check in, were starting to worry about him. He could hear it in the voices of his mother and sister. Hell, he wasn’t just wondering, he was becoming certain that he was going insane.

He couldn’t go back, though. He wouldn’t give up. Not until he breathed his last breath.

So, he’d been sitting on the deck and trying to figure a way to search beyond the charted sailing lanes when he’d felt the presence on his boat.

He turned slowly and blinked. She was there, lying in a heap, as if she were merely sleeping.

He rushed over her and pulled her into his arms, hugging her tight to his chest. When she still didn’t awaken, he felt urgently for a pulse. It was slow and steady and her breathing was easy. It was almost as if she were in a deep, deep sleep.

He gathered her closer to him and whispered his lips across her cheek to settle on the edge of her lips. He had some strange notion of waking her like in a fairytale. The old Greg would have scoffed at that

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idea. Now, he was ready to try anything, anything to see her eyes open and knowing of him.

So he kissed her with desire because he was a man who had hungered for her his entire life without knowing it, but also with tenderness because she meant everything to him. Her lips curved into a smile under the pressure from his and he eased them gently apart. Then he saw her eyes, beautifully open and clear.

"Do you think I'm Sleeping Beauty to be awakened with a kiss?" she asked lightly, drawing back a tiny amount.

"I know only that you're my princess. I'll do anything to bring you back to me," he said, pulling her close to him again and sealing his vow with a kiss that shared all his hunger, all his desire, all his love with her. She softened immediately and their desire spun out of control.

* * *

A long time later, they were lying on his deck under the brightest moon he had seen since he'd left Desirata.

"Alena, I'm sorry I disappointed you," he said. "I know now what you were trying to show me. Family is everything. It means more than all the hotels in the world, all the money on the earth."

She looked up at him and he saw tears in her eyes. Was she upset with his words? Had he somehow failed her again?

"No, Greg, I'm the one who is sorry. I treated you like a boy, a child, not a man who has the right to make his own choices. Then, when you didn't choose the way I wanted, I reacted like a child, throwing a temper tantrum and," she hesitated, "expelling you from Desirata."

Greg smiled and pushed a strand of her hair behind her ear.

"Well, I have to admit I didn't much care for the landing. Next time you get mad at me, darling, at least give me a soft bed to land on."

Alena's mouth formed an "oh" of surprise and Greg felt a great sense of relief.

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"You don't seem to mind that I, well, my whole family, has special powers," she said.

He shrugged. He could do that now. It had taken him many sleepless nights at home to get around that very thought. But when he'd been at his lowest, when he'd been certain he'd never be able to find her, certain he would never hold her in his arms, he'd realized that none of her powers mattered.

"You kept me too busy when I was on Desirata to think about things like that," he admitted. "But, even then, things were sticking in my mind."

She pouted. "No. I'm sure that isn't true. You didn't notice a thing on the island."

Greg laughed. "Ha." He held up his hand and started counting. "Let's see...there was the way our clothes magically disappeared and reappeared; the way you made it seem like we flew through the air on the grape vine; the way you knew everything about me and my life, despite the fact it appeared Desirata had no modern conveniences."

Alena was smiling. "And what about the way I knew what you wanted before you wanted it?" She paused and then whispered, "Like in the whirlpool and in my cabin."

Greg stroked her cheek with one finger. "No, my darling, that had nothing to do with magic. Well, maybe the magic of love."

"Love," Alena asked softly.

"Yes—love. We're soul mates, my darling. Destined to be together, no matter what. Believe that. I'd have found you again. I wouldn't have stopped searching until I did." Greg caught her hand and held it against his heart. "Do you believe me?"

He held his breath awaiting her answer.

"Yes. I would have found you as well. Do you believe me?"

"Absolutely," he answered pulling her into his arms and sealing their vow with a kiss that quickly spun into lovemaking that was

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brighter, purer and deeper than any he'd known. When they reached the summit together, he joined their hands and looked down into her face.

“For eternity, my love.”

“For eternity,” she answered.

TRIXIE STILLETTO

“Life is a smorgasbord of men. I believe in diving in like a starving woman hitting an all-you-can-eat buffet!

“Seriously, I love men and have been fortunate enough to work, and play (thank God) with some of the most intriguing ones on this fair earth. There’s a little piece of each one in every hero I create. I’ve had all manner of odd jobs, such as waitress, cook and bottle washer for an all-night dive, truck driver, and, of course, writer. I write erotic romances because it’s much more fun to keep the bedroom door wide open.

“My philosophy in life is simple. Love what you do and who you’re with and they’ll love you in return. Come and join me as I dive into the next delicious dessert.”

* * *

***Don’t miss Molding Clay, by Trixie Stilletto,
available at AmberHeat.com!***

Clay Fife has been in a rut. Vacationing in a small western New York town is a big mistake, until he sees a sculpture that will make a mint for his gallery and put the spark back in his life. He doesn’t count on the artist being difficult, however. Sure, it’s strange to make winner-take-all bets, but Clay has never been a loser and doesn’t plan on starting now.

Edi Raines has a bone to pick with Clay, even though he doesn't remember it. And if she can help him find his way back to his roots, even better. But the bet she makes on a whim may end up costing her more than she can pay...

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